

THEMES OF VISIBILITY IN
RANCIÈRE, BUTLER AND
CAVARERO

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Abstract

This thesis explores themes of visibility in the work of Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero. It argues that visibility is important for each author: for Rancière the making visible of particular existents; for Butler the making visible of violences; and for Cavarero the making visible of another's uniqueness. However, these commitments to visibility reach a limit when confronted with those who exist in indifference to visibility, for example, the fugitive politics of the enslaved as detailed by Saidiya Hartman. In these instances there is a danger that a fugitive politics is overlooked if visibility is one's primary frame of analysis. This thesis is interdisciplinary, bringing each author into conversation with the others but not attempting to synthesise their thought into a whole, nor to resolve the tensions in their work by privileging one author over the others. Instead, and following Rancière, it reads each author for their aesthetic contribution to making sense of the world with the aim of identifying the forms of existence that are opened up in their work, but also those that are closed down.

The first chapter identifies themes of visibility in Rancière's account of politics, arguing that there is an ambivalence in Rancière's politics but that in either case politics is linked to the making visible of forms of existence that are otherwise rendered insensitive. The second and third chapters identify themes of visibility in Butler's account of violence, arguing that Butler's reflections on violence's visibility are overlooked in her consideration of nonviolence. The fourth and fifth chapters identify themes of visibility in Cavarero's work, arguing that her insistence on making another's uniqueness visible is made urgent because of scenes of violence. The sixth chapter argues that Butler and Cavarero's work should be understood as an insurrectionary humanism centred on the paraontology of vulnerability. The seventh chapter reads Rancière, Butler and Cavarero in relation to Hannah Arendt, arguing that it is Arendt's proximity to each author that enables a politics of fugitivity to become tangible in their work. The eighth chapter reads Rancière, Butler and Cavarero against Saidiya Hartman's account of the Middle Passage, plantation slavery and its legacies to demonstrate the limits of their commitment to visibility and to further manifest a sense of a fugitive politics indifferent to visibility.

Key words: Rancière; Butler; Cavarero; visibility; fugitivity; politics; violence.

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Thank you to my friends, my family, and to Nicola.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Timothy J. Huzar

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Introduction

Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero each respond to a dominant partition of the sensible by making visible forms of existence otherwise rendered invisible. However, their own accounts presuppose a particular distribution of the sensible that cannot account for fugitive forms of existence that work apart from registers of visibility. I argue that the theme of visibility is central to the works of Rancière, Butler and Cavarero. In each case an insistence on visibility limits the forms of existence each author can make sense of: forms of politics in Rancière, forms of violence in Butler, and forms of uniqueness in Cavarero. The conception of the world deployed by each author - their interventions in what Rancière calls the *partage du sensible* - inevitably privilege certain forms of existence over others. Specifically, Rancière, Butler and Cavarero struggle to account for forms of existence that operate apart from visibility: fugitive forms of politics; violences better left unrecognised; instances of uniqueness that are not undermined in the absence of the apprehension of another. Put bluntly, their very focus on the need for visibility renders some forms of existence invisible. This issue is made clear when thought in relation to Saidiya Hartman's work on the Middle Passage, plantation slavery and its afterlives.

For Rancière, Butler and Cavarero, visibility is negotiated in relation to the poetic imbrication of politics and violence. Through a series of readings of their work I develop an account of politics that works with their thought, but also negotiates some of the aporias and elisions I identify through my readings. I argue that neither politics nor violence can be exhaustively defined: their proper expression is always improper, insurrectionary, situated; it is articulated in the name of emancipation and in the face of domination. My thesis does not define politics or violence but, in the spirit of Rancière, asks the question 'What if?'.¹ Rancière argues that politics is first a contestation over what constitutes politics. Similarly, for Butler violence is always conditioned by particular normative schemas that mediate whether violence can be recognised as such. Their response to these issues is not to define politics or violence in advance but instead to ask 'What if this were politics / violence?', from the perspective of those who are denied a place in the social order or given a place that exposes them to violences. My thesis refuses a neutral position from which proper proclamations of what constitutes politics or violence can be made; the point is to articulate politics and violence in a way that draws attention to their exclusionary mobilisations and leaves

¹ See Claudia Ruitenberg's 'What if Democracy Really Matters' (2008).

them open to being redeployed.

In saying that there is an imbrication of politics and violence I mean that the two concepts overlap but are not synonymous. I articulate their bearing on one another over the course of my thesis. In light of violence's varying visibilities there is always a politics of violence (just as one could say there is always a 'politics' of politics). Violence has no pure content but receives its meaning in its articulations. These articulations may shore up a dominant conception of the world, or they may disrupt this conception. So if there is always a politics of violence (different from saying violence *is* politics) politics is not of necessity violent. No doubt forms of politics can always be understood as violent by certain people, but this indicates the politics of violence, not the violence of politics. To declare that politics is always violent assumes a fixed definition of violence. By contrast, imminent to politics is the contestation over what constitutes politics. Politics names this paradoxical, improper contestation; violence does not name this contestation, even if it cannot escape this contestation. Although I explore the imbrication of politics and violence it is politics that is the more significant concept. My reading of politics, violence and their imbrication does not account for this imbrication at a structural, theoretical level, but first at a poetic, aesthetic level: I ask, 'When one makes claims about violence or politics, how does that affect the perceptibility of the other concept?'. I take this notion of poetics from Rancière (particularly his *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991)), which I outline further in my first chapter.²

The aporias and elisions that I identify in Rancière, Butler and Cavarero's work centre around the theme of visibility. Visibility can be politically and ethically powerful, as each author makes clear in their respective accounts of politics, violence and uniqueness. In much of my thesis I explore the potential the notion carries and work with the thought of each author in relation to it. However, by making visibility central to the poetics of their political and ethical projects, forms of existence that operate apart from issues of visibility are in danger of being depoliticised, or of having their ethical valence undermined. Through an engagement with Hartman's work I tease out these aporias and elisions.

In Rancière's political work, most significantly in *Disagreement* (1999), he develops a conception of politics concerned with "[making] visible what had no business being seen, and [making] heard as discourse where once there was only place for noise" (Ibid. 30). In particular, this making visible or making heard is directed

² Fred Moten's account of a "social poetics" (2013: 775) that can be thought as blackness has also influenced my use of poetics, even if I only directly engage Moten's work in the closing of my thesis.

towards those who actively deny visibility. This can be seen in the examples Rancière deploys to illustrate his account of politics, such as his reading of the secession of the Roman plebeians on the Aventine Hill (Ibid. 23-27), an example that has gone on to be the focus of much attention in the secondary literature (for example in Woodford (2016: 31), Norval (2012: 811) and Honig (2010: 21)). My argument is that politics can be, and often is, concerned with issues of visibility, but visibility does not exhaust what constitutes politics. As I will make clear, there is much in Rancière's work that alleviates this insistence on visibility, even if, as can be seen in its recurrence in the secondary literature, the theme has had a significant impact on the reception of Rancière's work.

For Butler, visibility is a central issue in her analysis of violence. In particular, in her post-9/11 work (although as Birgit Schippers makes clear present in various ways in her earlier work (Schippers 2014: 2-3)) Butler identifies "derealization" (2006: 34) as central to violence, which means both that violence can derealise those who are exposed to it, but also that violence is often derealised itself. In my words, what Butler indicates is *violence's varying visibility* and its necessary relationship to the visibility of those subject to violence. Butler's entire oeuvre can be thought as the continual insistence on the presence of violence that otherwise evades recognition. This relationship between violence and visibility is both politically and theoretically important: indeed, in my third chapter I argue that its political import has not been fully realised by Butler, in that her conception of nonviolence operates not in relation to the visibility of violence, but primarily in relation to one's own rage and aggression. Using resources derived from Butler, nonviolence can be rethought as the making visible of violences that are otherwise invisible. However, while making violence visible can often be a crucial strategy of the oppressed, this is not always the case: there are instances where a commitment to remaining out of sight requires the suspending of making violence visible, or instances where a historical demand that the wounded black body make visible its suffering requires that any making violence visible is interrupted.

In Cavarero's work, visibility is thought in relation to both violence and politics. A central concern of Cavarero's is the manifesting of a sense of the uniqueness of another, in particular another who otherwise has this uniqueness imperilled in their exposure to violence. The manifestation of uniqueness is the measure of politics for Cavarero, which means when uniqueness is imperilled in the face of violence so too is the political status of the one violated. Decoupling politics from uniqueness goes some way to resolving this issue, but Cavarero is still left insisting that the making visible of the uniqueness of another (typically through practices of narration) is able to restore something of their humanity (2015). Cavarero's account is caught between an insistence that uniqueness can be destroyed in its exposure to violence, while also

insisting that it is not, finally, annihilated. I recognise the importance of narrating the lives of those exposed to violence - of manifesting a sense of the uniqueness of another - and argue that uniqueness needs to be thought as excessive to account for its emergence despite the destruction of the conditions that would allow it to emerge. However, an account of uniqueness needs to maintain the possibility that the disappearance of the narrative of a life does not exhaust that life's meaning.

For many, visibility is not simply an impossibility but helps maintain and enforce forms of violence and domination. Perhaps one of the most famous accounts of the dominative force of visibility is Michel Foucault's reading of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. For Foucault, Bentham's prison - with its all-seeing-eye in the centre and its inmates exposed in inward facing cells around its circumference - polices the behaviour of its inmates precisely because of their constant visibility. As such, "[v]isibility is a trap" (1991: 200). Further, the panopticon functions not only to expose the prisoners to constant visibility, but also to render them invisible to those in bordering cells. In Foucault's words, "[t]he arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility" (1991: 200). The panopticon is eminently anti-social, operating via a mediation of both visibility and invisibility: a visibility in relation to the dominant regime, and an invisibility in relation to those who might enter into sociality with each other.

In this way Foucault helps make clear something important in my thesis: if people often exist apart from economies of visibility, they do not necessarily embrace the invisible. The forms of sociality that exist apart from visibility that I identify across my thesis *do* maintain a visibility, but typically one practised in relation to those others who also evade visibility. In these instances the visibility evaded is that of the dominant regime, and if those practising this evasion are understood as invisible, this can only be from the perspective of the regime. In this way I would agree with Andrea Mubi Brighenti when she argues that visibility is "not simply a monodimensional or dichotomic, on/off phenomenon" (2010: 3). Brighenti continues: "[i]n order to avoid determinism and essentialism, I present visibility as a phenomenon that is inherently ambiguous, highly dependent on context and complex social, technical and political arrangements which could be termed 'regimes' of visibility" (2010: 3). Brighenti makes clear that visibility can be thought in a way that disrupts its historically distal qualities (fundamentally associated with vision as a *noetic* contemplation) and concomitantly moving visibility towards a proximal understanding (more properly associated with smell, taste and touch (Brighenti 2010: 10)). However, this is beyond the scope of my thesis. My point is that there is a drive to visibility that structures the thought of

Rancière, Butler and Cavarero (as well as Hannah Arendt), one expressed in different ways by each author, but one that for each author is nonetheless in danger of denigrating the politicized of those who exist apart from economies of visibility.

To make sense of forms of existence that exist apart from the visibility of a dominant regime, I turn not to invisibility but to the notion of fugitivity. Fugitivity has its roots in the figure of the fugitive slave in the southern United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To be black in the south of the United States was to be either a slave or a fugitive, and to exist in the north as a free black person was to have one's freedom continuously imperiled. As Samira Kawash notes,

[t]he 'fugitive slave clause' incorporated into the original U.S. Constitution allowed the slaveholder to reclaim a slave who had escaped to another state [...] [B]ecause no slave could testify in his or her own behalf, there was no way for the one thus enslaved to demonstrate his or her legally free status (1997: 43).

As a consequence, "the freedom of free black people is never absolute or unassailable in the context of race slavery" (Ibid. 44); freedom is demonstrated to not be a disembodied, universal category and instead signifies differently for those racialised either white or black. For Kawash, "[b]lack is presumed to be slave, property of another, while white is presumed to be person, holder of property in the self" (Ibid.). The fugitive slave demonstrates the contingency of the liberal conception of freedom, premised on a possessive individual who owns property in himself: "[i]f the fugitive is neither property nor subject, then the closed circuit of property and subject is momentarily interrupted or suspended in the disruptive figure of the fugitive" (Ibid. 50). The notion of fugitivity has gone on to be central to the discipline of black studies. As Barnor Hesse notes,

[p]erhaps indicative of a black subaltern Western lineage, this figure of escapology might be read in various twists and turns of black fugitive thought, whether excavating black radicalisms, circumventing the colonial-racial order of things, reanimating the souls of black folk, cultivating the 'Black Fantastic' or augmenting our intellectual and cultural capacities to embody the meaning of freedom subversively (2014: 308).

Indeed, for Hesse black political thought is itself made fugitive by the foreclosures of "Western political ideas of liberty" (Ibid. 290): "[t]hese particular foreclosures make a virtual outlaw of black political thought, where conceptions of freedom seek to escape the captivity of Western hegemonic law and lore" (Ibid.). The notion of fugitivity has

been further explored in the work of Saidiya Hartman. Like Hesse, Hartman is acutely aware of the way modern western thought is constituted in a violent anti-blackness. Reading Hartman alongside Rancière, Butler and Cavarero - each central to the discipline of political theory even if they often orient their work in antagonism to this discipline - helps make clear the limits of political theory and its implicit privileging of a subject who is presumptively white, male, property-owning and only sensible when thought in relation to the visible. Hartman sits apart from political theory, working primarily as a cultural historian, yet her thought is fundamentally concerned with questions central to the discipline of political theory.

My thesis ends by mobilising Hartman's work on the Middle Passage, plantation slavery and its legacies to tease out the aporias and elisions in the valorisation of visibility in Rancière, Butler and Cavarero. I do this by gesturing towards a fugitive politics that displaces the trope of visibility from the issues of violence, politics, narration and uniqueness found in these authors' respective works. As a displacement this means that visibility is shifted from the zero-point around which politics, violence, narration and uniqueness are thought. This is not an evacuation of visibility: the project of making forms of life, forms of politics, or forms of violence visible is still crucial, as I attest to in much of my thesis. Rather, there may be forms of life, politics and violence that do not necessitate being made visible; that receive their meaning precisely by evading the visible. As Hartman makes clear, this places profound challenges on the author committed to an emancipatory practice that transforms not just our interpretation of the past, but also the coordinates of the present. My thesis ends not by resolving these issues, but by staging the tension that makes them urgent.

My thesis is consciously interdisciplinary, or perhaps, following Rancière, "indisciplinary" (2009: 17). Although one cannot step outside of disciplines, it is possible to undo what is proper to each discipline, bringing together objects, people and concepts that are not meant to be thought alongside one another. Butler, Cavarero and Rancière all engage in this type of work, drawing on, for example, philosophy, literature, political theory, history, classics and performance theory, allowing each discipline to unsettle the others. Rancière in particular is explicit about the limits of disciplines:

[a] discipline, in effect, is first of all not the exploitation of a territory and the definition of a set of methods appropriate to a certain domain or a certain type of object. It is primarily the very constitution of this object of thought, the demonstration of a certain idea of knowledge (Ibid. 16-17).

Disciplines do not describe objects, they constitute them as thinkable. They place

particular subjectivities in relation to these objects and assign a proper ethos to these subjectivities: “[disciplines] want the bodies that compose society to have an ethos - the perceptions, sensations, and thoughts that correspond to their ethos - proper to their situation and occupation” (Ibid. 17). This, for Rancière, is a “war” (Ibid.) because the people that a discipline disciplines continually refuse the place assigned to them:

[t]he point is that this correspondence is perpetually disturbed. There are words and discourse that freely circulate, without a master, and divert bodies from their destinations [...] Disciplinary thought must ceaselessly stop this hemorrhage in order to establish stable relations between bodily states and the modes of perception and signification that correspond to them. It must ceaselessly pursue war but pursue it as a pacifying operation (Ibid.).

Subverting the discipline of disciplines then becomes a way of “restaging” (Ibid.) this perpetual disturbance of the correspondence between perception, sensation, thought and ethos. Through this restaging a “narrative” (Ibid.) or a “myth” (Ibid.) is developed that is a “counterhistory of destiny” (Ibid.); a “countermyth” (Ibid.) that restores “the context of war” (Ibid.) between the insurrectionary activity of people living their lives in ignorance of what is proper to them and the counterinsurgencies enacted by disciplines. For Rancière, “indisciplinary” (Ibid.) thinking creates “the textual and signifying space for which this relation of myth to myth is visible and thinkable” (Ibid.). My thesis takes Rancière’s lead, attempting to downplay the significance of disciplinary thinking with the hope that this will best restage the dissensual activity of people refusing violence, enacting politics or simply living lives in indifference to their position in the social order.

Following from this indisciplinary methodology, I enact a particular type of reading in my thesis. Again, I focus on the ways Rancière, Butler and Cavarero weave a particular distribution of the sensible in their work. I read each author for this poetic contribution, bringing their particular accounts into conversation with one another. Following Catherine Ryther, this is a “complicated conversation” (2013: 2): it does not aspire to synthesise their thought, but nor is it a critique of their thought; instead, it identifies what their thought makes possible, as well as what limits it places on the possible. This is both methodologically and politically important: to write a thesis that overcomes the work of Rancière, Butler or Cavarero - playing one against the others, or all against all - would be to undermine my insistence on the poetics of their work - their weaving of a distribution of the sensible - and further to definitively answer the question of ‘What if?’ that their work poses. Through the gesture of critique, this would

be to capture forms of political or social existence that may challenge what constitutes the political or the social, but may also be indifferent to waging any such challenge. I do not, therefore, aspire to resolution in my thesis, whether this be in the triumph of one author over the others, or in the interruption of their work through the enactment of critique. Instead, I enact Ryther's complicated conversation, working with and against each theorist with the hope of maintaining the political possibility this 'with and against' engenders. In this sense, Hartman's presence at the closing of my thesis is not the answer to a question implicitly posed by Rancière, Butler and Cavarero: although Hartman helps me identify a valorisation of visibility in the work of Rancière, Butler and Cavarero, the fugitive politics that I reconstruct from her work as a response to this visibility is made possible through the resources that Rancière, Butler and Cavarero contribute. Again, the point is not to determine who is right and who is wrong, but to respond to aporias and elisions around the theme of visibility and, through the poetics of my own counter-translation, continue the orbit around the asking of 'What if?'

Although I work with Rancière, Butler and Cavarero in my thesis, I do not assume their thought to be the same. Butler and Cavarero share much: a commitment to a feminist politics; a concern for vulnerability, the body, and narrativity; an indebtedness to Arendt and Levinas. However, as Olivia Guaraldo argues, there are meaningful differences. Butler is wary of Cavarero's notion of irreplaceable uniqueness, which she views as "bound up with existential romanticism and with a claim of authenticity" (Butler, quoted in Guaraldo 2012: 109), and which, in Guaraldo's paraphrasing, allows "little or no room for social transformation" (Ibid. 110). Cavarero shows antipathy to Butler's notion of performativity (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 141-142), and, more generally, to the "'rhetoric of alterity,' which the philosophical discourse of the twentieth century seems to adore" (Cavarero 2000: 90). Finally, they diverge significantly around the question of sexual difference, which for Cavarero is an inescapable fact at the heart of uniqueness (1992: 38), while for Butler was the primary target of her critical work in *Gender Trouble* (2006a), *Bodies that Matter* (2011) and *Undoing Gender* (2004). I read their respective works as examples of a political commitment to the rearticulation of a hegemonic conception of the human within the western tradition - sovereign, autonomous and presumptively male - that posit vulnerability as being central to this rearticulation of humanness; what I describe in my sixth chapter as an insurrectionary humanism.

Links can also be drawn between Butler, Cavarero and Rancière. Butler and Rancière's shared concern for the sensibility of particular forms of existence indicates that they are working in a similar terrain; one might say that Butler offers a granular account of what Rancière would describe as the operation of the police and its

disruption through politics (and what Butler would describe as the operation of normativity and the consequent possibility for “social transformation” (2004: 204-231)). Rancière’s rejection of political philosophy (or the subsumption of politics in philosophy) bears a strong resemblance to Cavarero’s rejection of political theory (or the subsumption of politics in theory), while her insistence on the non-metaphysical uniqueness of all existents carries an impropriety not dissimilar to Rancière’s insistence on the impropriety of the excess of words common to all speaking beings (1994: 24-41). However, it is the incongruence in their thought that makes working with them productive. Specifically, Rancière makes clear the politics attendant to Butler and Cavarero’s respective stagings of an insurrectionary humanism, while Butler and Cavarero offer contextualisation for Rancière’s politics.

This thesis begins with a reading of Rancière’s account of politics. I emphasise four aspects of Rancière’s account: first, Rancière’s insistence that he is not developing a political theory but a dramaturgy of politics; second, what Rancière calls in conversation with Davide Panagia a “poetics of politics” (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 116); third, Rancière’s insistence that politics is a contestation over what constitutes politics; and fourth, the potential limits of a politics of visibility thought as the demonstration of one’s equal intelligence directed towards those who would deny this. In my second chapter I read Butler’s account of violence, stressing the way violence varies in its visibility and demonstrating its structural similarity to politics (the politics of violence). In my third chapter I read Butler’s account of nonviolence, arguing that Butler misses the possibility of thinking nonviolence as an operation that plays out around the visibility of violence; nonviolence thought as the staging of violence and thus as a further example of the politics of violence. In my fourth chapter I read Cavarero’s account of horrorism, juxtaposing it with Elaine Scarry’s account of torture. This allows me to think through the limits of the Aristotelian account of the political subject - a prominent figure for both Cavarero and Rancière - in relation to violence. Despite the violence of torture that, for Scarry, undermines speech, the one tortured is neither animal nor infant; resources can be found in Cavarero’s work to demonstrate this, working with and against her. In my fifth chapter I read Cavarero’s account of the relationship between narrative and violence. Issues of narrative are prominent in Rancière, Butler and Cavarero, and Cavarero’s account of the relationship between narrative and violence draws out the politics of narrating the lives of the violated; of making their uniqueness visible. In my sixth chapter I identify what I describe as an insurrectionary humanism in the work of Butler and Cavarero. I use this insurrectionary humanism in two ways: first, as an example that illustrates Rancière’s poetics of politics; and second, as an example of the poetic imbrication of politics and violence. In

my seventh chapter I read Rancière, Butler and Cavarero in relation to the work of Hannah Arendt. I demonstrate that a spatiality of politics can be thought that does not fall foul of Rancière's critique of Arendt. This spatial politics is indifferent to making visible one's equal intelligence to those who would deny this. In my eighth and final chapter I develop this account of politics by bringing Saidiya Hartman's work on the Middle Passage, plantation slavery and its afterlives to bear on Rancière, Butler, Cavarero and their Arendtian heritage. Through Hartman I develop a fugitive politics that makes apparent the limits of a politics of visibility.

Chapter One: Rancière

In this chapter I argue that Rancière's politics maintains a fundamental impropriety, in that, before all else, politics is a contestation over what counts as politics. However, there is a danger that this impropriety can be domesticated (policed): Rancière can be read as arguing that there are certain ways of being that are more or less political, or more conducive to politics, or more effective at resisting policing. Reading Rancière in this way closes the impropriety central to his account of politics; it reads his work as a political theory, something he refuses. I argue that Rancière's politics can also be the poetic activity of authors (such as Rancière's himself) who manifest a heterogeneous sense of the world and those who exist within it. However, even here there is a danger that the impropriety central to politics is policed: the process of recomposing the distribution of the sensible - of making new forms of existence visible in a way that they were not previously - leaves forms of fugitive existence that avoid visibility outside of what counts as politics.

There has been much engagement with Rancière's account of politics in the secondary literature.³ In this chapter I take issue with a particular reading of Rancière's account of politics that mines it for resources that would help in developing an especially effective politics (putting to one side what constitutes an 'effective' politics).⁴ Rather than reading Rancière's impropriety as an element of his politics that should be taken into account when making the transition from fleeting, ruptural moments of activity to the transformation of the *partage du sensible* (frequently translated into English as "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2010: 36)), I instead follow Mark Devenney in arguing that Rancière's impropriety is fundamental to his politics. However, I differ from Devenney in arguing that Rancière's impropriety interrupts any attempt to derive (improper) political subjectivities from Rancière's work, or effective activity from his work (Honig 2010; Woodford 2016), or inscriptions in the *partage du sensible* (Norval 2012).

For Rancière politics is very specific: "in its strict meaning, politics designates [...] the forms of collective subjectivization which call into question the police distribution of positions" (2009a: 121). However, limiting Rancière's account of politics to this statement is already to have distorted Rancière's thought, in that Rancière insists that the concepts he deploys are utterly contextual - that they are interventions and not

³ See, for example, Dillon (2003), Méchoulan (2004), Schaap (2011) and Deranty (2003).

⁴ See, for example, Honig (2010), Norval (2012) and Woodford (2016), each of whom I engage with later in this chapter.

theories (Ibid. 116) - and thus to claim that Rancière's politics has its proper account is already to have lost this contextual intervention. For Rancière "that which is proper to the political is precisely an absence of the 'proper'" (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 119). There is thus a fundamental "methodological impropriety" (Huzar 2013) to Rancière's account of politics. Whenever Rancière speaks of politics it is always articulated in a particular context, typically in his engagement with the archive, whether this is eighteenth century French workers (2012), Scythian slaves (1999: 12-13), or Roman plebeians on the Aventine Hill (Ibid. 23-27). These are not simply examples that illustrate his theory of politics: Rancière's politics cannot be thought outside of these (or other) examples. This is what I take to be the meaning of his repeated insistence that his thinking is "always a rethinking" (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 120). There is no kernel of political theory in Rancière's account that can be thought in the abstract; Rancière's politics is irremediably tied up with its particular, situated content. In this way Rancière's politics always requires a form: it needs to be furnished; it ceases to exist if it is placed in a vacuum.

Sometimes politics' form is provided by the activity of people (the "unpredictable subject which momentarily occupies the street" (Rancière 2007: 61)), and sometimes it is provided by accounts of people doing politics (the reading and writing of the archive, something Rancière continually engages in). However, I argue politics also occurs when one presents a heterogeneous conceptualisation of how to think the world and one's place within it, without a direct link to any particular enactment of politics (i.e. without direct recourse to someone doing politics). As I shall demonstrate, reading this latter instance as a form of politics requires shifting Rancière away from the "strict meaning" (2009a: 121) he gives politics. This strict meaning is bound up with his "too sharp division" (Norval 2012: 822) between politics and its obverse, police. If politics is to be thought between the poles of police (order) and politics (the breaking of order) then it is difficult to conceptualise the third activity I have identified - politics as the reconceptualisation of the form of the world - as politics. Because the options are either politics or police, it would seem to be more appropriate to identify this reconceptualisation as policing. The recognition of the blended (Chambers 2013: 49), tangled (Woodford 2016: 41) or scrambled (Ibid. 45) quality of police and politics does not help in this instance; these readings go some way to resolving the question of the effectivity of Rancière's politics, but do not help me in supporting a reading of Rancière that sees the construction of a heterogeneous conceptualisation of the world and one's place within it as a type of politics. However, understanding this world-making activity as a form of politics is not only important but further is demonstrable with recourse to Rancière's own writings. It is my argument that Rancière's ambivalence concerning a

proper account of politics, coupled with his methodological impropriety, means that shifting Rancière away from the strict meaning he gives politics does not of necessity require a fundamental break with his thought; rather, it might be thought as the slipping of an anchor.

Insisting that Rancière's politics always requires a particular content or form is another way of saying that it necessitates its appropriation and augmentation; on Rancière's own terms it is necessary to augment it in relation to the particular conditions within which it is being deployed. This is because Rancière's politics is, in his words, "not a political theory but a dramaturgy of politics" (2009a: 119), that is, "a way to make sense of the aporias of political legitimacy by weaving threads between several configurations of sense" (Ibid. 120).⁵ Treating Rancière's politics as a theory - mobilising it as a foundation from which certain types of political activity can be derived - is to lose the fact that politics is always, first, a contestation over what counts as politics: "the essential object of political dispute is the very existence of politics itself" (Rancière 2010: 35). It is my argument that this is the single most important contribution Rancière makes when discussing politics. It builds into his account an absolute refusal to make use of his politics as a yardstick that could ascertain the 'politicity' of certain forms of (in)activity. Again, identifying the blended (Chambers 2013: 49), tangled (Woodford 2016: 41) or scrambled (Ibid. 45) quality of Rancière's account of politics *vis-à-vis* the police is only so useful for my purposes: it may be true that politics functions to blend, tangle or scramble the dividing lines that the police enforces, but it is a mistake to then conclude that proper political activity is characterised by a blended, tangled or scrambled quality, or enacted by a blended, tangled or scrambled subject. This can be seen in Clare Woodford's *Disorienting Democracy* (2016): for Woodford, "[Rancière's] work gives us a thematisation of strategy that theorises how to effect politics in order to impact on the police order" (Ibid. 8). In particular, "[t]he criteria [Rancière] gives us [...] to help us to identify 'politics' at its most significant are appropriation of ways of being, doing and saying that produce alternatives via dis-identification and subjectivation" (Ibid. 45).⁶ This can also be seen in Bonnie Honig's 'Antigone's Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism', where Honig draws on Rancière to argue that Antigone is political to the extent that she parodies, mimics and cites the speech of others (2010: 20). If politics is first a

⁵ For Davide Panagia, Rancière's critique of theory can be seen from "his palpable disappointment and rejection of the theoretician position endorsed by his mentor, Louis Althusser" (2009: 298).

⁶ While this breaks with Rancière's own account of his work, in explicitly making use of Rancière's account of politics to determine strategies for an emancipatory political project, one could argue that Woodford is faithful to Rancière's methodological impropriety.

contestation over what constitutes politics then it is not possible for Rancière's work to be used as a blueprint for the effective course of political action without domesticating the impropriety of politics. Forms of politics enacted outside of appropriation, disidentification and subjectivation, or "[p]arody, mimicry, and citation" (Ibid.), are rendered non-political.

If in-built into Rancière's account of politics is the refusal to use it to judge whether something is political, how is one meant to engage with his account? What this question indicates are the disciplinary limits of engaging with Rancière. If one cannot use Rancière to determine right conduct, then one is stepping outside of political theory (or even political philosophy), and doing work that starts with and cannot be thought without politics' particular content or form.⁷ This requires a suspending of the question of what activity constitutes politics, or what strategies are necessary for the bringing about of politics, or even what forms of activity are politically effective (Honig 2010; Norval 2012; Woodford 2016).⁸ Instead it encourages an analysis of those forms of activity (or, sometimes, inactivity) that demand a rethinking of what it is that constitutes politics. If one is to describe these forms of (in)activity as politics, then one does so without any theoretical certainty derived from Rancière (or elsewhere), and does so as a political actor oneself, immersed in the poetic labour of reproducing a particular conception of the world (either heterogeneous to or homologous with the extant conception of the world) that one cannot step outside of. In other words, Rancière's methodological impropriety demands that the question shifts from 'What constitutes politics?' to '*What if this were politics?*'.

In the remainder of this chapter I offer some further textual evidence to support my reading of Rancière. However, in appealing to Rancière's text to properly prove his impropriety I am in danger of a performative contradiction. It would not do to demonstrate the poverty of distilling an account of politics from the writings of Rancière by, precisely, distilling an account of politics from his writings. For Davide Panagia, "[i]mpropriety hovers throughout Rancière's oeuvre without landing with specificity at any one point [...] It is, in this sense, unspecifiable in terms of prescriptive criteria" (2009: 298). Given this, I offer textual evidence for my argument that Rancière's account of politics should not be read as a theory, but I also demonstrate this by enacting Rancière's thought in contexts outside of his work. After all, Rancière himself

⁷ In Davide Panagia's words this is "Rancière's supreme and impossible lesson for political theory [...]: politics is not a project of the understanding" (2014: 294-295).

⁸ This is not to say that one should necessarily not derive forms of politics from Rancière's work, or determine forms of action that might precipitate politics. Both of these can be important tasks. However, in doing so they break with Rancière's insistence that politics is improper. This opens the door to a policing of proper political conduct.

has explicitly said that his thought “is not a theory of politics” (2009a: 120); that his concepts are not Platonic forms or empirical designations but rather “tools” (2009b: 288) used for the shaping of a new aesthetic topography; that he constructs “a moving map of a moving landscape, a map that is ceaselessly modified by the movement itself” (2009a: 120). The argument is not so much *should* Rancière’s work be read as a dramaturgy rather than a theory; it is *what follows from this*. Again, this point encourages one to ask the question ‘*What if this were politics?*’. This question motivates my thesis and encourages me to think Rancière’s thought in contexts outside of his work. It is this impropriety in Rancière’s account of politics - that he is not offering a theory; that politics is first the contestation of what counts as politics; that politics is always situated, never abstract - that is in danger of being undermined by the literature that uses his work as a blueprint or a yardstick. However, as I will argue, it is also in danger of being undermined by Rancière’s insistence that politics involves the making visible of forms of existence that were otherwise invisible. To make this clear I now focus on Rancière’s methodological and political impropriety in more detail. I first loosen Rancière’s “strict” (Ibid. 121) account of what constitutes politics by arguing that politics can also be thought as a poetic operation that manifests a heterogenous sense of the world, making forms of existence sensible in a way in which they were not previously. All authors manifest a certain sense of the world, however Rancière (as well as Butler and Cavarero) does this to make visible forms of existence that otherwise could not be seen. In the last section of this chapter I read Rancière’s formal account of politics found primarily in *Disagreement* (1999) and ‘Ten Theses on Politics’ (2010). Rancière presents politics as the process of making visible an equality of intelligence that could not otherwise be seen. I argue that this focus on visibility is in danger of policing forms of (in)activity that are indifferent to visibility, or actively avoid visibility. This focus on visibility is symptomatic of Rancière’s (and Butler’s, and Cavarero’s) poetic recomposition of the distribution of the sensible. Over the course of this thesis, I argue that this poetic recomposition is also in danger of policing forms of fugitive existence constituted apart from - either in *antagonism* to or in *indifference* to - visibility.

Rancière’s Methodological Impropriety

Rancière’s insistence that his politics is not a political theory but rather a “dramaturgy” (2009a: 119) indicates the importance of method to the philosophical work he engages in. At the beginning of his ‘A few remarks on the method of Jacques Rancière’ (2009a), Rancière suggests there are two ways one can approach a thinker’s work:

[o]ne can examine his/her ideas, test their consistency, compare them with other thinkers' ideas and judge the good or bad effects that they can produce when going from 'theory' to 'practice'. But, at another level, one examines the way these 'ideas' are produced, the issues they address, the materials they select, the givens they consider significant, the phrasing of their connection, the landscape they map, their way of inventing solutions (or aporias), in short their method (Ibid. 114).

It is this latter approach that suggests politics can be understood as the construction of a heterogeneous conception of the world. As Rancière suggests, this approach demands an attentiveness to method. Intervening at the level of the theoretical claims made in one's reconceptualisation of the world is important - as Woodford notes it is necessary to problematise the distinction between theory and practice (2016: 48) - however I am primarily interested in the form of the world that is constructed by an author; in their "philosophical imaginary" (Le Doeuff 2002: 4), to borrow Michèle le Doeuff's phrase (one that Ann Murphy has reinvigorated in relation to violence (2012: 13-15)). In Rancière's words,

[t]he main point is not what [words, arguments and narratives] explain or express, it is the way in which they stage a scene or they create a commonsense: things that the speaker and those who hear it are invited to share - as a spectacle, a feeling, a phrasing, a mode of intelligibility (2009a: 117).

For Davide Panagia, this method goes hand-in-hand with a particular style, that allows Rancière

to develop his insights not simply through content but also through form. By this I mean that Rancière develops his insights through practices of composition and juxtaposition (literary and otherwise) rather than through the exposition of a semantics of meaning. In this, his critical project is intended to appeal to one's sensibilities rather than to the faculty of understanding (2014: 284).

If Rancière does this work himself (what I am describing as his methodological impropriety, or possibly, following Panagia, Rancière's *stylistic* impropriety) then for Panagia this is also how Rancière engages with the authors he reads: "all of Rancière's writerly figures [...] present sensibilities rather than arguments and intentions" (Ibid.

287).⁹ Whatever else an author is doing, they are also creating scenes or stages from which forms of existence can become palpable and sensible in a way that they could not, of necessity, before. As a consequence,

the value of an author's argument, or claim, or theoretical point does not lie in the analytic of his or her concepts but in the ensembles - the processes of associations - that the critical-dispositif endorses. An author is, for Rancière, a mediator of associational dispositions - a curator of the divergences of thought and affect (Ibid.).

For Rancière, literature is not 'political' because it is written in a political manner, or has as its subjects those who do politics (2011: 3); this would be to begin with a theoretical account of politics that could be used as a yardstick to determine the political quality of particular examples of literature. Instead, "literature does politics simply by being literature" (Ibid.). If politics is "the construction of a specific sphere of experience" (Ibid. 3) that is "aimed at retracing the perceptible boundaries by means of which political capacity is demonstrated" (Ibid. 4), then literature also does something of this: "[t]he expression 'politics of literature' thereby implies that literature intervenes as literature in this carving up of space and time, the visible and the invisible, speech and noise" (Ibid.). This is another way of saying that an author is a dramaturg; that there is a "poetics of political thinking" (Panagia 2006: 5) at play in any theorist's work. This does not mean one cannot read a theorist to expose a "semantics of meaning" (Panagia 2014: 284) in their proper theoretical proclamations. However, given Rancière's own insistence on his thought being a dramaturgy rather than a theory, and given his approach to reading other theorists, a reading of Rancière that begins by stressing the poetics of politics in his work may prove fruitful. This is particularly the case when one comes to read the work of other authors (such as Butler and Cavarero) who also engage in processes of staging, in addition to any theoretical proclamations they make.

The role of staging - *mise-en-scène* in the French, i.e., literally, 'to set the scene/stage' - is central to Rancière's conception of politics. To stage something is to create the conditions that will allow it to be perceptible; it is to create a scene within which actors' words and deeds become meaningful. Although Rancière routinely emphasises this staging with a presumed audience in mind (those who would otherwise not recognise the words and deeds of the actors), as I will go on to argue one can also conceptualise this staging as being directed not towards those who would

⁹ Cf. Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique*, where Felski notes "modes of thought are also orientations toward the world that are infused with a certain attitude or disposition; arguments are a matter not only of content but also of style and tone" (2015: 4).

deny equality but to those collectively engaged in forms of existence that fall outside of the norms of the extant order. In either case, the centrality of staging to Rancière's conception of politics makes it difficult to disentangle one from the other. On the one hand one might say that it is political actors who construct stages from which they demonstrate their assumed equality (Rancière's "strict" (2009a: 121) account of politics); while on the other, it seems that prior to the construction of the stage there were no political actors. Demanding a temporal, causal account of the occurrence of politics does not resolve this issue, however. The emergence of political actors and the construction of a political stage may be co-constitutive. Or, perhaps, any attempt to properly determine the temporality of the relationship between the emergence of political actors and processes of staging - whether one is prior to the other, or even if they are co-constitutive - is to enter into forms of policing that politics refuses. What matters is that politics always involves a staging. My argument is that within the complex relationship between the emergence of political actors and processes of staging, the staging itself can be meaningfully understood as a form of politics on Rancière's terms.

For example, in my sixth chapter I argue that Butler and Cavarero should be read as staging a "scene" (Ibid. 117) or creating a "commonsense" (Ibid.) in their respective developments of an ontology of vulnerability. Ontology (and its co-constitutive ethics) becomes the mode in which politics is actualised: the staging of an ontology of vulnerability is a break with an ontology of liberal individualism, the setting up of a dispute, the substantiation of a gap between the universal pretensions of this extant ontology and the "part of those who have no part" (1999: 15) within this extant configuration of the *partage du sensible*. Butler and Cavarero stage the scene from which certain forms of existence and modes of conduct can become perceptible. Further, and as I will argue in the sixth chapter of my thesis, they do this via the imbrication of ontology and ethics; they manifest a paraontology antagonistic to extant forms of ontology.¹⁰ As Rancière says,

[p]olitics can certainly be described as on [*sic*] ontological conflict: it is a question of constructing a real in opposition to another. In the same way an artist or a novelist constructs with words and forms the ontological tissue within which his/her forms are visible or his/her words take weight. An ontological treatise thus means for him an attempt to construct a common

¹⁰ The prefix 'para' signifies that Butler and Cavarero's ontology is not only *beside* ontology, but also a *distorted* and *distorting* ontology: it is a parataxic parody of ontology. Cf. Fred Moten's 'Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)' (2013: 742) and his 'The Subprime and the beautiful' (2013a: 240).

space for those constructions, a form of intelligibility of their play (2009a: 119).

It is my contention that the words offered by Butler and Cavarero offer a particularly rich “ontological tissue” in their respective stagings of humanness.

As I have noted, technically Rancière draws a distinction between the setting of the scene from which political actors emerge and politics itself. For him, “in its strict meaning, politics designates [...] the forms of collective subjectivization which call into question the police distribution of positions” (2009a: 121). However, although not politics “in its strict meaning” (Ibid.), Rancière notes that “there are other forms of the subversion of the distribution of the sensible” (Ibid.):

Literature weaves forms of community between things and beings in which anyone can feel anything. In this sense, it is part of the democratic subversion of social conditions, it ‘does’ politics. The reason for the quotation marks is simple: literature does not perform political action, it does not create collective forms of action, but it contributes to the reframing of forms of experience. On the one hand, this reframing makes new forms of political subjectivization thinkable. On the other hand, it tends to break through the surface of political forms of equality to reach true equality or rather to dismiss equality in favour of the sympathy or fraternity of the subterranean drives or impersonal rhythms of collective life (Ibid. 122).¹¹

Rancière suggests, therefore, that this “reframing of the common landscape” (Ibid.) is technically a “metapolitics” (Ibid.): “the attempt to perform the task of politics, the construction of forms of community, by other means” (Ibid.). However, unlike in *Disagreement* where metapolitics becomes a straightforward object of critique, epitomised in the works of Marx (Rancière 1999: 82), here Rancière notes that

metapolitics, since the emergence of the aesthetic regime of art, has been continuously interwoven with politics [...] this metapolitics continuously interferes in politics and contributes to weaving the fabric of the political, its words, images, attitudes, forms of sensibility, etc... (2009a: 122).

For his part Rancière seems quite content to maintain this ambiguity in his use of politics: in his words, “the excess of the political over politics is inherent to politics”

¹¹ Cf. Rancière in conversation with Peter Hallward, where Rancière asks “[d]oes writing translate properties and transmit knowledge, or does it itself constitute an act, a way of configuring and dividing the shared domain of the sensible?” (Hallward and Rancière 2003: 204).

(Ibid. 123). As such, while not politics in the strict sense Rancière gives it, the staging of a contestatory conception of the world (or an aspect of that world) reframes forms of experience, making “new forms of political subjectivization thinkable” (Ibid. 122) and contributes to “weaving the fabric of the political” (Ibid.). If metapolitics is “interwoven with politics” (Ibid.), rather than unpicking the threads to maintain the purity of politics as distinct from metapolitics, I would, following Rancière, insist on the value of blurring the distinction: it is “these situations of confusion that make thinking an interesting and possibly useful activity” (Ibid. 123).

What Rancière calls, in conversation with Davide Panagia, a “poetics of politics” (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 115) seems apt to grasp this aspect of politics. For Rancière, “[t]o affirm the nature of the “poetic” in politics means to assert first and foremost that politics is an activity of reconfiguration of that which is given in the sensible” (Ibid). Rancière makes clear that politics does not emerge *ex nihilo* but rather is always enacted in relation to what can be sensed: politics is about the reconfiguring of sense experience; of what and whom is properly sensible. He goes on:

[i]n order to enter into political exchange, it becomes necessary to invent the scene upon which spoken words may be audible, in which objects may be visible, and individuals themselves may be recognized. It is in this respect that we may speak of a poetics of politics (Ibid. 116).

This invention of the scene is a creative moment, one that requires an improvisation because it always occurs in relation to what is already given in the sensible. A scene is invented upon which objects, words and actions receive a reconfigured meaning: this scene may be a moment of public assembly, or the pages of a book, but in either case it is upon this scene that objects, words and deeds can emerge as sensible in a manner in which they could not before. Again, both the creation of the scene and the activity that is possible within this staging can be thought as poetic: both reconfigure the sensible, and while they are related to each other, determining a formalised, causal relationship (e.g. either the scene creates the conditions for the actors, or the actors create the conditions for the scene) is not possible without entering into a form of policing that Rancière is attempting to undo. What is clear is that in either case, for Rancière this is a poetic operation.

It should be noted that the notion of poetics is a central category of analysis in what can be thought of as Rancière’s ‘literary’ work, however developing a precise account of what he understands as poetics here is difficult. In these texts - principally *The Names of History* (1994), *The Flesh of Words* (2004), *The Politics of Literature* (2011) and *Mute Speech* (2011a) - Rancière’s “*style indirect libre*” (Swenson 2009:

263) is in full force. *Style indirect libre*, or free indirect discourse, is “a third-person narration of reported speech or thought, capable of a smooth melding with exterior narration of actions and description of scenes” (Ibid.). Significantly, in Rancière’s deployment it undermines the possibility of distinguishing claims he is making from the authors he is reading. In this style of writing the reader is left to infer the significance or validity of the claims that are presented. This can be read as a strategy on Rancière’s part: an enactment of a consistent insistence across his work that there is a fundamental equality of intelligence proper to all speaking beings. Rancière is assuming the equal intelligence of the reader, refusing the position of the master-explicator, and insisting that the reader verify their intelligence through their own translation of his writing. As a consequence of this style of writing, any account of poetics from these texts is very much a reconstruction. Unlike in *Disagreement*, where Rancière’s writing is more direct, more willing to make specific claims in his own voice (no doubt contributing to the text’s dominance in readings of his work) Rancière’s ‘account’ of poetics emerges more as a series of themes working around issues of sensing, speech, writing and translation. Further, these themes are embedded in a historical analysis of typically French modernist writing (e.g. Rimbaud (2004: 41), Balzac (Ibid. 94), Proust (Ibid. 113), Flaubert (2011: 49), Mallarmé (Ibid. 80)) and, much like Rancière’s dramaturgy of politics, evade their reduction into a theory of poetics. Clare Woodford offers a careful reconstruction of some of the distinctions Rancière draws in his ‘literary’ work, in particular distinguishing between literarity and poeticity. For Woodford, literarity is the disruption caused by the slippage of meaning in forms of communication, while poeticity is the practice through which this literarity is exploited (2016: 142-143). However, despite this argument Woodford notes the incongruity of defining Rancière’s terms when a starting premise of his literary readings is the ever open possibility of offering translation (and counter-translation) of the meaning of objects in the world (Ibid. 123). In Rancière’s words,

not only does poeticity no longer stem from any principle of generic suitability, but it also no longer defines any particular form of matter. It is the language of both stones and words, of novelistic prose and epics, of manners and works. Henceforth, the poet is the one who speaks the poeticity of things [...] Poetic genius is henceforth defined as the expression of language’s distance from itself and the doubling by which anything can become language (2011a: 60-61).

For Rancière objects speak, and the poet is she who bears witness to this speech. This is the genius of the poet.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that this capacity is limited to a select few geniuses. Particularly pertinent for my engagement with a poetics of politics in Rancière's work is his discussion of poetics in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, that situates his account of poetics outside of modernist literature, closer to the politics of *Disagreement*. Here, poetics is an activity that all "reasonable beings" (1991: 63) are capable of enacting. For Rancière, Man thinks - that is, he is reasonable - not because he speaks, but because "he exists" (Ibid. 62). Reason is not guaranteed by the particular form of language, or because of the laws of the *polis*. Rather, "[i]f there is a divine law, thought itself, in its sustained truthfulness, alone bears witness to it" (Ibid.). Speech - which for Rancière encompasses not only the spoken word but also non-vocal forms of communication (Ibid. 65) - is a consequence of the desire of a will to communicate thinking: thought must be "communicated to other thinking beings" (Ibid.). It is in the movement from one's thinking about the world to one's communication of those thoughts that poeiticity is situated. Poeiticity is "translating and counter-translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts" (Ibid. 63). Indeed, the process of counter-translation is crucial: "[a]ll words, written or spoken, are a translation that only takes on meaning in the counter-translation" (Ibid. 64). Rancière can be read as undermining the distinction between *poiesis*, *praxis* and *theoria*, or rather, insisting on their imbrication: for him, creating, doing and thinking all imply each other through the movements of thought, translation and counter-translation.

One can discern a sociality to the poetics that Rancière develops in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, although it remains implicit in the text. This is situated in one's "desire to understand and be understood without which no man would ever give meaning to the materialities of language" (Ibid. 63). This is not only the fact that the desire to communicate presupposes another to whom one is communicating, but further that the act of counter-translating what another has translated provides the meaning for both moments of translation. Meaning emerges in sociality between people who *will* the communication of their translations of each other: it is the desire "to know what one reasonable animal has to say to what it considers the soul of another reasonable animal" (Ibid. 64), and that, in the reciprocal moment of 'considering',¹² manifests the soul of the reasonable animal. The distance between thought - that bears witness to a "divine law" (Ibid.) - and communication - that attempts to communicate the truth of thought - necessitates poetry:

[t]he impossibility of our *saying* the truth, even when we *feel* it, makes us

¹² 'Consider' comes from the Latin *considerare*, which might be rooted in *con* (denoting bringing together) and *sīdus* (a constellation).

speak as poets, makes us tell the story of our mind's adventures, makes us communicate our feelings and see them shared by other feeling beings. Improvisation is the exercise by which the human being knows himself and is confirmed in his nature as a reasonable man [...] In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same [...] He communicates as a *poet*: as a being who believes his thought communicable, his emotions sharable (Ibid. 64-65).

It is on these terms that Rancière suggests, contra Aristotle, that man is a "literary animal" (1999: 37). The 'poetics' of politics that I argue constitutes an important aspect of Rancière's politics has its roots in his insistence on the poetics of translation common to all who possess "the will to communicate" (1991: 62). It is the politics of acting "as if" (Rancière 2009: 16) one possessed the genius of the poet: the manifesting of a sense of another world through the fitful translation of one's thought into speech coupled with the reciprocal counter-translation of the speech of one's thoughts, a process that is the ultimate guarantor of the meaning of one's poetry. This translation and counter-translation can enact a *mise-en-scène*: a setting of the scene; a *staging* of what Rancière calls "dissensus" (2010: 38) that can be thought as a form of politics.

Rancière's Improper Politics

So far I have argued that one can meaningfully describe processes of staging - the poetics enacted by an author - as a form of politics, in part because Rancière himself is ambivalent about the distinction between the setting of the stage and the political actors who emerge on it, and in part because Rancière is committed to a methodology that avoids the abstract universality of theorising in favour of a dramaturgy of polemical, poetical intervention. However, whether one thinks politics in its strict sense, or more generally as the poetics of a staging (a reconfiguring of the distribution of the sensible), in either case there is a danger that politics is identified with a process of making visible what was invisible. In the remainder of this chapter I read this theme of visibility in Rancière's work, indicating its limits and also the ways Rancière's thought can be read against these aspects of his work.

Just as Rancière's methodology should be understood as improper, so too should his particular account of politics. In Mark Devenney's words, Rancière provides an "improper politics" (2011: 162) which "redefine[s] both ourselves and our world,

requiring leaps of faith and of passion which redraw the bounds of the given” (Ibid. 161); for Davide Panagia “[p]olitics [...] must begin with an act of impropriety, with a discomposition of the line that separates the sensible and the insensible” (2009: 300); for Ethan Stoneman, “Rancière’s political theory implies an aesthetic model of political indecorum” (2011: 131).¹³ This impropriety can be seen in Rancière’s clearest treatise on politics: his ‘Ten Theses on Politics’ (2010). In his first three theses Rancière insists that politics is not grounded in a particular subjectivity or a particular way of life (Ibid. 28). Instead, politics consists in a relationship “between two contradictory terms that define a subject” (Ibid. 29). To posit a particular way of life or subjectivity as grounding politics, or to seek reasons for the formation of political communities, is to construct a “vicious circle” (Ibid. 28) that results in “the disappearance of the object it professes to be explaining or founding” (Ibid. 29); that is, politics, and the disjuncture manifest by a political subject. Rancière argues that political subjects enact paradoxical forms of action, participating in “contraries” (Ibid.). This can be seen in philosophical formulations “that define politics as the ruling (*commandment*) of equals, and the citizen as the one who *partakes* in ruling and being ruled” (Ibid.):

[t]he Aristotelian formulation speaks to us of a being that is at once the agent of an action and the matter upon which that action is exercised. It contradicts the conventional logic of action according to which there exists an agent endowed with a specific capacity to produce an effect upon an object, which, in its turn, is characterized by its aptitude for receiving that and only that effect (Ibid.).

Attempts to ground politics in a proper way of being or a particular subjectivity miss this paradoxical status of politics: that specific to politics is the breaking of any logic - any “*arkhê*” (Ibid. 30) - which determines “the ‘normal’ distribution of positions that defines who exercises power and who is subject to it” (Ibid.). In his fourth, fifth and sixth theses, Rancière identifies democracy as this “rupture in the logic of the *arkhê*” (Ibid. 31) where the notion of the people disrupts the proper ordering of ruling and being ruled:

[t]he people is the supplement that disjoins the population from itself, by suspending all logics of legitimate domination [...] It is an abstract supplement in relation to any actual (ac)count of the parts of the population

¹³ Stoneman draws a close link between *decorum* and Rancière’s *propriety*: “[a]s an architectonic force of social composition and as a complex of differentiated communicative patterns, decorum sustains social order through the creation and interiorization of decorous modes of subjectivity” (2011: 133). As such, for Stoneman “we may interpret Rancièrian politics as a mode of *appropriate indecorum*” (Ibid. 142, emphasis original).

[...] The people is a supplementary existence that inscribes the count of the uncounted, or part of those who have no part (Ibid. 33).

The part of those who have no part is thus not identifiable with any specific part of the population - it is not the excluded, the disenfranchised or the disadvantaged - but is rather the calling into question of the proper counting of parts. It instigates a different count of the population; it insists there is supplementarity when otherwise this could not be perceived, a gesture which, for Rancière, “is the very stake of politics itself” (Ibid. 35).

The name that Rancière gives to that which politics disrupts is the “police” (Ibid. 36). In his seventh and eighth theses Rancière specifies what constitutes the police and how politics interacts with it. For Rancière the police is first “a distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*) whose principle is the absence of void and of supplement” (Ibid.). A distribution (or, as it is sometimes translated, *partition*) of the sensible is

a generally implicit law that defines the forms of *partaking* by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed [...] This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation. A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (*un commun partagé*) and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience (Ibid., emphasis original).

The distribution / partition of the sensible is in this way aesthetic, and determines the perceptibility of its objects: it “presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what is not, of what can be heard and what cannot” (Ibid.). For Rancière the police is a particular type of distribution of the sensible, one that “is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement” (Ibid.). It rigorously ties subjects to “specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places” (Ibid.). This leaves no room for any supplement or void: the police insists that its particular account is a totality which exhausts all possible forms of existence. By contrast, “[t]he essence of politics consists in disturbing this arrangement by supplementing it with a part of those who have no part, identified with the whole of the community” (Ibid.). Therefore, “[p]olitics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable” (Ibid. 37). Politics both demonstrates the contingency of any police order and reconfigures the distribution of

the sensible, transforming spaces which can then set the scene for the appearance of political subjects. Politics “consists in re-figuring space, that is in what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it” (Ibid.).

In this way politics manufactures a “dissensus” (Ibid. 38) within the proper account of names, roles and functions; a “demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself” (Ibid.). As I will go on to suggest, as a *demonstration* dissensus points something out, but as a *manifestation* it brings something into being; within the *aesthesis* of the distribution of the sensible these two operations go hand in hand. Dissensus thus “places one world in another” (Ibid.), “a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds” (Ibid. 39). In his ninth and tenth theses, Rancière notes that both political philosophy and the various theses on the “return” (Ibid. 42) or the “end” (Ibid.) of politics “efface” (Ibid. 40) politics by instigating the opposite of dissensus: “consensus” (Ibid. 42), or, “the reduction of politics to the police” (Ibid.). They do this by positing an account of the social which functions either as that which a pure political realm overcomes or as that which overcomes politics. In either case the “litigiousness” (Ibid. 40) of politics - its instituting of a dispute of what constitutes the social to begin with - is done away with.

One of the consequences of Rancière’s account of politics is that the primary contestation politics enacts is over the status of politics: “the essential object of political dispute is the very existence of politics itself” (Ibid. 35). It is in this precise sense that one should understand Rancière’s politics as being improper.¹⁴ Rancière demonstrates this by returning to an inaugural moment in the account of politics in the western tradition: Aristotle’s identification of man as a political animal through his possession of *logos*, or reasoned speech (Aristotle 1992: 60; Rancière 2010: 37-38). Being in possession of *logos* meant one could express qualities and opinions proper to the political community; one could distinguish between what is useful and harmful, just and unjust. Those animals deprived of *logos*, including slaves, women and barbarians, who understood *logos* but did not possess it, were, for Aristotle, limited to their use of *phone* - mere voice - in expressing pain and pleasure. For Rancière, this ordering of the parts of the community is exemplary of policing: through a particular partition of the sensible

¹⁴ In this way my reading differs from Devenney’s (2011), for whom Rancière’s politics is improper because of its undermining of forms of propriety that are structured around the policing of a particular set of property relations. As a consequence, for Devenney political activity is a form of “trespass” (Ibid. 160) which “*is in part about the reactivation of the bounds of the proper*” (Ibid. 152-153, emphasis original). The “figures of the trespasser in contemporary politics” (Ibid. 160) are therefore “the immigrant, the squatter, the suicide bomber” (Ibid.). Instead, rather than drawing a properly improper political subject from Rancière’s politics, I argue that Rancière’s politics is improper because of its refusal to offer the resources to make this move; that is, because “the essential object of political dispute is the very existence of politics itself” (Rancière 2010: 35).

people are allotted certain names and roles with concomitant capacities, incapacities and proper locations. A particular *arkhê* - a justification for ruling - is then founded based upon this partition. One hears reasoned speech and therefore knows one is dealing with the political animal that is *anthropos*. However, as Rancière points out,

[t]he only practical difficulty lies in knowing in which sign this sign can be recognized; that is, how can you be sure that the human animal mouthing a noise in front of you is actually articulating discourse, rather than merely expressing a state of being (Ibid. 38)?

Rancière thus identifies a vicious circle, whereby those in possession of *logos* can recognise *logos* because of their possession of *logos*. This, for Rancière, is the initial tension at the heart of political philosophy, in Jean-Philippe Deranty's words "a logical or ontological *torsion*, a logical or ontological twisting" (2003), a wrong (*tort*) which is also a "wrungness" (Ibid.) and a "wringing" (Ibid.). Political philosophy covers over this tension by situating politics in its proper place; for Rancière, either via an archipolitics, parapolitics or metapolitics (1999: 61-93). Consequently, politics for Rancière becomes the disruption of this aesthetic ordering which hears some sonic emissions as speech and others as noise. It is the moment when those who should not be capable of discourse assume they have this capacity and start making use of it. Typically this incapacity has been associated with particular spaces, for example the factory for workers, or the *domus* for women. In this way politics consists

in re-qualifying these spaces, in getting them to be seen as the places of a community; it involves these categories making themselves seen or heard as speaking subjects (if only in the form of litigation) - in short, as participants in a common *aisthesis*. It consists in making what was unseen visible; in making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech and in demonstrating that what appeared as a mere expression of pleasure and pain is a shared feeling of a good or an evil (2010: 38).

Although the dominant example Rancière draws on when thinking through the formation of a political community is the enactment of "heretical speech" (1994: 88), Rancière's account of politics is not grounded in the capacity for speech, but rather in the "equality of intelligence, the absolute condition of all communication and any social order" (1999: 34). With his insistence on "the equality of speaking beings" (Ibid. 33) Rancière makes it easy to misread his politics as reinstating the very object he otherwise wants to critique: the privileging of *logos* as the distinguishing quality of the

political subject.¹⁵ Rancière's frequent recourse to the equality of *speaking* beings makes it more difficult to discern forms of politics that are not centred on the phonic register. However, this is not Rancière's intention: politics for Rancière is not limited to speech; rather, what matters is that it is motivated out of an assumption of equal intelligence.

A question is still left hanging, however, over whom this demonstration of equal intelligence is directed towards. If politics is the making visible of what was invisible or the making audible as discourse what was only heard as noise - "the power of monstrosity" (2009: 306) in Panagia's words - whom should one take the audience to be? And why is the appeal to some form of recognition of equal intelligence necessary? For Rancière,

[p]olitical argumentation is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world in which the argument could count as an argument, one that is addressed by a subject qualified to argue, over an identified object, to an addressee who is required to see the object and hear the argument that he 'normally' has no reason either to see or to hear (2010: 39).

Clare Woodford too makes this claim in her reconstruction of Rancière, when she argues that

Rancière's 'politics' is the moment when this different, previously unrecognisable 'reason' breaks through and is recognised, thus resulting in the subject of 'politics' carving out a new place for the part that up until then had no part, and this results in a new distribution of the sensible where all else shifts to accommodate this part (2016: 44).

Exemplary here is Rancière's account of the secession of the plebeians gathered on the Aventine Hill (1999: 23-28). Within the police order established by the patricians, the plebeians do not speak "because they are beings without a name, deprived of logos" (Ibid. 23). Consul Menenius "is a victim of sensory illusion" (Ibid. 24) and makes "a fatal mistake in imagining that *words* were issuing from the mouths of the plebs when logically the only thing that could issue forth was noise" (Ibid. 23-24). Rather than responding that the plebeians only had a "transitory speech, a speech that is a fugitive sound, a sort of howling, a sign of want [*besoin*] and not an expression [*manifestation*] of intelligence" (Ballanche, quoted in Rancière 1999: 24) Menenius fails to put them in their place and delivers his apologia, reporting back to the patricians. The plebeians

¹⁵ See, for example, Rancière's account of *mésentente* as "a determined kind of *speech situation*" (1999: x, emphasis added).

then

establish another order, another partition of the perceptible, by constituting themselves [...] as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them these. They thereby execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians (Rancière 1999: 24).

This establishment of another order constructs a common stage which “exists for the use of an interlocutor who can’t see it and who can’t see it for good reason *because* it doesn’t exist” (Ibid. 27). The plebeians then establish a common *aisthesis*, demonstrating their equal intelligence which the patricians are forced to reckon with.

The danger is that in Rancière’s insistence on politics demonstrating equality - of enacting a certain type of visibility by making one’s equal intelligence perceptible in a way that it was not previously - the actions of those that refuse the ordering of the police but are indifferent to demonstrating their equality are not understood as politics; one is closer to an analysis that seeks to use Rancière to determine what activity constitutes politics, or what activity is politically effective, rather than one that asks *what if* a particular activity were politics. This becomes especially pressing in situations where the possibility of demonstrating equality (or having this equality recognised) is radically limited, for example, the slave plantation as analysed by Saidiya Hartman in her *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) (something I will explore in my final chapter). In particular, Hartman highlights the mobilisation of pleasure and pain in redressing the pained body of the slave, enacting a “politics without a proper locus” (Ibid. 51) (or, on my reading, a politics *with* an *improper* locus); this has little to do with appropriating and making visible *logos* (for Aristotle definitively distinct from pain and pleasure) and more to do with appropriating affective, embodied experiences more properly associated with *phone* (an *appropriation* of one’s body because, within the rationality of chattel slavery, the slave’s body was the property of another). For Hartman, it is precisely the “fugitive sound” (Ballanche, quoted in Rancière 1999: 24) associated with “want” (Ibid.)¹⁶ and manifest between slaves - “black noise” as Hartman describes it (2008: 12) - that should be read as a politics without a proper locus; whether these sounds mimic, parody or cite (Honig 2010: 20) the slaveholders - whether they make visible their reasoned speech, or even their equal intelligence - does not affect their political quality, nor the forms of sociality established in relation to these sounds.¹⁷ In

¹⁶ Or “need” as *besoin* might be translated.

¹⁷ Peter Hallward makes a similar point when he argues that Rancière’s emphasis on liminality, the interval or the in-between is potentially problematic: “[i]t is far from clear that the resources of the interval as such can give effective analytical purchase on the forms of relation -

contrast, Rancière's politics can account for the speeches made to and by abolitionists without difficulty: see, for example, Jason Frank's reading of the speeches of Frederick Douglass as an exemplary instance of a staging of dissensus (2009). However, if one comes to exist through fugitivity - through forms of escape and evasion - then the demand for visibility undermines not only the conditions for one's politics, but the conditions for one's existence.

This emphasis on the making visible of one's equal intelligence (or equal capacity for speech) is prominent in Aletta Norval's reading of Rancière (Norval 2012). Norval is concerned with an aporia in Rancière's thought, one located in "the transition from interruption to inscription" (Ibid. 811). For Norval, Rancière does not offer an adequate account of how this transition is to take place. His antipathy to thinking politics as an ethos means that Rancière does not have the resources to make sense of how extant orders are reconfigured through political enactments. Norval turns to Rancière's example of the secession of the Roman Plebeians to show that the moment of inscription is important for Rancière: that the plebeians' achievement - in contradistinction to one of Rancière's other examples in *Disagreement*, the revolt of the Scythian slaves (1999: 12-13) - is found precisely in their forcing of the patricians to hear their phonic emissions as speech rather than noise; to see them as beings in possession of a common soul, existing in a common world. Without the reconfiguration of the extant order - without making one's equality visible and thus transforming the one who would deny this equality - moments of interruption carry limited political meaning. For Norval, Rancière recognises this, however his "analysis moves far too quickly. He fails to explore the Roman Senate's response to the Plebeians. Accounting for the role of responsiveness in bringing about change to the extant order is crucial" (2012: 811). Norval attempts to resolve this issue by dissolving the "too sharp division between politics and the police order" (Ibid. 822) that she identifies in Rancière's work, through an engagement with Stanley Cavell's account of exemplarity. What is important for my purposes is not whether Norval's response is successful, but that she seeks to offer clarity to an insistence latent in Rancière's work: that there is a relationship between what constitutes meaningful political activity on the one hand, and the extant order that an egalitarian inscription reconfigures on the other. This raises the specter of depoliticising those who have little interest in making their equality visible, or in making the transition from interruption to inscription, or even in "[making] visible a range of injustices" (Ibid. 810).

However, there is another aspect of Rancière's account of politics that one can

oppression, exploitation, representation, but also solidarity, co-operation, empowerment - that shape any particular situation" (2006: 125).

emphasise which does not leave open the possibility of depoliticising those who are indifferent to the recognition of their equality in the extant order. This depends upon how one reads Rancière's claim that politics should be understood as "demonstrating a shared *aisthesis*" (2010: 38) or "a common *aisthesis*" (Ibid.). If the emphasis is placed less on the *demonstration* of this shared *aesthesis* and more on the shared *aesthesis* itself, then one can imagine forms of politics where any demonstration of a shared *aesthesis* is directed not to the extant police order, but rather inwards amongst those who collectively manifest this *aesthesis* and demonstrate it to one another. This reading becomes more compelling when one considers that Rancière routinely uses the French *manifestation* for what is frequently translated as *demonstration* in the English. The French *manifestation* can be translated as *demonstration* in English, but here demonstration signifies less the pointing out or proving of something (which in the French might be *démonstration*) and more collective forms of political action (e.g. a demonstration understood as a protest against a war). In either case, it would seem that in Rancière's French *manifestation* carries both the conventional, political meaning of *demonstration* (as a collective protest), as well as the qualities of bringing something about which are signified by the English *manifestation* (i.e. to make something palpable or sensible). So to return to the question of the audience of a shared *aesthesis*, as a *manifestation* this would not so much be the appropriation of *logos* in the name of the demonstration of equality, but rather the undermining of the distinction between *logos* and *phone* to begin with; the creation of a common *aesthesis* between those who enact politics. In Bonnie Honig's words,

analytically distinguishing *phone* and *logos*, though useful, misleads us into thinking of *phone* and *logos* as parallel and distinct logics, or of *logos* as epiphenomenal to the real human register of *phone*. What if instead *phone* and *logos* inspire and interrupt each other (2010: 18)?

This is not to argue that politics cannot be thought of as "subversion that function[s] via appropriation" (Woodford 2016: 163), "[p]arody, mimicry, and citation" (Honig 2010: 20), or the movement from "interruption to inscription" (Norval 2012: 811). Rather, it is to suggest that these forms of appropriative action do not exhaust the possibilities of politics: politics may occur through the parodic subversion of reasoned speech, but it also occurs as a shared *aesthesis* is manifest via forms of sociality whose relationship to the extant order is marked by indifference, or a refusal of visibility, or fugitivity (something I further explore in my final chapter).

What I have sought to demonstrate is that Rancière's account of politics can extend to include the staging of a heterogeneous conception of the world and our place

within it. Although in a strict sense politics for Rancière is proper to the action of political subjects, I argue that Rancière's methodological impropriety and his ambiguity concerning the relationship between political actors and the stages from which they emerge make it possible to read poetic interventions (found, for example, in the work of Butler, Cavarero and Rancière himself) as a form of politics on his terms. As I will go on to demonstrate, it is my argument that Butler and Cavarero, in staging a contestatory conception of humanness premised on vulnerability, are enacting an "ontological conflict" (Rancière 2009a: 119) and therefore a form of politics, or, more specifically, a "poetics of politics" (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 116). However, for Butler and Cavarero, just as for Rancière, their poetics of politics are also susceptible to depoliticising forms of existence that operate apart from visibility.

Chapter Two: Butler on Violence

In my first chapter I argued that Rancière's work can be thought in relation to visibility in two ways: first, Rancière privileges a type of politics that involves making visible forms of existence that would otherwise not be sensible; and second, Rancière's work itself, as a poetic intervention in the distribution of the sensible, is also concerned with this making visible. Judith Butler's work also concerns visibility, however here visibility is primarily thought in relation to violence. In this chapter I give an overview of Butler's account of violence, demonstrating the centrality of issues of visibility to it. This lays the groundwork for my reading of Butler's account of nonviolence, and also Cavarero's engagement with issues of narrative and uniqueness as they relate to violence. Throughout Butler's engagement with violence there is an ethical and political imperative to make forms of violence visible that are otherwise rendered invisible. However, in my final chapter I read Hartman's work on the Middle Passage, plantation slavery and its afterlives to make clear the limits to this engagement with violence: there are instances where making violence visible reproduces the "hypervisibility" (Hartman 1997: 36) demanded of the wounded black body; or times where a politics of fugitivity was a necessity in the context of slavery. This was a type of resistance that operated apart from the visible.

What an analysis of Butler's account of violence demonstrates is that offering a definition of violence - one that could be deployed to determine whether violence has occurred - is a futile task. As Butler makes clear, a central aspect of violence is its varying visibility: violence can be recognised, misrecognised, or can evade recognition entirely, even by the person who is undergoing violence. One's violation depends upon schemas of recognisability, intelligibility and normalisation to be recognised as violence (Butler 2010: 5-6).¹⁸ Since, following Butler, these schemas "not only organize visual experience but also generate specific ontologies of the subject" (Ibid. 3) this potential failure to recognise violence also extends to one's own recognition of personal violation. As such, and in Jelke Boesten's words, "[a] careful questioning of the normative truths that guide and restrict life helps to visibilise violence that is otherwise

¹⁸ This begs the question of how the distinction between 'violation' and 'violence' should be understood, and further what the norms of recognition policing this distinction are. Is violation always a form of violence, or could one undergo violation without at the same time suffering violence? Can this question only be answered by offering a precise definition of 'violation' and 'violence', or is the distinction one that depends on norms of recognition? Is violation itself always apparent and deducible through analysis, or is it too always subject to norms of recognition that fundamentally limit the extent of one's analysis?

tolerated, normalised and, in some cases, legitimised” (2017: 134). Violence is unquestionably the back-drop to almost all of Butler’s work (Carver and Chambers 2008: 76; Karhu 2016) and yet an account of what it is - when something counts as violence and when something does not - is not to be found. Nonetheless, Butler is both politically and ethically motivated by a desire for a less violent world, and her analyses are replete with examples of violent injustice. She does not shy away from questions of violence, and does not elide the problems violence poses through a purely theoretical analysis. For Butler, the problems violence poses are precisely what motivate her account of ethics and her ontology of vulnerability that refuse to rest on an ontology of sovereignty, autonomy and invulnerability.

To piece together Butler’s understanding of violence requires an overview of much of her recent thought. As has been noted by Sanna Karhu (2016), Butler has been concerned with questions of violence from the publication of *Gender Trouble* (2006a, originally published in 1990) onwards, emerging from her engagement with Foucault, Derrida and, as Karhu stresses, the feminism of Monique Wittig. In Sam Chambers and Terrell Carver’s words, “Butler’s engagement with post-9/11 politics, far from constituting an abandonment of her previous work, instead relies upon and further elaborates her previous theoretical position” (2008: 86). However, while I recognise that the theme of violence can be found throughout Butler’s work, nonetheless there is a meaningful distinction between Butler’s pre- and post-9/11 work: not a radical break, but rather “a catalyst for a shift in thematic orientation” (Schippers 2014: 3). This shift can be seen in Butler’s concern with notions of humanness; her increasing engagement with the thought of Arendt, Levinas and Cavarero; and her analysis of the wars waged by the United States of America and Israel. As such, while I note the legacies of Butler’s account of violence in her earlier work, I predominantly limit my reading to her systematic engagement with the question of violence across her post-9/11 work. Even here, however, Butler’s understanding of violence does not rest in a single place and, like Slavoj Žižek’s “six sideways glances” (2009: 3) at violence, refuses to be accounted for head-on. In order to give an overview of Butler’s account of violence I orient this chapter around three key issues: *recognisability*, *precariousness* and *derealisation*. Recognisability and derealisation refer to issues of visibility in violence (respectively, whether violence can be recognised, and the ways violence makes others unreal) while precariousness is the theoretical backdrop against which violence is made sense of. What will become clear is that there is always a constitutive politics to violence that mediates whether it is recognised as violence as such. The notion of political violence (or “*political forms of violence*” (Evans and Carver 2017: 2, emphasis original)) is something of a pleonasm: violence is necessarily political.

Reading Butler's accounts of recognisability, precariousness and derealisation will make this politics (and its concomitant mediation of visibility) clear.

Recognisability

One of Butler's central questions in her recent work, most obvious in *Undoing Gender* (2004), *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2010), is when and how certain lives are visible as lives worth living, and when and how someone who is alive is perceived as not having a life. Butler draws a distinction between the act of apprehension and the act of recognition: apprehension "can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition" (2010: 5) and precedes the act of recognition. For Butler, it is possible to be apprehended as living without being recognised as having a life. Butler further breaks down these categories of recognition. She argues that recognition does not occur in isolation: that for a living being to be recognised they must conform to "general terms, conventions, and norms" (Ibid.) of *recognisability*, that "prepare or shape a subject for recognition" (Ibid.). As Butler says, "recognizability precedes recognition" (Ibid.); recognisability is therefore necessary for recognition to take place. It is recognisability rather than mere recognition that is more significant in Butler's theoretical work. The dyadic scene of recognition cannot be fully accounted for at the level of the individuals involved: the possibilities that a person will either be recognised or be able to confer recognition both depend on general conditions of recognisability that establish and induce a certain kind of subject. An analysis at the level of recognition does not challenge dominant understandings of the form of the human, because these dominant understandings have conditioned the capacity for recognition; to begin to challenge the dominant understanding of the form of the human one needs to consider recognisability.¹⁹ As Butler says:

[t]he problem is not merely how to include more people in existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differentially. What new norms are possible, and how are they wrought? What might be done to produce a more egalitarian set of conditions for recognizability? What might be done, in other words, to shift the very terms of recognizability in order to produce more radically democratic results? (Ibid. 6).

¹⁹ In this way, one can see that Sam Chambers' critique of Butler in his *Bearing Society in Mind* - that her account of the social reproduces a dyadic scene of recognition that "merely falls back on a liberal, aggregative model" (2014: 52) - is misplaced: Butler's delineation of recognisability from recognition is precisely deployed to refuse this aggregative model and insist upon broader formations of power that condition any dyadic scene of recognition.

A further layer of analysis needs to be added to help understand how recognisability operates: *intelligibility* and *apprehension*. For Butler, intelligibility should be understood as “the general historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable” (Ibid.). It is these schemas that “condition and produce norms of recognizability” (Ibid. 7). Butler’s account of recognition has three aspects: first, someone can be *recognised* as being a person; second, in order to recognise someone their identity needs to conform to norms of *recognisability*; and third, these norms of recognisability are conditioned by *schemas of intelligibility* that establish domains of the knowable. Most importantly for Butler, at each point there exists the possibility that someone may be misrecognised because they do not conform to norms of recognisability, or further, that they may be rendered unintelligible because they fall fully outside of norms of recognisability and thus cannot even be misrecognised. Here, Butler deploys the term *apprehension* to distinguish those moments when someone is registered as being alive, but not recognised as having a life: apprehension is a “mode of knowing that is not yet recognition, or may remain irreducible to recognition” (Ibid. 6). To apprehend someone is to sense or perceive them “but in ways that are not always - or not yet - conceptual forms of knowledge” (Ibid. 5).

These conceptual tools are central to Butler’s account of violence. However, they are valuable not only as a means of specifying different forms of violation, but further as an aid to a general project configured around questions of visibility. In particular, Butler’s delineation of recognition, recognisability, intelligibility and apprehension is valuable for the work of Jacques Rancière given his central preoccupation with questions of visibility. Rancière’s account of the *partage du sensible* and Butler’s account of recognition are, on my reading, responses to a shared intuition: that the visibility of certain forms of existence varies and that this has important political implications.²⁰ Butler’s distinctions within the concept of recognition offer a granular account of Rancière’s more general analysis; they offer a greater degree of precision when thinking through issues of visibility.²¹ It should be noted that, particularly in *Disagreement* (1999), Rancière indicates he is working at the extreme of issues to make clear the underlying rationality of the relationship between politics and philosophy (Ibid. xii). However, these extreme instances do not exhaust the possibilities of the visibility of moments of politics:

²⁰ This can also be traced back to a shared ancestry: the work of Michel Foucault. My thanks to Lars Cornelissen for this point.

²¹ This does not make Butler’s analysis superior, however. The great strength of Rancière’s *partage du sensible* (and its corollary, the police) is in its theoretical openness that does not capture the forms of existence that it purports to analyse; or, perhaps, its theoretical openness best allows these forms of existence to escape any capture that Rancière’s analysis cannot rid itself of.

there are degrees of subjectification. Movements like those of the 1995 strikes put elements of subjectification into play, without, however, arousing political subjects in the full sense - subjects capable of tracing a connection between all instances of subjectification and attaching them to the great signifiers of collective life (Rancière et al. 2000: 20).

If there are a variety of instances of perception and imperceptibility, then the distinctions Butler draws in the concept of recognition are helpful in making sense of these. Butler's notion of apprehension - a mode of existence prior to conceptual forms of knowledge - proves especially valuable in thinking through a politics that augments the work of Rancière. As I noted in my first chapter, there is a danger that Rancière's politics becomes understood only as a form of appropriation enacted by those who were previously insensible; a making visible of what was invisible. However, within the coordinates of Rancière's account of politics, forms of existence that are indifferent to the extant orders of recognition can also be thought of as enacting politics, for example in the manifestation of a dissensual, heterogenous world within a world. Butler's notion of apprehension offers a way of making sense of these instances of fugitive politics. If Butler is primarily concerned with thinking apprehension as a remainder after violence has obliterated recognisable forms of subjecthood, then space is left open to think apprehension apart from the specter of violence: as a mode of knowing another that operates "in ways that are not always - or not yet - conceptual forms of knowledge" (Butler 2010: 5), ways that might apprehend without also capturing. I develop this notion of apprehension over the course of my thesis.

If there is space to think apprehension apart from violence, nonetheless Butler primarily develops her notions of recognition, recognisability, intelligibility and apprehension in relation to violence. The phenomenon of violence is ever present in Butler's discussions of recognition, but its presence is often to be found in the shadows of her analysis rather than at the fore. In the introduction to *Undoing Gender* (2004) Butler argues that it is possible for a person to be "undone" (Ibid. 1) by norms of recognisability, both by the "conferring [of] recognition" (Ibid. 2) and by the "withholding [of] recognition" (Ibid.). Here Butler is investigating the dissolution of identity at the hands of recognition: the impact of misrecognising, or of refusing recognition, or denigrating the recognised identity. One may want to understand the process of being undone as a form of violence, but things are not that simple. Certainly for Butler, violence is at least on the periphery of being undone at the hands of recognition: as she says,

[c]ertain humans are recognized as being less than human, and that

form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life. Certain humans are not recognized as humans at all, and that leads to yet another order of unlivable life (Ibid.).

In *Undoing Gender* Butler offers the example of “infants or children with sexually indeterminate or hermaphroditic anatomy” (Ibid. 4) undergoing coercive surgery “in the name of normalizing these bodies” (Ibid.):

[t]he intersex community’s resistance to coercive surgery moreover calls for an understanding that infants with intersexed conditions are part of the continuum of human morphology and ought to be treated with the presumption that their lives are and will be not only livable, but also occasions for flourishing. The norms that govern idealized human anatomy thus work to produce a differential sense of who is human and who is not, which lives are livable, and which are not (Ibid.).

Here the undoing of a certain identity - the exclusion of an identity from the realm of what is a normal bodily morphology - not only exposes those excluded to violence, but further is a form of violence itself. For Daniel Ross violence is that which ruptures a body, but ‘body’ in the broadest sense, encompassing not just the human body but something that can be isolated from other things; something that is whole within itself; something that is “contained within its boundaries, its surface, or its skin” (2004: 4). For Ross the violent act typically involves a rupturing of this boundedness, and it is in this way that one could understand the rupturing of the identity of the intersex person as being violent. Likewise, for Fiona Jenkins violation should be understood in terms of “the violation of a boundary, the violation of a law of prohibition - where the key thought is that the violation only subsists to the extent that a law is enforced sustaining the being of that entity that is violated” (2007: 164). It is not only that there is a close relationship between the material violence of the “corrective” surgery and the social exclusion of the intersex person, but that whatever material violence has caused the social exclusion, or whatever material violence a person has suffered as a result of being socially excluded, the process of being excluded also carries a violence. In her analysis of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Butler highlights the “social death” (2006b: 7) of the colonised at the hands of colonisers:

refusing to reply to or address another who speaks, or requiring an asymmetrical form of address according to which the one in power is the exclusive audience for the second person - these are all ways of deconstituting ontology and orchestrating a non-livable life (Ibid.).

This “non-livable life” may not be livable because of the material violence one is exposed to, but it is also non-livable because of the undoing of the identity of the colonised as recognisably human.

However, does it follow that any form of undoing is a form of violence? Complicating this conclusion is Butler’s point that some forms of undoing may be voluntarily undergone by persons; indeed, may be actively willed. As Butler argues, there may indeed be “advantages to remaining less than intelligible” (2004: 3):

if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred (Ibid.).

In her discussion of the notion of ‘dispossession’ Butler notes that it carries a positive valence in that it “can be a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 3). Nonetheless, it is also a process which we “abhor and resist” (Ibid.), when “populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood, and become subject to military and legal violence” (Ibid.). If the process of becoming undone - of being dispossessed - can often be one that is violent, for Butler this is not an inevitability: to be undone does not of necessity lead to material violence (even if this is often so); it is not of necessity a violent process (even if this is often so). Sometimes one’s undoing can represent the cessation of violence, if the identity inhabited is necessarily tied to violence. One can further see that for Butler the experience of misrecognition is always a possibility, or rather, that recognition is never complete and singular. As Estelle Ferrarese makes clear, while Butler’s account of recognition depends upon a reading of Althusser’s notion of interpellation - that one can be interpellated by the other’s act of recognition - for Butler this act of interpellation is dependent on norms of recognisability and always carries with it the possibility of failure (Ferrarese 2011: 761). The moment of interpellation can be interrupted by its own actualisation:

[i]f I understand myself to be conferring recognition on you, for instance, then I take seriously that the recognition comes from me. But the moment I realize that the terms by which I confer recognition are not mine alone, that I did not single-handedly devise or craft them, I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer (Butler 2005: 26).

On Butler’s account this dynamic of recognition is necessary for any coming into

existence of the subject. Recognition is not simply bestowed in a “demiurgic” (Ferrarese 2011: 763) manner: something “precedes [recognition] and makes it possible” (Ibid. 764), what, as I have shown, Butler elsewhere calls norms of recognisability. These norms are consequently social, indeed “[t]hey function to the extent that they are social, exceeding every dyadic exchange that they condition” (Butler 2005: 24). In this way norms of recognition are put into question at the moment when recognition fails, or if someone resists recognition by not responding to an interpellative call, or if someone is undone in the act of conferring recognition: these possibilities are always present because, as Butler argues, norms always function in a social context and are consequently dependent on their social reiteration for their continued affective quality. As Butler says, “[t]he norm is actively conferring reality; indeed, only by virtue of its repeated power to confer reality is the norm constituted as a norm” (2004: 52). It is this dependence on repetition that can disturb norms of recognition, which leaves the possibility of misrecognition always open: “[t]he normative production of the subject is an iterable process - the norm is repeated, and in this sense is constantly ‘breaking’ with the contexts delimited as the ‘conditions of production’ ” (Butler 2010: 168).

If recognition carries with it a constant possibility of failure, indeed if the “rupture” (Butler 2005: 19) that is the experience of dispossession “is constitutive of identity itself” (Ibid.), does it make sense to always describe a failure of recognition - a moment of dispossession - as violent? If so, then it would seem that this understanding of violence would cease to be meaningful: its application would be so broad and could be deployed so frequently that it would rob the notion of any analytic purchase. However, this reading would be mistaken: as I will demonstrate, violence for Butler can be understood as something particular, and despite her claim that we are “mired” (2010: 171) in it, and despite her refusal to offer a precise description of it, the concept is not empty, a fact that is crucial if we are to make sense of her account of nonviolence (as I will later outline). In piecing together Butler’s understanding of violence, however, I argue that she has good reasons for resisting giving a precise account of violence, and so it is necessary to make this reticence on Butler’s part central to my reconstruction of her account of violence. To do so requires moving my analysis away from Butler’s understanding of recognition (even if it remains on our periphery) and towards her notions of precariousness and derealisation, and nonviolence.

Precariousness

As I earlier argued, central to Butler's recent work is a consideration of when a being who is alive can be recognised as having a life. As Butler insists, "a life has to be intelligible as a *life*, has to conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable" (2010: 7). One can see that an ongoing concern of Butler's is the failure of recognition and the consequences of this failure for the lives that fail to be recognised. In order to account for these consequences Butler makes use of the notions of precariousness and precarity. Precariousness is an equal attribute that all humans share by dint of being alive, whereas precarity is politically differentiated: as Butler says, "[t]he more or less existential conception of 'precariousness' is thus linked with a more specifically political notion of 'precarity' " (Ibid. 3). Indeed, it is precisely when a life is not recognised as a fully human life - when it is incongruent with the norms that govern a proper human life - that a person is exposed to a greater degree of precarity, and a life exposed to a greater degree of precarity is one that is so often exposed to a greater degree of violence. For Butler:

[t]his differential distribution of precarity is at once a material and a perceptual issue, since those lives who are not 'regarded' as potentially grievable, and hence valuable, are made to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment, legal disenfranchisement, and differential exposure to violence and death (Ibid. 25).

There is thus a link between "the epistemological problem of apprehending a life" (Ibid. 3) and "the ethical problem of what it is to acknowledge, or, indeed, to guard against injury and violence" (Ibid.). One might say that when a life is not recognised as fully human this can result in the failure to recognise the violation of this life as violence; but one might equally say that it is the failure to recognise violation as violence that results in the misrecognition of a human life. The chains of cause and effect are not obvious here. Instead, it would be more accurate to talk of mutual *conditions*: that one of the possible conditions for the failure to recognise violence is a misrecognition of a human life, while at the same time that one of the possible conditions for the failure to recognise a human life is the misrecognition of violence. As I will later argue, this interdependent binary is significant when considering the reasons one might have for developing a notion of nonviolence.

In extrapolating her understanding of precarity and the concomitant exposure to violence, Butler turns to the ongoing colonialism of the Israeli State. Butler looks at the Israeli corporate media's response to the bombing of Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009

to offer one example of the differential distribution of precarity: the Israeli media reported that Hamas were hiding in locations populated by children (schools, nurseries etc.) and were thus using the children as a form of shield.²² In this way, so the logic of these media commentators goes, the Israeli military were justified in bombing the members of Hamas despite the consequence of the slaughter of children. As Butler says:

[w]e are asked to believe that those children are not really children, are not really alive, that they have *already* been turned into metal, to steel, that they belong to the machinery of bombardment, at which point the body of the child is conceived as nothing more than a militarized metal that protects the attacker against attack (Ibid. xxvii).

She goes on:

[i]f one were to conceptualize the child as something other than part of the defensive and manipulative machinery of war, then there would be some chance of understanding this life as a life worth living, worth sheltering, and worth grieving. But once transformed into duplicitous shrapnel, even the Palestinian child is no longer living, but is, rather, recognized as a threat to life (Ibid.).

As “duplicitous shrapnel” these children are not recognised as possessing human lives: as shrapnel there is no prerogative to shelter their lives and therefore, falling outside of what is understood as the human, they inhabit a “socially induced transience and dispensability” (Ibid. xvi) increasing their exposure to violence. However, again the causal chain of this exposure is not clear: to be “human shields” or “duplicitous shrapnel” requires a context of warfare where injuring and violation is the defining feature. The Palestinian children could not be shields or shrapnel without the ever present violence of the Israeli state. These children are not only exposed to a greater degree of precarity by being assigned the category of ‘shield’ over the category of ‘human’; the Israeli state’s violence maintains the conditions that make possible the emergence of these military categories, and consequently an understanding of these children as shields. The bind is therefore tight: as shields they are exposed to violence; and this violence nourishes their understanding as shields. Indeed, as Butler argues, separating the “material reality” (Ibid. 25) of violence from “perceptual categories” (Ibid.) is a “difficult, if not impossible” (Ibid.) task:

²² Cf. Butler’s ‘Human Shields’ (2015).

it would seem that both happen at once and that such perceptual categories are essential to the crafting of material reality (which does not mean that all materiality is reducible to perception, but only that perception carries its material effects) (Ibid.).

As I will later argue, this interdependency interrupts one's efforts to offer a precise account of violence: if violence is in some ways a condition for the misrecognition of violence it becomes very difficult to draw a causal explanation of how it operates, and consequently to finally determine what counts as violence.

Butler develops her vocabulary of precariousness and precarity both to highlight the socially induced conditions that maintain the differential distribution of precarity and to help think about how to interrupt these conditions. For Butler, it is because of our shared precariousness - our equal vulnerability by dint of being alive - that precarity is able to be differentially distributed. The two concepts are closely linked in her thought: an awareness of the differential distribution of precarity can help in recognising our shared precariousness, and conversely an awareness of our shared precariousness can help in resisting the differential distribution of precarity. This is not inevitable: as Butler argues, an understanding of our precariousness "implies, although does not entail, certain normative consequences. It does not suffice to say that since life is precarious, therefore it must be preserved" (Ibid. 33). Instead, more is needed to support this claim: an analysis of the conditions that allow a life to be a *livable* life, and concurrently a recognition of our fundamental and generalised vulnerability, which underpins Butler's understanding of precariousness.

For Butler, precariousness is a precondition for any and all understandings of life: it is an inescapable and necessary part of being alive, a "condition of being laid bare from the start and with which we cannot argue" (2006: 31). This, for Butler, is what she has described as a "new bodily ontology" (2010: 2), qualifying this phrase by highlighting that when she uses the term ontology she is talking about a "social ontology" (Ibid. 3):

[t]o refer to 'ontology' in this regard is not to lay claim to a description of fundamental structures of being that are distinct from any and all social and political organization ... The 'being' of the body to which this ontology refers is one that is always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have developed historically in order to maximize precariousness for some and minimize precariousness for others (Ibid. 2-3).

In *Precarious Life* Butler interrogates the experience of loss that helps give ground to her understanding of our social ontology. For Butler, when one experiences loss, more is going on than the sudden absence of someone one has come to know. Butler identifies three aspects of loss: the aforementioned loss of the other; the consequent loss of one's own identity that is bound up with the other; and further, the loss of the *relation* between the other and oneself (2006: 22). When someone close to you is suddenly removed from your life there is an absence: materially and symbolically you have lost the agential subject that you have known. However, this is only the most immediately visible form of loss. As Butler argues, "If I lose you [...] I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you?" (Ibid.). Something of ourselves is simultaneously lost when another is removed from our life: in this way Butler highlights our fundamental dependence on others as socially embodied beings, not only for our physical well-being but also for our symbolic existence. It is not simply that other people affect our identity, but that our identity cannot be untangled from our relations with others; indeed, that preceding our identity is our entanglement with others. When we lose someone we lose a part of ourselves: our identity experiences a sudden change and consequently it is left alien to us, "inscrutable" (Ibid.). Here Butler is following Freud's arguments in 'Mourning and Melancholia': that someone may know "*who* it is [that he has lost], but not *what* it is about the person that he has lost" (Freud 2005: 205). As Butler points out, this form of loss can be further deconstructed: beyond the loss of the part of 'me' that is intimately connected to 'you' is the loss of the relation itself, "*the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related" (2006: 22). Although a subtle difference, the disruption of the relation between oneself and a lost other helps one recognise that "we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well" (Ibid. 24). Our relations simultaneously offer us the possibility of an agential subjectivity while also calling this subject into question: "I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must" (Ibid. 23).

For Butler then, we are both psychically and materially exposed to others from the start: our identities are the product of social norms, and our embodiment leaves us "subject to incursions and to illnesses that jeopardize the possibility of persisting at all" (Butler 2010: 30). It is in this way that Butler maintains that we have an ethical obligation: not to the "right to life" (Ibid. 18), or "life itself" (Ibid. 23), but to "the conditions that make life possible" (Ibid.). To defend a right to life still begs the question of which life we are to defend and, further, of what we understand as life to begin with. If "degeneration and destruction are part of the very process of life" (Ibid. 18) then the groundedness of this right to life is immediately put into question since "no right can

ward off all processes of degeneration and death” (Ibid.). To defend a right to life is to say nothing about what is necessary for this life to be one that can be lived; it does not consider whether “the social conditions of persistence and flourishing are or are not possible” (Ibid. 20). Following Giorgio Agamben in noting the distinction between *bios* and *zoē* (1998: 1), Butler argues that there are “at least two senses of life, the one, which refers to the minimum biological form of living, and another, which intervenes at the start, which establishes minimum conditions for a livable life with regard to human life” (2004: 226). When making moral and political judgements it is the latter that requires our attention: it is this understanding of life that raises the question of “what humans require in order to maintain and reproduce the conditions of their own livability” (Ibid.). We are, from the start, precarious, in need of myriad conditions in order for our lives to be ones that can be lived. For Butler, this precariousness cannot be understood at an individual level but needs to be understood socially, as a *generalised* condition:

[t]here is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, and relations to the environment and to non-human forms of life, broadly construed (2010: 19).

Or, simply put, “life requires support and enabling conditions in order to be a livable life” (Ibid. 21).

In this way “[p]recariousness has to be grasped not simply as a feature of *this* or *that* life, but as a generalized condition whose very generality can be denied only by denying precariousness itself” (Ibid. 22). Precariousness is thus an equal attribute, and consequently the ethical imperative to minimise the differential distribution of precarity is one that is necessarily egalitarian. As Butler argues, “[t]he recognition of shared precariousness introduces strong normative commitments of equality and invites a more robust universalizing of rights that seeks to address basic human needs for food, shelter, and other conditions for persisting and flourishing” (2010: 28-29). Sara Rushing is thus correct when she argues that “if we can shorthand Butler’s diagnosis of the human condition in terms of ‘vulnerability’, we can shorthand the normative aspiration of her work in terms of ‘livability’” (2010: 291). Rushing demonstrates that for Butler “livability” is “deeply connected to the norm of possibility” (Ibid.). Butler does not shy away from the normative force of a commitment to possibility: countering her critics, who she paraphrases as claiming that she is “trying only to make gender complexity possible” (2004: 219), Butler argues that “[t]he thought of a possible life is only an

indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (Ibid.). It is on these grounds - the recognition of our generalised precariousness and the necessity of possibility for those who would otherwise not be possible - that, for Butler, one would oppose fascism and champion the anti-apartheid movement: both could be understood as invoking "rights to which they were not entitled by existing law" (Ibid. 224), but the former "sought to intensify the violence of exclusion" (Ibid. 225) whereas the latter "sought to counter the violence of racism and exclusion" (Ibid.).

As I will go on to demonstrate, the "normative aspiration" (2006: 26) of livability functions as the obverse of what Butler comes to understand as derealising violence. As I have demonstrated, for Butler one's existence is inextricably linked to others, and it is this link that is exploited when one is exposed to violence. Relationality is thus a condition of violence, a relationality that is not only a "historical fact of our formation, but also an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives" (Ibid. 27). Violence is not an inevitability, but it is also not something that can be fully accounted for: it is "an exploitation of that primary tie" (Ibid.) *between* embodied beings, and it is precisely for this reason that violence is so often beyond one's control. Indeed, it is violence more than any other phenomenon that gives testament to the limits of one's autonomy and the ever present possibility of the undoing of one's identity. However, Butler is committed to the principle that violence is not a discrete analytic concept: as she says, "we are talking about different modalities of 'violence' at each level of this analysis, but that does not mean that they are all equivalent or that no distinctions between them need to be made" (2010: 3). Is the violence Butler references in her essay 'Violence, Mourning, Politics' (2006: 19) of the same "modality" as the violence she explores in *Parting Ways* (2012)? Or is it of an entirely different modality? Or does the modality depend on the context within which (and with whom) Butler is engaging? Surely, the violence Butler considers in the context of war is different to the violence she considers in the context of coerced "corrective" intersex surgery, just as the violence Butler considers when engaging with Michel Foucault (2005) is of a different sort to the violence she considers when engaging with Hannah Arendt (2012), or Frantz Fanon (2006b), or Walter Benjamin (2012), or Melanie Klein (2007), or Jean-Paul Sartre (2006b). And yet these modalities of violence cannot be entirely unrelated, for otherwise one would have no cause to describe them all as violence, and further, Butler condemns certain instances of violence across all these different contexts and conversations. While recognising that violence is not a discrete concept, one can nonetheless determine some reasons why Butler might object to it in a variety of different modalities. These reasons becomes apparent when one considers Butler's

notion of “derealization” (2006: 33), and make use of it to think through the relationship between violence and the experience of being made “unreal” (Butler 2004: 217).

Derealisation

Butler begins her discussion of derealisation in the essay ‘Violence, Mourning, Politics’ with a series of open questions that provide the frame through which one comes to terms with her analysis:

I am referring not only to humans not regarded as humans, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion. It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade? Those who are unreal have, in a sense, already suffered the violence of derealization. What, then, is the relation between violence and those lives considered as “unreal”? Does violence effect that unreality? Does violence take place on the condition of that unreality (2006: 33)?

What can be discerned from this opening framing? First, one can see that Butler is concerned not simply with violence as enacted on subjects (be that material or symbolic) but with the primary visibility of subjects - their visibility in relation to recognition, recognisability and apprehension - and with the dynamic of violence in relation to this process. Throughout her discussion of derealisation this distinction is central. Second, one can see that Butler signals the ways the dynamic between violence and derealisation occurs: she highlights that violence both *produces* derealisation and is the *product* of derealisation. Here Butler problematises the notion of violence without positing a solution: her approach signifies that there is something about violence that destabilises a temporal understanding of how it is manifest; that violence is somehow untimely and so cannot be accounted for through a single linear narrative. One can see then that, as I have previously highlighted, Butler frequently thinks of violence in terms of ‘conditions’, not in terms of ‘cause and effect’. If violence can both produce derealisation and be the product of derealisation, describing this process in terms of cause and effect would not make sense. As seen in the example of the Palestinian children given the category of ‘shield’ by the Israeli corporate media, this category both exposes them to violence (if they are shields and not children they can be violated) and is maintained by their exposure to violence (they can only be

understood as shields in the context of the violence of war). One may want to say that violence is a *necessary* condition of derealisation, whereas derealisation is a *sufficient* condition of violence: in this way there can be no derealisation without violence, but violence may occur without derealisation. But in either case, it seems violence and derealisation can affect one another, and when this is the case they function as mutual conditions, tightening the grip of precarity that those exposed to a violence of derealisation are caught in. In this way Butler is resisting reading violence “as an analytic category” (Butler 2007: 185) and instead is contending that it is necessary “to distinguish among forms of violence” (Ibid.). Third, and linked to the former point, not only does violence produce derealisation while also being its product, but one can also discern a *derealisation of violence itself*. On this understanding the very visibility of violence *as violence* is under interrogation. Once again the structure of this relationship is one marked by mutual conditions rather than cause and effect: is violence derealised because it is enacted on a derealised subject (i.e., the violence cannot be seen as violence because the subject exposed to the violence is not one that can be violated), or is the violation of a subject, without naming this violation as violence, a condition which derealises the subject? As Fiona Jenkins has argued, often “violence being done by the hegemonic authorities is not violence, since those others to whom it is done do not themselves qualify as violable” (2007: 166). Likewise, as Carver and Chambers have claimed, there is a primary form of violence that Butler’s work identifies - what they call “normative violence” (2008: 75) - that “both *enables* the typical physical violence that we routinely recognise and simultaneously *erases* such violence from our ordinary view” (Ibid. 76). They go on: “normative violence done ‘before’ everyday violence makes such everyday violence invisible, illegible, non-existent” (Ibid. 80). Although I am not convinced one can distinguish between “normative” (Ibid.) and “everyday” (Ibid.) violence as clearly as Carver and Chambers do, nonetheless their notion of normative violence does much to capture the centrality of issues of visibility to violence that I am arguing is a crucial aspect of Butler’s work.

To summarise, I have highlighted the following features of Butler’s initial paragraph framing her discussion of derealisation. First, Butler is concerned with violence in relation to the primary visibility of subjects; whether one can impress on the senses of another and thus whether one can be recognised by another. Second, violence can be understood as both producing and being the product of derealisation. Third, violence itself can be derealised. One can further identify a fourth aspect of her account of derealisation immediately following the initial framing paragraph: the dynamic of violence *applied against* the unreal. For Butler, “[t]he derealization of the ‘Other’ means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” (2006: 33-34).

When violence is enacted on the derealised other the usual linear pattern of violent effect breaks down. Rather than injuring or negating the derealised other, as is the usual effect of violence, the status of the derealised other as 'derealised' means that their lives "are already negated" (Ibid. 33). Thus "from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives" (Ibid.). This in turn produces a cycle: the negated yet animated other - the "interminably spectral" (Ibid. 33-34) who is neither alive nor dead - is a threat to the dominant social order because the other is capable of making visible the contingency of this order. To be called unreal is to be "the inhuman, the beyond human, the less than human, the border that secures the human in its ostensible reality" (Butler 2004: 218). The derealised other both secures the border of what it is to be human while at the same time posing a threat to this understanding of humanness. In this way Jenkins argues that violence can be thought of as "a process of enforcing the boundaries of what can be regarded as real and permitted to exist" (2010: 102). As Butler says, "[the derealised other] must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object" (2006: 33).

The understanding of derealisation that Butler presents is resonant with an understanding of dehumanisation: for Butler, "on the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all [...] they cannot be humanized" (Ibid. 34). In this way "being called unreal can be not only a means of social control but a form of dehumanizing violence" (2004: 217). This dehumanisation should not simply be understood as a form of oppression:

[t]o be oppressed one must first become intelligible. To find that one is fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find one to be an impossibility) is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human. It is to find oneself speaking only and always as if one were human, but with the sense that one is not. It is to find that one's language is hollow, and that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in one's favor (Ibid. 218).

Thus, Butler argues "it is not simply [...] that there is a 'discourse' of dehumanization that produces these effects, but rather that there is a limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility" (2004: 35). The dehumanisation of the derealised is the result of "a refusal of discourse" (Ibid. 36). It is precisely because an intersex infant is recognised as receiving "corrective" surgery - surgery with the explicit aim of correcting an aberration from dominant gender norms - that one can see that they fall

outside of discourse and are thus dehumanized. The “corrective” surgery cannot be recognised as violence because the intersex infant undergoing the surgery is derealised, despite the fact that “the coercive acts of ‘correction’ undergone by intersexed infants and children [...] often leave those bodies maimed for life, traumatized, and physically limited in their sexual functions and pleasures” (Ibid. 6). As Carver and Chambers argue, “[i]t becomes easy to do normative violence to gender deviants, precisely because they are dehumanised through their non-normative gender or sexuality” (2008: 89). As Jenkins points out, Butler recognises that often “these cases pose complicated personal and political dilemmas” (2010: 104), and undoubtedly the surgery is often performed “because it brings about a good” (Ibid. 105): the cessation of the anxiety of the child existing in a world that has no place for them. Yet the significant point is that a righteous moral frame “can make the violence of intervention ‘disappear’, as violence becomes the justified means to a valid end” (Ibid. 104-105).²³ As Butler argues, “the point is to try to imagine a world in which individuals with mixed genital attributes might be accepted and loved without having to transform them into a more socially coherent or normative version of gender” (2004: 64-65). When this acceptance and love is not forthcoming, the transformation into a socially coherent gender occurs via violence and simultaneously derealises this violence.

In a related manner, Butler argues that often the framing of war seeks “to institute an interdiction on mourning: there is no destruction, and there is no loss” (2010: xiii). In this way “discourse itself effects violence through omission” (2006: 34). When a derealised existent dies their death is not grieved, not because the death “is poorly marked” but rather because “it is unmarkable” (Ibid. 35). Butler continues:

²³ We can see a similar operation occurring in what is known as ‘just war theory’: violence is disappeared in the righteous dynamic of means / ends, as Michael Neu has intimated (2015). Butler’s analysis can also be compared to that of Elaine Scarry. As Scarry notes, in the context of war the process of injuring - the “central activity of war” (1985: 80) - is continually made invisible, primarily through “omission and redescription” (Ibid. 69); and often omission and redescription “are manifestations of one another” (Ibid. 69). Bodily injuring may be omitted through its redescription, as when the injuring is imagined to have been done on the body of the army waging war rather than on the bodies of those who fight as part of an army: “the movements and actions of the armies are emptied of human content and occur as a rarefied choreography of disembodied events” (Ibid. 70). As Scarry notes, this latter instance is typical of “the genre of strategy writing” (Ibid.): “[i]f such descriptions were sustained over pages or even whole paragraphs, the text would become a mythology of giants lumbering across rivers and stalking through forests” (Ibid.). If the fact of injuring is not made invisible through omission or redescription, then injuring is instead “escorted from the centre of view to the margins” (Ibid. 72). Injuring becomes a *by-product* of war, as if war accidentally produces injuring (Ibid. 72-73); or the injuries occur *on the road* to another goal (for example, freedom), as if injuring were an accidental interruption of the path to freedom rather than being the central goal of war; that is, injuring is not *on* the road but *is* the road (Ibid. 74-75). Interestingly, for Scarry these forms of making invisible and marginal are not the explicit goal of strategic, military or political writings on war. Instead, the making invisible or marginal of the wounded body is proper to the aims and goals of those who wage war; their concern is not for the destroyed bodies of those in war but for the instrumental use of armies fighting within a war for a particular outcome (Ibid. 71).

“[s]uch a death vanishes, not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds” (Ibid.). It is a death of one who was neither alive nor dead, a life lacking “intelligibility” (2008: 6) and thus recognisability. Under the dominant norms of intelligibility, when this derealised life ceases it cannot be grieved and thus will not be mourned. As Butler argues, “[t]here are no obituaries for the war casualties that the United States inflicts, and there cannot be. If there were to be an obituary, there would have had to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition” (2006: 34).

These lives fall far short of the normative aspiration of livability. They are lives with radically limited possibilities, lives that are not recognised as lives and are thus ungrievable within dominant schemas of grievability. One can see then that despite violence being an ever present possibility - one that is inescapable due to our existence as socially embodied beings - there are instances of violence that one has good reasons for opposing: violences caught in the dynamic of derealisation, whether by enacting this derealisation, or being a consequence of this derealisation, or being violent derealisation itself. Separating these mutual conditions is a difficult, sometimes impossible task, and it is this more than anything else that makes the question of ‘what counts as violence?’ one that cannot be resolved. I would argue, however, that this conclusion should not be seen as a failure. If, following Butler, the visibility of violence *as violence* is dependent upon norms of recognition (for example, whether we understand the intersex infant undergoing “corrective” surgery or traumatic violence), is it not better to rest with an open question of what counts as violence? Put the other way around, is there not a danger that in specifying precisely what violence is, when it emerges, who is subject to it etc., we are left with an understanding that too easily can be put to work to delegitimise the claimed exposure to violence that one who is socially excluded may wish to make?²⁴

An account of what properly counts as violence is always, at the same time, a claim about what objects are properly violable. Specifying what counts as violence at an analytic level then becomes a form of policing as Rancière understands it: violence becomes part of the texture of a *partage du sensible* that distributes bodies into those that are violable and those that are not. As such, parallels can be drawn between Rancière’s account of politics and Butler’s account of violence: both authors refuse to

²⁴ It seems that by leaving unanswered the question of precisely what violence is, we maintain a responsibility to be attendant to when we ourselves are complicit in violences that we otherwise would not recognise as violence. Note that leaving unanswered this question of precisely what violence is does not render it impossible to condemn something as violence; it is simply to recognise that we are subject to norms of recognisability that condition how we understand ourselves and the world, and in this way we can never be certain that our understanding of what violence is (and is not) is finally certain.

determine in advance what counts as the object of their inquiry and instead think through its function and rationality. Most importantly, this thinking through does not occur in the abstract but always in relation to situated instances of its enactment. As a consequence, the question posed by both authors is not 'What constitutes politics/violence?' but rather '*What if* this were politics/violence?'. As I have suggested, for Rancière this becomes part of his political intervention itself: the process of identifying the politicality of certain enactments is a political intervention, one that challenges a police order that refuses to recognise certain forms of activity as politics. Butler's analysis of violence is no less a political intervention, however here Butler's intervention predominantly focuses not on the visibility of certain forms of political action but on the visibility of the violences of the police. Butler's analysis thus gives one tools with which to counter the violences of a police order that precisely depends upon the mediation of violence's visibility: either a violence that cannot be seen as violence, or a violence that can be seen but is righteous. So often violence undoes itself; it covers its tracks in moments of derealisation.

It is no coincidence then that much emancipatory activity is concerned with countering these processes of derealisation. One could perhaps lend the name nonviolence to such emancipatory activity; indeed, this process of making violence visible was a central aspect of one of the most famous instances of nonviolent resistance: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's opposition to British colonial rule in India. Butler does not make this move, however. For Butler, as I will go on to demonstrate, nonviolence is primarily a struggle with one's own violence in the face of the other. Nonviolence thus becomes equated with a certain ethos. This was no doubt central to Gandhi's enactment of nonviolence too, but it is my argument that Butler's account of nonviolence misses the opportunity to think through forms of resistance to violence that are precisely concerned with interrupting the efficient, consensual mediation of violence's visibility. In this way, my next chapter makes use of Butler's analysis to begin to develop a politics of nonviolence. However, the project of "making such violence visible" (Carver and Chambers 2008: 81) that Carver and Chambers trace from *Gender Trouble* throughout Butler's oeuvre reaches a limit point: as with Rancière's emphasis on making visible forms of existence that have been rendered invisible, and Cavarero's emphasis on making visible uniqueness when it is undermined in scenes of violence, Butler's emphasis on making violence visible needs to be supplemented when one considers fugitive forms of existence that enter into resistance precisely by evading visibility.

Chapter Three: Towards a Politics of Nonviolence

As I argued in my last chapter, Butler's account of violence makes clear that central to the phenomenon is a question concerning its visibility. Violence is often made invisible, for example when the object that is undergoing violence is not understood as being violable; or violence is visible but righteous, which either redescribes the violence as something else (corrective surgery rather than violent trauma) or maintains that violence is necessary even if undesirable (the many liberal justifications for 'humanitarian' war). It is my argument that the notion of nonviolence can make sense of forms of resistance that interrupt this mediation of violence and its visibility. However, despite Butler making clear the centrality of issues of visibility with violence, this is not the path she takes when developing a notion of nonviolence. As I will go on to demonstrate, for Butler nonviolence is primarily an ethos that necessitates a struggle with one's own violent rage and aggression. Instead, I argue that violence's varying visibility changes the function of nonviolence: rather than simply being an ethos, nonviolence can be understood as *making visible* violences that otherwise cannot be recognised as such. As powerful as Butler's account may be it does not adequately engage with the politics of nonviolence: nonviolence enacted by those with bodies, interrupting the mediation of a violence that so often begins with the violation of those enacting nonviolence and that effaces itself in the process of its enactment.

There is a presumption running throughout this chapter: that the common-sense account of nonviolence that sees it simply as a refusal to do violence - an account that is expressed across social and mainstream media in the light of any protest that could be understood as violent, often supported by misreadings of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. - is irrevocably flawed, complicit as it is in violent structures of oppression.²⁵ Howard Caygill, paraphrasing Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, suggests that "[n]on-violence from this perspective is imperial pacification, the province of the Hegelian 'beautiful soul' who does not want to recognize that their enjoyment of peace in non-violence is thoroughly implicated in a prior and subsisting violence" (2013: 52). Butler herself has been a keen critic of any liberalism that "outsources its violence to preserve its spuriously humanist self-definition" (2006b: 9). As such, nonviolence as a simple refusal to do violence is not addressed in this chapter. Further, this chapter does not concern itself with accounts of nonviolence that position

²⁵ See Simone Sebastian (2015) and Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) for the prevalence of the condemnation of recent Black Lives Matter protests for failing to be sufficiently nonviolent.

it first as a strategy or tactic of resistance; this is not because such a positioning is necessarily incorrect but rather because, alongside (and sometimes overlapping with) the common-sense account of nonviolence, understanding nonviolence as a strategy or tactic is dominant in theorisings of nonviolence, and it is one of the arguments of this chapter that there is more to nonviolence than strategy.²⁶

Butler's Nonviolence

Butler has been a prominent theorist of the relationship between violence and embodiment,²⁷ however her account of nonviolence has been, for the most part, removed from her account of the varying visibilities of violence. As I have noted, Butler primarily offers an account of nonviolence as an ethos or a form of ethical comportment; a valuable account, but one that misses the the *politics* of nonviolence. I propose to think nonviolence differently, in particular in light of anti-racist protests under the sign Black Lives Matter. The question of nonviolence as a tactic and alternative to violence has been central to public debates surrounding Black Lives Matter protests. I argue that nonviolence should not be understood primarily as a tactic or an ethos (even if it can be productively thought of in both of these ways), but rather as a political act concerned with interrupting the mediation of violences that evade visibility (or mediation that maximises the visibility of certain acts as violence). Hand in hand with this interruption of the mediation of violence is the manifestation of a heterogeneous world-within-a-world, populated by those who are subject to, and resist, racist violence. This chapter ends by using Jacques Rancière, Elaine Scarry and Butler's own work to develop such a conception.

Butler's account of nonviolence has developed across a number of different works, at points being the central focus of attention, but more often being mentioned in the context of broader discussions. Nonetheless there are specific themes that consistently emerge throughout her discussions of nonviolence, prime among them being nonviolence as a struggle with one's own desire to enact violence. Nonviolence first appears in Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). Here, Butler mobilises Freud and Nietzsche to theorise morality as something that "is predicated on a certain kind of violence" and "performs that violence again and again in cultivating the subject as a reflexive being" (Ibid. 64). Butler warns that this violence "cannot simply be opposed in the name of nonviolence, for when and where it is opposed, it is opposed from a

²⁶ For examples of nonviolence read first as a strategy or tactic, see Todd May (2015), James Dodd (2011), Howard Caygill (2013: 90-96) and Gene Sharp (2012).

²⁷ In particular in *Bodies That Matter* (2011), *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2010).

position that presupposes this very violence” (Ibid.). It is significant that Butler qualifies her objection to the opposition of violence with the adverb “simply”: this “simply” leaves open the possibility that another way of understanding nonviolence apart from a mere opposition to violence may be possible. Indeed, Butler prefigures her later work on nonviolence when she notes that a subject is not condemned to repeat their “normative shackles” (Ibid.) in “exactly the same way” (Ibid. 65).

Butler returns to nonviolence in *Undoing Gender* (2004). In this text Butler suggests that

we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take. It means we must be open to its permutations, in the name of nonviolence (Ibid. 35).

Nonviolence is here equated with a certain approach to the possible variations that humanness can take: “in the name of nonviolence” (Ibid.) we are responsive to the fact that conceptions of the human are articulated, rearticulated, threatened and even destroyed. The content of nonviolence is left under-specified: our response to these permutations of the human is *motivated* by nonviolence, or rather motivated by a refusal of a possible violence associated with acting as if we know in advance what the human is or will be, but beyond this it is unclear how, why, or in what form this nonviolence is to be enacted. For Butler, when one feels “the surety of one’s epistemological and ontological anchor go” (Ibid.) in an encounter with the difference of the other, one is left with two responses: the violent response, that “does not ask, and does not seek to know” (Ibid.) who the other is; and the nonviolent response, that “lives with its unknowingness about the Other in the face of the Other” (Ibid.). There is a “bond” (Ibid.) that the question ‘who are you?’ opens, that is “finally more valuable than knowing in advance what holds us in common, as if we already have all the resources we need to know what defines the human, what its future life might be” (Ibid.). Writing in response to Habermas, Butler asks

[d]o we need to know that, despite our differences, we are all orientated toward the same conception of rational deliberation and justification? Or do we need precisely to know that the “common” is no longer there for us, if it ever was, and that the capacious and self-limiting approach to difference is not only the task of cultural translation in this day of multiculturalism but the most important way to nonviolence? (Ibid. 221).

In both of these fleeting mentions Butler equates nonviolence with a refusal of commonality as a founding of the human, and a desire to maintain the “anxiety” (Ibid. 35) of an encounter with the other that challenges one’s sense of self. Nonviolence negotiates this anxiety as an alternative to the desire to stymie it through an act of violence. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) this understanding of nonviolence is expanded. Not only does one negotiate the challenge to one’s own identity that the other poses, but one also maintains a responsibility for the other in the face of the question ‘who are you?’. For Butler, when one asks the other ‘who are you?’ and when one demands an answer that maintains “narrative coherence” (Ibid. 63) one forecloses “an ethical resource - namely, an acceptance of the limits of knowability in oneself and others” (Ibid.). There is a violence to the demand that the other offer an account of themselves that maintains narrative coherence, since this narrative account elides “something we might tentatively call the truth of the person, a truth that, to a certain degree, for reasons we have already suggested, might well become clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness - in enigmatic articulations that cannot easily be translated into narrative form” (Ibid. 64). Butler argues that when one asks the other ‘who are you?’,

it will be important not to expect an answer that will ever satisfy. By not pursuing satisfaction and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we might try to give of it (Ibid. 43).

One does violence to the other in demanding an account of their life that satisfies our desire to know who the other is, especially in the ethical scene of judgment. For Butler, “a certain practice of nonviolence may follow” (Ibid. 64) if we “permit, sustain, and accommodate the interruption” (Ibid.) that inevitably occurs when one attempts to give an account of oneself. Butler suggests that this becomes most important when one experiences a violation: on the one hand one can respond to injury by acting violently, demanding a confession of responsibility from the one who does the injuring and consequently enacting a just punishment. This retributive violence shores up the injured party and effaces the vulnerability exposed in the moment of injury. On the other hand, so Butler suggests, one may suffer injury and then refuse to return it. For Butler, “[i]f violence is the act by which a subject seeks to reinstall its mastery and unity, then nonviolence may well follow from living the persistent challenge to egoic mastery that our obligations to others induce and require” (Ibid.). This would be nonviolence as “an emphatically nonreciprocal response” (Ibid. 100) that Butler

describes as “an experiment in living otherwise” (Ibid.).

One can see from these early discussions that the nonviolence Butler is theorising is a particular nonviolence, one that has as its target not all forms of violence, but rather the violences associated with challenges to one’s “egoic mastery” (Ibid. 64): our egoic mastery is challenged, and the question of nonviolence becomes pertinent when we consider how to respond to such a challenge. This is sharpened in Butler’s reading of Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ (Benjamin 2007), where for Butler nonviolence might be read as a form of divine violence that targets the deadening violence of the law and the guilt that it manifests. Mythic violence is a law making violence that carries its performative force in the moment of violence that determines a transgression has occurred: in Butler’s words, mythic violence “establishes law without any justification for doing so, and only once that law is established can we begin to talk about justification at all” (2006c: 203). Thus, in the myth of Niobe that Benjamin draws on (2007: 294) and Butler references (2006c: 207), Niobe claims she is more fecund than Leto, and Leto, taking offence, sends her sons Artemis and Apollo to kill Niobe’s children. Niobe herself is figured as responsible for her children’s deaths and is turned to stone by her guilt, the only signs of her life the tears that flow as she mourns her children. Niobe did not violate a pre-existing law; rather, she injured and angered Leto with her words, and Leto’s violence established law in light of her injury. As Butler says, “[I]aw is thus a specific consequence of an anger that responds to an injury, but neither that injury nor that anger are circumscribed in advance by law” (Ibid. 208). Niobe not only suffers the retributive violence of the killing of her sons and daughters, but is also, in this same moment, presented as responsible for this outcome. The law that is instantiated in the moment of retributive violence at the same time makes Niobe properly deserving of such a retribution, because she is figured as the cause of the violence meted out to her children. Niobe is “steeped in guilt, compelled to take responsibility for misfortunes that are not of her own doing” (Ibid. 216). This guilt leaves Niobe petrified, a stone figure who can only weep for her lost children. But of course, Niobe is not - could not be - the sole cause of her children’s deaths. For Butler, following Benjamin, divine violence targets the law that brings this causal narrative into being. In this instance, nonviolence targets the violence of law that not only legitimises the violence enacted on Niobe’s children but deadens Niobe in a petrified guilt. Nonviolence here would make visible and condemn the violence of law:

[i]t would no longer be a question of what [Niobe] did to deserve such a punishment, but of what system of punishment imposes such a violence

upon her. We can imagine her rising up again to question the brutality of the law, and we can imagine her shedding the guilt of her arrogance in an angry refusal of the violent authority wielded against her and an endless grief for the loss of those lives (Ibid. 218).

This nonviolence might not only be enacted by those who have suffered violence but also by those who are obligated to wield it:

[i]magine, if you can, that Apollo and Artemis tell their mother to get a grip and refuse to obey her command, or that the military, refusing to break up a strike, effectively goes on strike itself, lays down its weapons, opens the borders, refuses to man or close the checkpoints, all its members relieved of the guilt that keeps obedience and state violence in place (Ibid. 219).

Nonviolence here is transformative in that it undermines the law's legitimacy and makes visible its contingency; that it is founded in violence and that violence is an always present possibility in response to the law's violation. However, there is a danger that Butler's account of nonviolence via Benjamin obfuscates the materiality of violence that is so central to the inauguration of law. Nonviolence can certainly target law, but it would also, it would seem, need to target the materiality of violence in the moment of its enactment: when it is doled out to bodies, whether this be the spectacular violence of the bullets and batons of the police, or the quotidian violence of structures of racism, poverty, debt and precarity. This violence is not only central to law, but can also function outside of a direct relation to law. If nonviolence comes to be explicated only as a divine violence that targets the law then it becomes more difficult to theorise its enactment in moments that are not primarily structured by law, or its functioning in addition to the undoing of law; and crucially, the role of the body in these forms of resistance becomes too easily sidelined.

Butler's most extended engagement with nonviolence comes in the final chapter of *Frames of War* (2010). This essay emerges from a debate between Butler and Catherine Mills. Mills takes issue with Butler for allowing an ethical argument concerning nonviolence to enter into her work. For Mills there is a problem with Butler turning to nonviolence: as Mills says, if Butler is right that "norms themselves are inherently violent" (2007: 134) and those same norms constitute and condition one's subjectivity, then "violence is not easily expunged" (Ibid. 135) from a nonviolent ethics. Butler responds to Mills by stressing that "even if norms originated in violence, it would not follow that the fate of norms is only and always to reiterate the violence at their

origin” (2007: 183). However, Butler still claims at various points in her work that violence is often inescapable; that we are both exposed to violence and do violence to others, often with little say in the matter. Butler makes clear that nonviolence has “nothing to do with cleansing or expiating violence from the domain of normativity, nor does it involve finding and cultivating an ostensibly non-violent region of the soul and learning how to live according to its dictates” (2010: 171). In this way Butler puts a distance between herself and the common-sense account of nonviolence as a simple ‘not doing’ of violence. Instead, Butler sees nonviolence as a struggle that can only be understood in light of “the violence involved in the making and sustaining of the subject” (2010: 170). She goes on:

[i]t is precisely because one is mired in violence that the struggle exists and that the possibility of non-violence emerges. Being mired in violence means that even as the struggle is thick, difficult, impeding, fitful, and necessary, it is not the same as a determinism - being mired is the condition of possibility for the struggle of non-violence, and that is also why the struggle so often fails (Ibid. 171).

It is because one is so often mired in violence that nonviolence carries any import: if the common-sense account of nonviolence were correct - if it were possible to withdraw into a beautiful part of the human soul and so escape any violence unwittingly enacted in the sustaining of one’s identity - then there would be no need to ponder the question of nonviolence: as Butler says, “there could be no ethical quandary, no struggle, and no problem” (Ibid. 172). Worse, a position of nonviolence that sets as its goal the eradication of violence from one’s identity “would disavow or repress the violence from which such positions are wrought” (Ibid. 172). At every turn in her work Butler wishes to confront this disavowing of violence. She not only sees it in the purifying nonviolence of liberal-humanists (2006b: 9), but in the US state’s violent response to September 11th (2006: xi-xiii), and further in the Israeli state’s persecution of Palestinians (2010: xx-xxx). All these acts, for Butler, function to mask the “irrefutable generalizability” (Ibid. 22) of precariousness and thus precipitate “the differential distribution of precarity” (Ibid. 25), to Palestinians, or Afghans, or Iraqis, or Syrians, or to migrants displaced from the preceding countries. Again, it becomes clear that the nonviolence Butler is theorising is a particular nonviolence, one that attempts to interrupt the desire to resolve injury through violence. Nonviolence “denotes the mired and conflicted position of a subject who is injured, rageful, disposed to violent retribution and nevertheless struggles against that action (often crafting the rage against itself)” (Ibid. 171). This struggling is most urgent “precisely when one has been

subject to aggression and injured, and when the desire for retribution is sharpened” (Ibid. 172). In this way nonviolence takes its departure

from an understanding of the possibilities of one’s own violent actions in relation to those lives to which one is bound, including those whom one never chose and never knew, and so those whose relation to me precedes the stipulation of contract (Ibid. 179).

Time and again Butler brings her discussion back to the struggle of the person who is injured and who faces a choice in responding to this injury, either with violence or with nonviolence. Thus, if nonviolence is inseparable from violence - if “one has to come up against violence to practice non-violence” (Ibid. 182) - then this is a violence that “does not issue exclusively from the outside” (Ibid.). There is an internal violence, or in Butler’s words “aggression and rage” (Ibid.), that is as much the challenge nonviolence faces as the external violence that one might imagine enacted by, for example, the police. No doubt there is a doubling of the struggle, as one is *first* exposed to the injury and then *second* exposed to the rage and aggression ignited by the injury, and no doubt Butler is right when she identifies this rage and aggression as being something that should not be resisted but rather mobilised in the name of nonviolence: as Butler argues, “non-violence is not a peaceful state, but a social and political struggle to make rage articulate and effective - the carefully crafted ‘fuck you’” (Ibid.).

Making rage and aggression effective rather than disavowing them is certainly important, but is it not necessary to pause prior to the analysis of the struggle with one’s violence and consider for a little while longer the violence that precipitates this internal struggle? In the struggle of the subject desiring to enact a retaliatory violence, what of the body of this subject; what of the wound received - the injury undergone - that precipitates the struggle? If there was no *material* wounding (a notion already complicated by the inevitable mediation of the wounded body in discourse²⁸), nonetheless the one who responds to injury, or struggles with the response to injury, also does so as someone who is embodied: whether a body has been riven or whether the injuring is symbolic or psychic, the body’s role in the enactment of nonviolence is crucial for a full articulation of nonviolence’s functioning. The relative absence of the body leaves Butler’s account of nonviolence open to being read only as the cultivation of a certain ethos or way of life; this is clear in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), but is made explicit in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015a), where Butler describes nonviolence as both a “holding and comporting [of] oneself” (Ibid. 190)

²⁸ See Amelia Jones’ ‘Performing the Wounded Body’ (2009).

and as “a way of approaching a situation, even living in the world, a daily practice of mindfulness that attends to the precarious character of living beings” (Ibid. 190-191); nonviolence is thus “more precisely defined as an ethos” (Ibid. 192).

Butler’s discussion of nonviolence in the closing chapter of *Frames of War* (2010) is ambivalent in this regard: Butler warns against thinking nonviolence simply as an act, asking instead “what a refusal to act might look like” (Ibid. 183), which would seem to fit more easily with a certain way of composing oneself or of conducting one’s life; while at the same time insisting that the refusal to act “does not quite capture the forms of stalled action or stoppage that can, for instance, constitute the non-violent operation of the strike” (Ibid.). But these words fall at the end of Butler’s chapter, the necessarily embodied character of the strike absent from her discussion, just as the necessarily political character of the strike is also absent. Butler does talk of what she terms “political exposure” (2015a: 185) in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*: this is equated with the collective action of those who protest on the street, “at once concretely vulnerable, even breakable, and potentially and actively defiant, even revolutionary” (Ibid. 186). However, Butler’s analysis of nonviolence is bracketed off from the vulnerability of embodied forms of protest that she analyses in the rest of *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, and is used instead to specify, as has been indicated, a supplementary ethos and tactic; not an intervention in the relative visibility of violence. Indeed, what one might call a politics of nonviolence is yet to be theorised by Butler, which as a consequence misses something important about the phenomenon: that if, as I am arguing, nonviolence is in part a making visible of injuries, wounds and violences, then this is intimately connected to the making visible of a certain conception of a people. Nonviolence is thus, following Rancière, a properly *political* moment. By privileging nonviolence as an ethos that can supplement forms of public assembly and protest, Butler’s account of the politics of nonviolence is left undertheorised.

In what follows, the beginnings of a reading of nonviolence are offered that focus on the politics of nonviolence; not in spite of the nonviolence that Butler has given an account of, but as a supplement that might clear the ground for other ways of thinking the phenomenon. I situate nonviolence in light of recent anti-racist protests under the sign Black Lives Matter. These protests make visible racist violence both at its spectacular level (the killings of black people caught on smartphone cameras) and at its quotidian level (harassment, intimidation, indebtedness, precarity). At the same time they stage a contestatory, heterogeneous understanding of a people. It is this dual enactment - making visible violences and making visible a particular conception of a people - that I argue should be central to the phenomenon of nonviolence. Further, this

understanding of nonviolence works in opposition to a common-sense account of nonviolence, characterised by a naive belief in the ethical valence of simply not enacting violence.²⁹ This is especially important in the context of Black Lives Matter, where a particular understanding of nonviolence is mobilised to police the actions of those protesting. It is necessary to ask how nonviolence can be a part of resistance without unwittingly depoliticising protest and effacing the extent of racist violence. In response to this question I argue that nonviolence is the staging of a particular “wrong” (Rancière 1999: 22) that makes visible both violences that would otherwise escape one’s view, and makes visible a particular people who are exposed to these violences but who also resist these violences.

Black Lives Matter

On the 17th July 2014 Eric Garner, a forty-three year old African American man, was killed after being put in a chokehold by Daniel Pantaleo, a New York police officer. Protest (and police violence) rose up in response, and then again on the 3rd December when a grand jury decided not to indict Pantaleo. On the 9th August 2014 Michael Brown, an eighteen year old African American man, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a Ferguson police officer. Protest (and police violence) rose up in response, and then again on 24th November when a grand jury decided not to indict Wilson. On the 4th April 2015 Walter Scott, a fifty year old African American man, was shot and killed by Michael Slager, a North Charleston police officer. On the 19th April 2015, Freddie Gray, a twenty-five year old African American man, died from injuries to his spinal cord and larynx. These injuries were sustained five days earlier while Gray was being transported after his arrest by officers of the Baltimore Police Department. Gray spent the five days between these events in a coma. On the 25th April a protest was held in response to Gray’s death, which resulted in thirty-four arrests. Gray’s funeral was held on 27th April, after which protest (and the police response) escalated. A state of emergency was declared, the Maryland National Guard were deployed, and *habeas corpus* was in effect suspended as hundreds of people were held for days without charge (Woolf et al. 2015).³⁰

²⁹ The common-sense account of nonviolence is only naive in the mistaken belief that it is possible to live life free of enacting violence. The account is not naive when it is understood to be complicit in maintaining a racist status quo.

³⁰ Although these killings are all of black men, black women and black queer lives have also been the recipients of police (and other) violence, often fatally. As Jared Sexton notes, Black Lives Matter “is, from its inception, a feminist and queer proposition” (2015: 162). In particular, he cautions against “a narrow emphasis on the attack on black masculine empowerment” (Ibid. 169), instead stressing that “every time these same forces kill black men and boys they are *also*

In each of these cases, the protests were not because of the exceptional nature of the events but precisely because they were unexceptional; that is, in the United States of America (as well as in many other parts of the world) it is unexceptional for police officers, particularly white police officers, to kill black people. Each protest featured violence, both from the police, the national guard, those protesting and those defending themselves. The predictable response to this violence from the mainstream media and politicians, as well as many people on social media, was a preoccupation with the perceived violence enacted by those protesting, and an effacement of the violence enacted by the police. The figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. was deployed as a way of moralising the protesters, arguing that King's commitment to nonviolence should be the model that informs protest in response to the deaths of black people.³¹ The same moralising was conspicuous by its absence in the instance of Freddie Gray and his crushed larynx and broken spine; or Walter Scott and Michael Brown and the bullets that tore through them; or Eric Garner and his death through asphyxiation while in a choke hold, repeating the words "I can't breath" eleven times until he could not say them any more; or the many other deaths of black people at the hands of predominantly white police.

The protests were typically characterised as an aberration, an interruption to the smooth running of the community. Baltimore Police Commissioner Anthony Batts, following a night where protest was quelled through police violence, declared that "[c]itizens are safe. The city is stable. We hope to maintain it that way" (quoted in Swain et al. 2015). Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, after visiting the reopening of the Mondawmin Mall almost a week after the civil unrest began, declared "[w]e are resilient. We will rebuild" (quoted in Jalabi 2015). In both Baltimore and Ferguson much praise was placed on the public libraries, which stayed open despite many other public services closing. Ferguson library placed a sign outside its premises declaring "Stay strong Ferguson. We are family" (Flood 2015). Roswell Encina, Director of Communications for Baltimore's libraries, said

[i]t's at times like this that the community needs us [...] That's what the

victimizing, directly and indirectly, those black women and girls who raise and care for them" (Ibid., emphasis original).

³¹ See, for example, Diane Diamond's "Black Lives Matter' Tactics a Far Cry from Martin Luther King's" (2015). The similarities between condemnations of Black Lives Matter protests and the hate mail Martin Luther King Jr. received is also of note (Matthews 2015). Finally, although the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. is routinely deployed to police the tactics of Black Lives Matter protesters, Page May notes that the project to "reclaim King" (2016) as a radical is in danger of effacing both his "sexism and adultism" (Ibid.) and (as a consequence) the crucial role played by "those who experience multiple forms of structural, compounding oppression (e.g., Black LGBTQ women)" (Ibid.) in Black liberation.

library has always been there for, from crises like this to a recession to the aftermath of severe weather. The library has been there. It happened in Ferguson; it's happening here (quoted in Rosenfield 2015).

When the library stays open for the “community” (Ibid.), when the library declares that “We are family” (Flood 2015), which community and which family is figured? What is its relation to those calling the membership of this community into question? When protest in response to endemic racism is contrasted with other ‘crises’ like a recession or severe weather, what is happening to the political status of these protests?

In Ferguson, Baltimore and many other places, people come together to mark and condemn racist violence by occupying the street in the face of overwhelming police repression. What is being declared is the presence of a people within the community who previously could not be seen: people who have been violated at the hands of the state; people who have a history of suffering (and resisting) racism. These are politicised bodies, bodies that refuse the atomising, depoliticising logic of neoliberalism which sees them as singular entities with no history of repression, no history of resistance, and consequently no possible future of resistance, no future that can acknowledge endemic racism.³² For Judith Butler, “[f]or politics to take place, the body must appear” (2011a). Further, this appearance is necessarily social: following Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1998), Butler argues that

to act and speak politically we must “appear” to one another in some way, that is to say, that to appear is always to appear for another, which means that for the body to exist politically, it has to assume a social dimension - it is comported outside itself and toward others in ways that cannot and do not ratify individualism (2011a).

This politicised and social body, the body that declares a history of racist violence, indeed the body that bears witness to a history of racist violence, is occluded when the actions this body performs are understood as an aberration, as another crisis amongst many crises that simply functions as a sign that it is necessary to foster a more resilient approach to the management of life.³³ The people who declare this wrong cannot be seen prior to their substantiation of this wrong, prior to their bearing witness to this wrong; instead, a very different people can be seen, a people without a history of suffering and resisting endemic racism, a people who, through their personal failings,

³² See Wendy Brown’s ‘Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy’ in *Edgework* (2005: 37-59).

³³ Cf. Brad Evans’ *Liberal Terror* (2013: 39).

are a problem that needs to be overcome. Of course neither conception of the people completely disappears from view, but the number of those who can see one people or the other shifts, as does the ease with which one people or the other can be seen, as does the ease with which one can live a life as one people or the other. Central to the policing of this dynamic is violence.

This violence is overwhelmingly the violence of the police, but it is also the violence of the military. This is not only because of the presence of the National Guard on the streets of Baltimore (Stolberg 2015), but also because the technologies the police deploy to inflict violence are military technologies, and the training the police receive to use these technologies is military training. This technology and training may be from the state military, but it may also be from another state's military, or it may be from a Private Military Company.³⁴ This violence has a specific consequence: inhibiting the emergence of a particular understanding of the people. As Harney and Moten argue,

[w]e have to recognize that a state - the racial capitalist/settler colonial state - of war has long existed. Its brutalities and militarizations, its regulative mundanities, are continually updated and revised, but they are not new. If anything, we need to think more strategically about our own innovations, recognizing that the state of war is a reactive state, a machine for regulating and capitalizing our innovations in/for survival (2015: 83-84).

This is not the violence that captures the imagination of the mainstream media: it does appear, but like the understanding of the people that is suppressed by the dominant understanding, the violence of the police struggles to appear, and when it does its typical position in the narrative of events is such as to justify its use (what Roland Barthes might describe as a form of "inoculation" (1972: 151)). Instead, it is the violence of the protest (or the protest *as violence*) that comes to dominate understandings of the events, that is effortlessly taken up by media commentators, and that is presented as the cause of any and all retaliatory (and therefore *righteous*) violence. As Butler notes, "[t]he concerted actions of groups for the purpose of opposing state violence are understood in these instances as violent action, even when they do not engage in violent acts" (2015a: 26). The violence of the protest may be condemned by those on the political right for its disregard of the rule of law, or from

³⁴ See, for example, Kappeler and Kraska's "Normalising police militarisation, living in denial" (2015); Steve Martinot's "The Militarisation of the Police" (2003); Ed Pilkington's "US police departments are increasingly militarised, finds report" (2014); and Ali Winston's "US police get antiterror training in Israel on privately funded trips" (2014).

those on the political left as a strategic or moral mistake, but in either case what stays the same is its condemnation.

In the context of a people refusing the part society allocates to them, a part maintained by centuries of racist violence, how does one begin to talk about nonviolence? Nonviolence is on the lips of every well-meaning liberal, eager to hold up a very particular reading of Martin Luther King, Jr. (or Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, or most often both) as the model against which the violence of protest is failing. Uttered in this manner, this is “Nonviolence as Compliance” (Coates 2015):

[w]hen nonviolence is preached as an attempt to evade the repercussions of political brutality, it betrays itself. When nonviolence begins halfway through the war with the aggressor calling time out, it exposes itself as a ruse. When nonviolence is preached by the representatives of the state, while the state doles out heaps of violence to its citizens, it reveals itself to be a con (Ibid.).

Nonviolence cannot be the posturing of a “beautiful soul” (Milne 2002), nor a universal stratagem, nor, crucially, the effacement of the violence of the dominant order. Conceived in this manner it should be rejected *tout court*. Yet a certain understanding of nonviolence is crucial for a politics of resistance: not necessarily as a strategy or ethos (although nonviolence can certainly be a useful strategy and an important ethos), and not as a way of avoiding violence (one is always implicated in forms of violence). Rather, it is a way of interrupting the mediation of violence’s visibility; of exposing the presence of violence that would otherwise efface itself; of bearing witness to violence, a witnessing that occurs through embodied acts of resistance. In Butler’s words this would be a moment where “the established regimes of both space and time are upended in ways that expose their violence and their contingent limits” (2015a: 79). In this manner nonviolence declares a “wrong” (Rancière 1999: 22) as Rancière might understand it, a wrong that is sustained in part by violence and makes this violence visible in the moment of the wrong’s declaration. For Rancière, whatever the specificities of the wrong declared, what is also being declared is the wrong at the heart of philosophy and politics: this is an “immemorial and perennial wrong” (Ibid.) that divides the “symbolic distribution of bodies” into two categories:

those that one sees and those that one does not see, those that have a logos - memorial speech, an account to be kept up - and those who have no logos, those who really speak and those whose voice merely mimics the articulate voice to express pleasure and pain. Politics exists

because the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt (Ibid. 22-23).

Just as *logos* is never simply speech but “always indissolubly” (Ibid.) an account, so too is violence never simply violence but “always indissolubly” (Ibid.) an account. When one talks of violence what is offered is a topography of violence that implicitly is also, always, an account of those who can or cannot be violated. This is surely why Rancière’s account of the “[b]eginning of [p]olitics” (Ibid. 1) is important. What rests on the distinction between speech and mere voice is the legitimacy, or further the righteousness, of doing violence to a particular body: is this body violable or is it not; can it suffer, or can it not; does this body constitute the human, or does it fall outside of the human and thus expose itself to violences that the quality of ‘humanness’ would abrogate? Whatever the answer to these questions, what is also occurring is a particular accounting, a particular partitioning, of the bodies under question and their relation to other bodies in a community. Violence hangs heavy over all of Rancière’s words. It is why Davide Panagia is correct to note that the translation of the French *tort* into “wrong” for the English edition of *Disagreement* has the unfortunate consequence of eliding the juridical / legal resonances of *tort*, and thus missing that “Rancière’s tort registers miscount as a kind of injury” (2006: 91).

The emergence of a people and the violences that these people suffer are intimately connected. It may be that the violences suffered by a people are made visible by the staging of a people who previously could not be seen, but it may also be that a people is staged through the declaration of violences that previously could not be seen. Elaine Scarry is instructive here: in her analysis of war, Scarry suggests that the act of injuring - for Scarry one of war’s two “predicate nominatives” (1985: 63)³⁵ - is continually made invisible, either through omission and redescription (Ibid. 69), or, where injuring does achieve visibility, through marginalisation (Ibid. 72). Instead, for Scarry, “[w]ar is relentless in taking for its interior content the interior content of the wounded and open human body” (Ibid. 81). That the policing of black lives approximates the actions of the military rather than the police is not the only reason Scarry’s analysis is relevant. Scarry suggests that war is so centrally concerned with injuring because the open and exposed wounded body is able to substantiate the

³⁵ The other being that war is a “contest” (1985: 81).

fundamentally substanceless beliefs that wars are fought over, whether these be beliefs concerning borders, ideologies or conceptions of the human. In Scarry's words, through the "massive opening of human bodies" (Ibid. 128) injuring offers "a way of reconnecting the derealized and disembodied beliefs with the force and power of the material world" (Ibid.).³⁶ Scarry draws attention to something that is missed in Butler's analysis of nonviolence: that the process of exposing oneself to violence or to the threat of violence makes visible wounds and injuries that otherwise are omitted, redescribed or marginalised; and further, that these wounds and injuries can substantialise immaterial beliefs that are central to the narratives, histories and ontologies of a particular understanding of the people. In and of itself this fact is politically ambivalent: while the wound a body sustains in its moment of violation may be the locus of resistance, it can also perform the opposite effect. For Scarry,

[t]his by no means means that the issues on the two sides are the same, for there may be [...] an expanse of justice that separates them; but it does mean that the substantiation process itself, the collective work of the bodies injured in the external space of conflict, is the same regardless of what it substantiates, is the same whether what it substantiates is a construct suffused with beauty and justice or one containing the very antithesis of these attributes (Ibid. 138).

Scarry describes this as "the complete fluidity of referential direction" (Ibid. 115) between "body and belief" (Ibid.). A wounded body can offer substance to a racist discourse as much as it can offer substance to the claim of equality. What is certain is that the wounding of bodies is routinely mobilised by the police, and that this mobilisation goes beyond the brute rationality of public order policing. The outcry over the wounding of bodies, and further the mourning when the wounds sustained by bodies become enough to end their animating force, are thus deeply and necessarily political, even as they are, at the same time, expressions of grief.³⁷ Harney and Moten make this point clear in relation to the police's killing of Michael Brown:

Michael Brown is the latest name of the ongoing event of resistance to, and resistance before, socioecological disaster. Modernity's constitution in the transatlantic slave trade, settler colonialism and capital's emergence in and with the state, is The Socioecological Disaster. Michael Brown gives us

³⁶ In Scarry's original text these two sentences are emphasised in their entirety; this has been omitted here.

³⁷ Cf. Butler's 'Violence, Mourning, Politics' in *Precarious Life* (2006: 19-49).

occasion once again to consider what it is to endure the disaster, to survive (in) genocide, to navigate unmappable differences as a range of localities that, in the end - either all the way to the end or as our ongoing refusal of beginnings and ends - will always refuse to have been taken (2015: 82).

Or as Butler notes, “the ungrivable gather sometimes in public insurgencies of grief, which is why in so many countries it is difficult to distinguish the funeral from the demonstration” (2015a: 197).

Resisting the violences of the police cannot end by forcing the recognition of all bodies as violable: there are many violences that are done because a body cannot be seen as violable, but there are many others that are done precisely because the body is violable; legitimately violable, or righteously violable, or strategically violable. This violence can be both visible and invisible, as when the quotidian violence of the police in Baltimore depends upon a certain visibility to strategically maintain power relations within the low-rise housing projects of the city, while also depending upon an invisibility of this self-same violence to carry on enacting it with impunity. Resisting the violences done to particular bodies may begin with demanding the recognition of these bodies as violable people, but it must also make visible these violences in a way that resists their recognition as legitimate, or strategic, or righteous. Under the sign of Black Lives Matter, on the streets of Baltimore, Ferguson and other places, this people is substantiated, a people that refuses not only the spectacular violence of police brutality captured on smartphones, but also the quotidian violence of intimidation, poverty, indebtedness, harassment and surveillance. Nonviolence here would be a staging of a specific people: an act of politics as Rancière understands it, but attentive to the violences that are central to the operation of what Rancière calls “the police” (1999: 28) in a way that Rancière does not reflect on. In the act of staging, this people reveals, condemns and refuses a violence that could not be seen, or a violence that could partially be seen, or a violence that could be seen and further celebrated. This happens not only in the present but also in the past and the future: this people asserts that the racist violence of the now is part of a history of racist violence, that there is a genealogy or narrative that must be traced, a genealogy that is legal, philosophical, political and economic.³⁸ This genealogy is one of violence, but also resistance. So too, this people, the bodies on the streets of Baltimore and Ferguson, makes visible that the future for black lives is one where they matter less than other lives, where consequently they will be disproportionately exposed to violences recognised or unrecognised, but also that this future can and will be resisted.

³⁸ See, for example, Richter-Monpetit (2014), Hartman (1997) and duBois (1991).

What motivates a rethinking of Judith Butler's account of nonviolence is not any failure in the account Butler has offered. The question of violence - of whether to enact it, whether to return it, whether and in what sense it can be refused - is, as Butler makes clear, most pressing in moments when one is exposed to violence. The importance of Butler's work in unpacking the complexities of violence cannot be overstated: Butler's work on issues of violence, precariousness and the body is a crucial starting place if one is to argue for a politics of nonviolence, as this chapter has. Nonetheless, Butler's account of nonviolence primarily theorises it as a struggle with one's own violence, often in the face of the other, from which a certain ethos can be derived. While Butler is careful not to present this as an isolated struggle, the role of nonviolence as an intervention in violence's visibility is not considered. I have suggested that one way to address this absence is to read Butler's work alongside that of Rancière and Scarry: Rancière's work helps emphasise the political quality of the nonviolent act as a simultaneous staging of a people, while Scarry offers resources to help think through the relationship between injuring and substantiation.³⁹ As can be seen from the example of Black Lives Matter protests, the mediation of wounding, injuring and violation has a crucial political dimension, whether this be in the making visible of wounds that struggle for visibility, or, concomitantly, in the effacement of said wounds that consequently maintain the conditions for the enactment of further violence. This aspect of nonviolence is distinct from nonviolence thought of as a tactic, strategy or ethos, and as such needs to be understood apart from these accounts if its significance is to be made apparent. As Butler herself argues, "we will need to consider more closely the bodily dimensions of action, what the body requires, and what the body can do" (2015: 73). Butler also helps to make clear something unaddressed in this chapter: the necessity of theorising the conditions that maintain and support this form of nonviolence. In Butler's account there is a dearth in the thinking of nonviolence as a political act, but it would be a mistake to theorise this politics in a manner that disavows its own conditions of possibility. Nonviolence can name forms of resistance that respond to violence's varying visibility, however it should not necessarily be privileged as a form of resistance, either strategically or morally. Forms of resistance that make violence visible depend upon particular conditions that make them possible as forms of resistance. For example, the saturation of violence on the slave plantation that Saidiya Hartman demonstrates in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) renders the process of resisting by making violence visible redundant. Resistance to violence can

³⁹ One could also think Butler's nonviolence alongside recent work on the body and resistance, for example Bargu's *Starve and Immolate* (2014), Fierke's *Political Self-Sacrifice* (2013) and Wilcox's *Bodies of Violence* (2015).

occur in many other forms, often forms that operate apart from the register of the visible. I detail these fugitive forms of resistance in the final chapter of my thesis.

Intermezzo: Giving an Account of Accounts of Torture

In the following chapter I read the work of Adriana Cavarero alongside Elaine Scarry's account of the structure of torture (found in her seminal text *The Body in Pain* (1985)) to interrogate Cavarero's account of uniqueness around the question of visibility. However, prior to doing this I want to pause to reflect on the challenges of writing about torture. How does one give an account of torture? How does one read accounts of torture?

There are many ways of giving an account of torture. One may intervene in debates on torture, as Bob Brecher does in denouncing theoretical justifications for the use of torture (2007), or as J. M. Bernstein does in situating torture as a paradigm of moral injury (2015). One can document instances of torture as they are practised across the world, as can be seen in Darius Rejali's *Torture and Democracy* (2007). One may offer testimony of one's own torture, such as Jean Améry in his *At the Mind's Limits* (1980), for whom his torture at the hands of the Nazi SS was marked by his being rendered "*helpless*" (Ibid. 27, emphasis original) and by an inculcation of a loss of his "trust in the world" (Ibid. 28). For Améry, in torture one's "flesh becomes a total reality" (Ibid. 33); "only in torture does the transformation of the person into flesh become complete" (Ibid.); "the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that" (Ibid.). One may also lend one's voice to another's account of their torture, as Jean-Paul Sartre does in his preface to Henri Alleg's *The Question* (2006), a text detailing Alleg's torture at the hands of the French State during Algeria's war of independence. No doubt Sartre's preface contributed to the political project of exposing the barbarity of the French State, but it also serves an example of the potential problems of giving an account of torture. For Sartre,

[t]hose who were silent saved the lives of all. Those who talked could not be blamed, even by those who did not give way. But the man who talks becomes one with his executioner. Coupled as man and wife, these two lovers made the abject night terrible (Sartre, in Alleg 2006: xxix).

Sartre's grandiose exaltation of not talking under torture is troubling on a number of levels. Why does the man who talks become one with his executioner, echoing the "one flesh" of Genesis 2:21-24 and the sexual contract underpinning the consummation of marriage? Why is it that the torturer fulfills the role of "wife" and is thus presumptively female? How does this relate to Sartre's insistence that Alleg has "conquered torture"

(Ibid. xxxi)? Sartre's choice of metaphor opens a plethora of issues.

Whatever form an account of torture takes, there are a series of problems that require negotiation. First, accounts of torture are overdetermined by 'torture' as spoken in the singular as a universal category. That is, an account of 'torture' intervenes in the phenomenon the word is purportedly describing: it polices the horizons of the myriad and at times contestatory variations of what is designated under the sign 'torture'; the particularity of torture disappears in the face of a universal torture. To this extent it is more appropriate to talk of 'tortures' in the plural. Indeed, torture may be comprised of varying aspects, not all of which may be unique to torture, nor present in every instance of torture. This is further complicated by the distinction between torture *as it is experienced* and torture as it enters discourse. There is much that could be said about the possibility of keeping these two distinctions separate. If, for now, we conclude that there is some use in keeping these separate (without forgetting that torture as it is experienced is always discursively mediated), it becomes possible to see that there are things one can say about torture as it appears in discourse that it would be peculiar (at best) or obnoxious (at worst) to say of torture as it is experienced. For example, one might understand torture as a process of apotheosis, but this, surely, could only be appropriate if by torture what is meant is the *account* of torture that emerges in discourse: it is unlikely that torturers aspire to the status of gods in any literal way. But at the level of discourse, at the level of signification, as people make sense of torture through biography, testimony or, even, theory, it might be entirely appropriate to describe the process of torture as maintaining an aspect concerned with apotheosis. This does not mean this will always be the case.

Second, as *accounts* of torture, writings on torture may be testimony, or they may be theory, or they may be both. In either case they are *accounts* of torture; they are not the experience of torture. This may seem a facile point, however it is of consequence when one comes to read accounts of torture and engage in political or ethical work: there are things one can say about accounts of torture that one cannot say about torture as it is undergone. This is because accounts of torture work with a discursive construction of the phenomenon of torture that exceeds the experience of torture as it is undergone (even if this undergoing cannot occur in isolation but instead is always conditioned by torture's discursive construction). At the most basic level accounts of torture are expressed in relation to the norms, tropes, styles, motifs and imaginaries of other accounts: this neither makes them wholly constrained by these accounts nor radically free to express the experience of torture. But in either case, what is expressed does not simply coincide with the experience but works with material that emerges quite apart from the sensory experience of torture. This poses profound

ethical challenges for accounts of torture, as can be glimpsed in the brief example of Sartre's preface. Significantly, the distinction between a narrative account of torture and a theoretical account of torture can only be maintained for so long, and in many instances collapses from the offset.

Writing about any experience of violence poses ethical and political challenges, and while much of what I have said also applies to the other forms of violence that I discuss in this thesis, the manner in which Scarry discusses torture makes these issues especially pressing at this juncture. The first chapter of Scarry's *The Body in Pain* is not simply an *account* of torture but further an *idealisation* of torture, one whose unspoken archetype is the model of interrogational torture, even if it also resonates with other tortures beyond the questioning and answering mediated through extreme violence that characterises interrogational torture. To claim that Scarry's account of torture is further an idealisation of torture is not to say that the text is completely estranged from the lived experience of torture: the text emerged in large part from Scarry's work in the archives of Amnesty. For this reason, while being an idealisation it is nonetheless not rarified. It is an idealisation to the extent that it is a distillation of various experiences of torture - indeed, of various tortures - that are then abstracted into a "structure" of torture that is marked both by its critical acumen and by its universalism to the point of generality (a split seen in the wildly differing responses to the text in the literature).⁴⁰

What the text does do is offer a clear and powerful example of the relationship between the negotiation of scenes of violence and a particular understanding of what it is to be human. Scarry's influential accounts of torture and war receive their acumen not simply because of what they have to say about violence and violation, but also because of the particular conception of humanness that Scarry develops across the entirety of the text. It is this account of the human that is the condition for her powerful and, for some, controversial discussions of torture and war. Reading Scarry makes clear that any account of violence is always subtended by an account of the human, just as any account of the human is subtended by violence. Scarry's human is a deeply relational creature, and the account she gives is primarily phenomenological in a straightforward sense, emphasising the significance of the body, its sensing and its necessary relationality, and further the relationship between an embodied existence and forms of creation and self-extension.

Scarry's account of humanness and her accounts of violence offer resources to understand ethical and political responses to violence and pain, but they also place

⁴⁰ See, for example, Judith Shklar (1986) and Patrick McGee (1987).

limits on what can be said about violence, as well as (potentially) creating ethical and political conundrums that have no easy answer within the discursively constituted imaginary - the poetics - that Scarry manifests. These issues are not explored in the following chapter, as my primary interest is in tracing and contrasting an Aristotelian schema of the human in the work of Scarry and Cavarero. Nonetheless, they are questions that exist in the shadows of any engagement with accounts of torture (this one included) and as such marking them at the offset might help identify the moments in what follows where they become most urgent.

Chapter Four: Horrorism in the Scene of Torture

In my second and third chapters I argued that violence has a central political dimension, in that its visibility as violence is dependent on the recognition of those who are exposed to violence as being properly violable. If one is seen as someone (or *something*) who cannot suffer violence, or can suffer violence righteously, then, as Butler notes, violence has become derealised. Further, violence's varying visibility is of central importance to Rancière's account of politics, even if Rancière does not explicitly note this. As I demonstrated in my first chapter, one of the central elements of Rancière's account of politics is the distinction between speech and voice - *logos* and *phone* - that Aristotle draws on when determining the propriety of the political animal that is *anthropos* (Rancière 2011: 3-4; Aristotle 1992: 60). As such, man's possession of speech

marks the separation between two kinds of animals as the difference between two modes of access to sense experience: that of pleasure and suffering, common to all animals endowed with a voice, and that of good and evil, exclusive to human beings (Rancière 1999: 2).

As Rancière notes, the political question turns on why the groan is heard as a groan, proper to *phone*, rather than as a grievance, proper to *logos* (Ibid.). As I argued in my third chapter, the Black Lives Matter movement intervenes in this distinction between *phone* and *logos*, but also makes visible the violences attendant to the denigration of certain people as not possessing reasoned speech. When one's phonic utterances are heard as noise rather than speech, the violences one is exposed to become less easily discernible and are thus more easily enacted.

In the context of Scarry's account of the structure of torture this question becomes heightened, because here not only is a distinction maintained between the phonic groan and the reasoned grievance, but the two are locked in a mutual relationship mediated by violence: for Scarry, as it will be demonstrated, the infliction of violence and, more specifically, the manifestation of pain, destroys reasoned speech and leaves one with phonic groans; what Jean Améry described as his "strange and uncanny howls" (1980: 23). Scarry's argument is in this way dependent on the Aristotelian schema, to such an extent that it is in danger of reducing the tortured prisoner to the status of the animal or, more accurately, the infant (from the Latin *infans*, literally *without speech*). In this chapter I read Scarry's account of the structure

of torture alongside Adriana Cavarero's *For More than One Voice* (2005) and *Horrorism* (2011). This serves a dual purpose: on the one hand to clarify the underlying rationale in Scarry's account of torture; and on the other to link Cavarero's notion of "horrorism" (Ibid. 29) to what she describes in *For More than One Voice* as "a vocal phenomenology of uniqueness" (2005: 7) that helps to interrogate the relative visibility of uniqueness, in particular in relation to violence. This develops the relationship between visibility, politics and violence that I have been exploring so far in my thesis. Further, Cavarero's Arendtian account of uniqueness opens the door to thinking fugitive forms of existence that enact politics despite extreme violence, even if this requires loosening Cavarero's commitment to Arendt's own dependence on the Aristotelian schema, something Rancière has clearly identified (2010: 29-30).

In the first half of this chapter I argue that Scarry's dependence on the Aristotelian distinction between *phone* and *semantike* is most apparent when one reads *The Body in Pain* via Cavarero's account of *logos* found in *For More than One Voice*. Further, however, I argue that resources can be found in Scarry's account of torture that undermine this distinction: on closer inspection Scarry's account can be read as challenging the primacy of *semantike* over *phone*, indicating that the cries of the body in pain communicate a uniqueness that is indifferent to the semantic content that has been supposedly destroyed in the scene of torture. Scarry and Cavarero's accounts compliment one another, in that Cavarero's insistence on the importance of the distinction between *phone* and *semantike* is made starkly clear in Scarry's account of torture. I argue that in Scarry's account, the torturer violently enacts what Cavarero describes as the devocalisation of *logos* (Ibid. 33): that is, the tendency in the western metaphysical tradition to ignore the fact that *logos* is both *semantike* and *phone* - that it is both reasoned speech and mere voice - and instead privilege only the semantic component. In effect, in the scene of torture that Scarry portrays, the process of torture actualises this devocalisation of *logos* through the infliction of violence (and the manifesting of pain) in the body of the other. In torture the body in pain is made to force the separation of *phone* from *semantike*, positioning *semantike* with the torturer and *phone* with the body in pain. The embodied voice of the prisoner is used as a vehicle for the disembodied reason of the torturer, thus ridding the torturer of his dependence on the materiality of his body. In this way, it is argued, in Scarry's account of torture the torturer attempts to speak without his body.

The second half of the chapter proceeds to contrast Cavarero's account of the ethical implications of the exposure to extreme forms of violence - an account that is formalised in *Horrorism* but is present in prefigurative form in *For More than One Voice* - with Scarry's account of torture. I argue that what is particularly horrifying in Scarry's

account of torture is not the torturer's disregard for the singular uniqueness of the prisoner - Cavarero's central ethical concern - but rather the torturer's recognition and exploitation of this singular uniqueness; the manner in which the torturer places this uniqueness in a suspended state of dissolution. This is made apparent by reading two examples that Cavarero deploys in *For More than One Voice* - the nymph Echo and the child Hurbinek - in the light of her more recent account of horrorism. Finally, by reading these examples in this manner I pose some critical questions to Cavarero's account of the human voice as being "destined to speech" (2005: 211). If uniqueness is to play a part in the account of politics that I am developing throughout my thesis then, following Rancière, it cannot function as the grounds of a politics, and nor can its recognition be seen as ethically valuable in and of itself. Insisting that the human voice is destined to speech, as Cavarero does, links not only politics but *humanity* with the capacity for speech, and thus polices who counts as a properly political animal. Instead, as I will go on to demonstrate, Cavarero's account of uniqueness can help conceptualise forms of fugitive politics that exist between people in sociality with one another and in indifference to the visibility granted by one's proper place in the *polis*.

The Devocalisation of the Pained Body's *Logos*

In the first chapter of *The Body in Pain* Scarry offers a "structure" (1985: 27) of torture, thinking through the phenomenology of the unilateral exposure to extreme pain that is characteristic of torture. Central to the structure of torture, for Scarry, is the distinction between the body and the voice: put briefly, when one is exposed to extreme pain one's sense of language, self and world, typified by voice, are placed in a process of destruction, while one's sense of body becomes utterly overbearing (Ibid. 35). For Scarry, speaking and thinking, both forms of self-extension, become increasingly difficult under extreme pain. When one is in pain one cries out; language typically evades the person in extreme pain, as does, so Scarry argues, thought. Scarry uses 'voice', 'speech' and 'language' interchangeably throughout the second chapter of *The Body in Pain*, but what is most prominent in the chapter is the process whereby the semantic content of speech is destroyed in the experience of extreme pain, leaving one with groans, wails and cries. As such, if Scarry does not make explicit reference to the Aristotelian conception of Man, it is nonetheless implicit throughout her account of torture. For Aristotle, Man (always Man, and this is not insignificant) was understood as the *zoon logon echon*; "the living creature who has *logos*" (Cavarero 2005: 34) as Cavarero interprets it. Cavarero notes that *logos* was figured in the Greek tradition as *phone semantike*, that is, as semantic voice, or what often gets translated simply as

'speech' (although as we will see this single word elides the fact that implicit in *logos* are two, albeit inseparable, conceptions: *semantike* and *phone*). Far more than mere voice, Man possesses speech. It is the *semantike* of *logos* - its capacity to signify, to endow Man with reason - which is significant. The *semantike* of *logos* distinguishes Man from other creatures and other animals: if Man signifies through his speech, for other animals they are limited by their mere voice, their cries and wails simply being signs of pleasure and pain. Slaves and women would, for Aristotle, fall somewhere between the two: they do not possess speech (otherwise they would be the equal of Man) but they can recognise speech (otherwise Man could not make productive use of them) (Aristotle 1992: 69).⁴¹ Stuart Elden is certainly right to point out that it is important to remember that the *having* or the *possession* of *logos* was not simply a unilateral having or possession: he says,

in reading the term *zoon logon echon* we should bear in the mind that to say that the human is the animal or being that has language is not to say that humans merely possess it, but that they are, at the same time possessed by it (2005: 286).

Nonetheless, in the Hellenic philosophical tradition there is an overwhelming sense that for slaves and for women they are far more *possessed* by *logos* than they are the *possessors*, and similarly that animals are utterly possessed by passions that dictate their vocalisations, and that if Man is possessed by *logos* it is a possession that never calls into question his presumed reason and rationality.

For Cavarero then, *phone* and *semantike*, while both being central to the philosophical understanding of *logos*, are not equally recognised in this tradition. *Semantike* is consistently privileged over *phone*, a privileging which, Cavarero suggests, operates through clear gendered stereotypes. For Cavarero:

the symbolic patriarchal order that identifies the masculine with reason and the feminine with the body is precisely an order that privileges the semantic with respect to the vocal. In other words, even the andocentric tradition knows that the voice comes from "the vibration of a throat of flesh" and, precisely because it knows this, it catalogues the voice with the body. The voice becomes secondary, ephemeral, and inessential - reserved for women (2005: 6).

In *For More than One Voice* and much of her other work, Cavarero attempts to disrupt

⁴¹ Cf. Page duBois, *Torture and Truth* (1991: 66).

this partitioning of the human (with its concomitant privileging of Man) not simply by claiming that women are in fact the possessors of speech, but further by insisting on the significance of the vocalic quality of *phone*, not only for women but for “the incarnate singularity of every existence insofar as she or he manifests her- or himself vocally” (Ibid. 7). Cavarero’s central concern is to stress that “logocentrism radically denies to the voice a meaning of its own that is not always already destined to speech” (Ibid. 13). Following in the footsteps of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas, Cavarero argues that prior to any communication of semantic content the voice first communicates the uniqueness of the person who is vocalising: “the truth of the vocal”, suggests Cavarero, “proclaims simply that every human being is a unique being, and is capable of manifesting this uniqueness with the voice, calling and infecting the other, and enjoying this reciprocal manifestation” (Ibid. 6-7). This uniqueness is consistently overlooked by a tradition that both only regards *phone* to the extent that it is the vehicle for *semantike* and further is committed to the theorisation of Man in general, rather than particular, non-generalisable men, or women, or many others.⁴² As Cavarero argues, even in lines of research “dedicated to challenging the dominion of language, the voice of vocality insists on presenting itself as a voice in general” (Ibid. 12). For the most part, however, *phone* is simply ignored when seen alongside *semantike*, or rather, following Cavarero, *phone* is *captured* by *semantike* (Ibid. 35). This capturing renders *phone* superfluous, not only by making it dependent on *semantike*, but further by privileging the visuality of *semantike* over the orality of *phone*:

[w]hat we call “signified” is, in fact, for metaphysics an object of thought that is characterized by visibility and clarity. The problem here is not only the relation between the realm of thought and that of speech, nor is it simply the usual metaphysical privileging of thought over speech. Rather, at stake is the fundamental gesture that locates the principle of the system of signification, of the signified, in the visual sphere (Ibid.).

Cavarero continues: “[m]etaphysics has always dreamed of a videocentric order of pure signifieds. Verbal signification is, from its perspective, a hindrance - especially when it unfolds acoustically in vocal speech” (Ibid. 40). *Logos*’ ambivalent structure, referring both to reason and to voice, is collapsed, or always in the process of collapsing, towards the “noetic” (Ibid. 39) realm of knowledge governed by the static metaphors of vision and away from the dynamic metaphors of sound. The flesh of the

⁴² This is most clearly articulated in Cavarero’s *Relating Narratives*, where Cavarero argues that “‘Man’ is a universal that applies to everyone precisely because it is no one. It disincarnates itself from the living singularity of each one, while claiming to substantiate it” (2000: 9).

body, and the sonority of sound from which reasoned speech can never escape, is effaced; *logos* is devocalised.

The devocalisation of *logos* becomes an especially pressing issue given that, as has already been indicated, *logos* plays a crucial role for Aristotle in distinguishing Man from other animals. The distinction rests on the possession of speech in the former, and this is central to Man's status as a properly *political* animal:

[Nature] has endowed man alone among the animals with the power of speech. Speech is something different from voice, which is possessed by other animals also and used by them to express pain or pleasure (Aristotle 1992: 60).⁴³

This account, and in particular Aristotle's separation of voice and speech, has been central to the conception of the human as it has been inherited in the western tradition (Bourke 2011: 7, 29-60; Rancière 1999: 1-19; Agamben 2007: 3-11). Cavarero highlights that "[t]he voice prior to speech or independent of speech is therefore simply an animal voice - an *a-logic* and *a-semantic* phonation" (2005: 34). This is important when one considers Scarry's arguments concerning torture.

For Scarry, when one suffers extreme pain one's capacity to deploy language - unequivocally the *semantike* of *logos*' signifying voice - is destroyed. There is something crucial to pain that, for Scarry, "actively destroys" (1985: 4) language, "bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (Ibid.). When considered through the lens of the Aristotelian schema, in torture the *semantike* of *logos* is stripped away leaving nothing but *phone*; pure voice. It should be noted that the 'purity' of this desemanticised voice can already be called into question. As Joanna Bourke has demonstrated, to claim that pain robs speech of its semantic component is to ignore a plethora of counter-examples: in Bourke's words, "the same people who declare their suffering to be 'unspeakable' or 'absolutely evanescent' may then go on to tell their story of pain in exquisite detail" (2014: 28). Pain, notes Bourke, is "inherently social" (ibid. 46): it is not an isolated experience within a person, as Scarry maintains, but rather emerges as a consequence of sociality. It is on this basis that Bourke charges Scarry with falling into the "ontological trap" (ibid. 5) of conflating the metaphorisation of pain with "descriptions of an actual entity" (ibid.). Rather than pain being an entity that

⁴³ It should be noted that for Aristotle it is not speech *per se* that makes Man a political animal, but rather speech's function in signifying what is proper to the *koinonia politike*, or 'political community'. Cavarero's reading is exemplary on this account: see 'Logos and Politics' in *For More than One Voice* (2005: 183-188).

carries ontological weight and resides within people - fundamentally inaccessible to others and, as a consequence, destructive of forms of communication - Bourke proposes that one thinks of pain “as an event” (ibid.). In this way one becomes a “person-in-pain” (ibid.) through one’s recognition, naming, and storying of one’s pain, a process that “can never be wholly private” (ibid. 6). However, as Bourke herself notes when reading Jean Améry’s account of his experience of torture (Améry 1980), the “extreme example” (Bourke 2014: 30) of torture is marked by “incommunicability” (ibid.). In this way the hard distinction between pure voice and reasoned speech that has its roots in Aristotle is maintained in this chapter, not because it is deemed the correct account of pain, but because it has influenced understandings of extreme pain and thus can be mobilised to help make sense of them.

Following the Aristotelian schema, torture is concerned with the forcible separation of speech from voice and thus concerned with the violent resolution of the ambivalence of *logos*: that it reduces one to an animalistic state “anterior to language” (Scarry 1985: 4). Or, perhaps more accurately, to an infantile state: unlike the animal, which is not presumed to have the capacity to possess the *semantike* of *logos*, the infant is understood as being “destined to speech” (Cavarero 2005: 13).⁴⁴ As it will be argued towards the end of this chapter, the conclusion that the body in pain is animal or infantile can be refuted using resources that Cavarero offers, and this despite Cavarero’s insistence on voice’s “destination to speech” (Ibid. 210) which would otherwise unwittingly bolster this conclusion. First, however, it is necessary to offer a more detailed reading of Scarry’s account of voice in the scene of torture. Scarry’s account makes clear the crucial role violence plays in manifesting an understanding of Man as a disembodied, reasoning being, freed from an embodied voice and its associative lungs, throat and tongue, and necessarily actualised in relation to the violation of another. For Scarry, voice is important for two reasons: first, the torturer’s voice objectifies the fact that the prisoner’s voice has been, or is in a process of being, destroyed; second, the absence left by the stripping away of the language of the prisoner (the *semantike* of *logos*) is filled, or perhaps rather colonised, by the torturer.

Scarry argues that as well as inflicting pain the torturer also objectifies the destruction of the prisoner’s world. The torturer does this by juxtaposing their world against the “small and shredded world” (1985: 36) of the prisoner, *and in so doing* further contributes to the destruction of the prisoner’s world. Interrogation may be a common way of enacting this objectification, but it is not the only way. As Scarry says, “[t]he confession is one crucial demonstration of this absent world, but there are others”

⁴⁴ Cf. Giorgio Agamben’s *Infancy and History* (2007).

(Ibid. 38). These include the torturer's "weapons, his acts, and his words" (Ibid.); that is, the fact that he exists as an embodied, relational being, extending himself out into the world. The interrogation is a performative gesture, a particular strategy that exploits, bears witness to and objectifies the disjuncture between the world of the torturer (marked by myriad forms of self extension) and the world of the prisoner (which for Scarry extends barely beyond the surface of the prisoner's body). As Scarry argues, "for the prisoner, the body and its pain are overwhelmingly present and voice, world, and self are absent; for the torturer, voice, world, and self are overwhelmingly present and the body and pain are absent" (Ibid. 46). For Scarry there is thus a direct relationship between the prisoner's voice, self and world, and that of the torturer: the torturer instrumentalises the prisoner's deconstructed world to enlarge their own sense of world (and the regime that the torturer may represent): as Scarry says, "[i]t is only the prisoner's steadily shrinking ground that wins for the torturer his swelling sense of territory" (Ibid. 36). One can see then the intimate relationship between the fetishisation of disembodied reason - the *semantike* of *logos*, which as Cavarero rightly notes is always dominant over the embodied vocality of *phone* - and the infliction of violence on another: following Scarry, a desire to rid oneself of body in the name of *noetic* reason is achievable through the making overwhelmingly present the body of another, via the medium of violence.⁴⁵ It is precisely the absence of the *semantike* of *logos* in the other, achieved through the infliction of extreme pain, that is a condition for the attainment of this disembodied, reasoning, *noetic* being: for Cavarero, "[t]hought as male, the body loses its carnal reality and becomes a conceptual form" (2015a: 134). Torture, one could say, manufactures a sense of omniscience and omnipotence; an approximation of God, or shock and awe;⁴⁶ an 'apotheosis' in the original sense of the word.⁴⁷ As Cavarero notes, it is precisely because *logos* cannot escape the vocality of *phone* that it needs to violently resolve its constitutive ambiguity by radically separating *phone* and *semantike* into their properly gendered expressions: the devocalisation of *logos* leaves "the feminine figures to embody what remains - namely, the voice" (Cavarero 2005: 207).

Scarry makes the relationship between a desire for a disembodied reason and

⁴⁵ Cf. Page duBois, *Torture and Truth* (1991).

⁴⁶ Rachel Pain (2015) explicitly links experiences of domestic violence to military tactics such as shock and awe, arguing both that domestic violence, typically seen as an intimate violence, is also a political violence, and that the violence of war, typically seen as a political violence, is also an intimate violence. In both cases gender is crucial for conceptualising the dynamics of these scenes of violence, and I would suggest that the idealisation of the reasoning, disembodied Man as the universal subject of philosophy can also account for something of what is occurring in the 'shock and awe' domestic violence that Pain identifies (Ibid. 67).

⁴⁷ Cf. Jean Améry, who asks "is not the one who can reduce a person so entirely to a body and a whimpering prey of death a god or, at least, a demigod?" (1980: 36).

the violation of another clear in what is a centrally important passage from her account of torture. Scarry argues:

[t]o assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can be only dimly heard, or to reach aimlessly for the name of a person or a place that has barely enough cohesion to hold its shape as word and none to bond it to its worldly referent, is a way of saying, yes, all is almost gone now, there is almost nothing left now, even this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another (1985: 35).

What is most apparent here is the separation of *logos'* *phone semantike*. Voice, or *phone*, is stripped of any capacity for signification it previously had; voice becomes "the sounds I am making" (Ibid.) which "no longer form my words" (Ibid.). Crucially, however, the vocality of voice is not left simply to exist but rather forms "the words of another" (Ibid.). The torturer in this manner rids himself of *phone*, colonising the *phone* of another that makes materially manifest the *semantike* of his *logos*, realising an ideal that has long been at the heart of the Western tradition. Understood in this way, the torturer is able to speak without his body. But there is another way of reading this passage, a way that concerns the question of communication.

As has been indicated, one can read this particular account that Scarry offers as being exemplary of the challenge that experiences of extreme pain pose: communication is radically undermined because the semantic content of said communication is estranged from the person who is vocalising.⁴⁸ And yet, Scarry claims that the vocalising of this estranged semantic content is nonetheless "a way of saying" (Ibid.). It would appear then that even after *semantike* is stripped from *phone*, the very process of this stripping is saying something: that is, something is being communicated. Scarry suggests that the content of the estranged speech of the one in extreme pain "is a way of saying" that my voice is not my own; this is communicated despite the words not having enough cohesion to bond them to their "worldly referent". What Scarry is indicating is what is, for Cavarero, so frequently overlooked (or even actively effaced) in considerations of *logos*: that the *semantike* of *logos* is intimately connected to *phone*, and further that there is something communicated in *phone* that is utterly indifferent to semantic content. *Phone* is not a "remainder" (Cavarero 2005: 13) or a "leftover" (Ibid.), rather it is an "originary excess [...] the sphere of the voice is constitutively broader than speech" (Ibid.). Whatever speech may communicate, first it communicates "the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voice" (Ibid.),

⁴⁸ For more on the "estrangement" of pain see the second chapter of Joanna Bourke's *The Story of Pain* (2014: 27-52).

that is, “a vocal phenomenology of uniqueness” (Ibid. 7).⁴⁹ Following Hannah Arendt, Cavarero argues that voice signifies first that there is a particular, unique existent: it communicates not *what* someone is but *who* they are. This *who* - expressed not through *noetic* reason but through embodied voice or, in another formulation of Cavarero’s, not through philosophy but through narration (2000: 52) - is a non-generalisable *who*, a *who* that does not make the mistake of philosophy in asking after *what* Man (or even Woman) is, but rather *who* men and women (and many other people) are (Ibid. 50). In Scarry’s account uniqueness is communicated precisely because it is being violated: because there is a particular, non-generalised person - a *who* rather than a *what* - who is unilaterally exposed to extreme pain.⁵⁰ As it will now be suggested, however, this uniqueness is not incidental to torture but is actively exploited by the torturer. This is, to use Cavarero’s word, the “horrorism” (2011) of torture, however a closer analysis of Scarry’s account of torture will help clarify precisely what it is that is horrifying, in a way that will shift, even if only slightly, the account of horrorism offered by Cavarero.

The Horror of Torture

In *Horrorism* (2011) Cavarero draws a distinction between terror and horror, arguing that the term horrorism is better able to account for various forms of contemporary violence, as well as maintaining a greater ethical valence in that it is articulated “as though all the innocent victims, instead of their killers, ought to determine the name” (Ibid. 3). Cavarero offers various examples of contemporary forms of horrorism: suicide bombing (Ibid.); aerial bombing (Ibid. 1-2, 27-28, 94-95); the London bombings of 7th July 2005 (Ibid. 18-19); concentration camps (Ibid. 40); and the torture conducted at Abu Ghraib (Ibid. 106-115). What these examples indicate is that proper to horrorism is the destruction of the uniqueness of a person, often as it is expressed through the body (although it will be suggested that the body is not the central condition for an occurrence of horrorism), and that it is enacted on the helpless; that is, those who have no capacity to defend against it.

As a form of violence, horrorism “offends the ontological dignity that the human figure possesses” (Ibid. 9). Its principal target is the singular uniqueness of the human,

⁴⁹ To take Cavarero seriously, it is crucial to understand her claim of human uniqueness on its own terms; that is, it would be a mistake for one to read this claim as a generalised claim, when implicit in the claim is the recognition of specificity that is central to the notion of uniqueness. If all are unique, their uniqueness is theirs (even if it is inevitably tied up with the presence of others). By understanding uniqueness as a particular quality not of *the* human but of *this* human, the naive universalism that assumes all have equal access to uniqueness is avoided.

⁵⁰ Cf. Judith Butler’s reading of Levinas in the final chapter of *Precairous Life* (2006: 133-134).

which for Cavarero is most evident in the destruction of the body, particularly the head and face (Ibid.). Horrorism is a “violence whose precise aim is to erase singularity” (Ibid. 19). In this sense the killing of the human is incidental to horrorism, even as it so frequently accompanies scenes of horror:

[a]s its corporeal symptoms testify, the physics of horror has nothing to do with the instinctive reaction to the threat of death. It has rather to do with instinctive disgust for a violence that, not content merely to kill because killing would be too little, aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body, tearing at its constitutive vulnerability. What is at stake is not the end of a human life but the human condition itself, as incarnated in the singularity of vulnerable bodies (Ibid. 8).

Cavarero goes on: “it is not so much killing that is in question here but rather dehumanizing and savaging the body as body, destroying it in its figural unity, sullyng it [...] nullifying human beings even more than killing them” (Ibid. 9).⁵¹ Torture, for Cavarero, typifies this most clearly: “[t]he dead body, no matter how mutilated, is only a residue of the scene of torture” (Ibid. 31).⁵² The horror of torture also makes clear, for Cavarero, that what is proper to horrorism is its enactment on the “helpless” or the “defenseless” (Ibid. 30):

[d]efenseless and in the power of the other, the helpless person finds himself substantially in a condition of passivity, undergoing violence he can neither flee from nor defend against. The scene is entirely tilted toward unilateral violence. There is no symmetry, no parity, no reciprocity. As in the exemplary case of the infant, it is the other who is in a position of omnipotence (Ibid.).⁵³

Importantly, in torture this is a manufactured helplessness: unlike the infant, who of

⁵¹ Cavarero here, as in many other places, is indebted to Hannah Arendt’s analysis of the Nazi concentration camps and the killing of man’s “uniqueness” (Arendt 2003: 134-137). See also Cavarero’s ‘Narrative Against Destruction’ (2015: 4-5).

⁵² As Cavarero notes, torture’s etymology lies in the latin *torquere*: “to twist and distort the body” (2011: 32). *Torquere* itself is linked to *tortum*, a wrong or injustice; cf. tort law, or Jacques Rancière’s *tort*, translated as “wrong” in the English versions of his *Disagreement* (Rancière 1999: 21; Panagia 2006: 91). Interestingly, the French *supplice* that Foucault draws on extensively in *Discipline and Punish* (1991), translated into the English as ‘torture’, is rooted in the latin *supplicium*, which signifies kneeling in supplication, as well as torture, punishment and suffering. ‘Supplication’ is rooted in the latin *supplicāre*, the *plicāre* meaning ‘to bend’. So both examples of the infliction of suffering - *torquere* and *supplicāre* - are linked to a torsional force, a twisting or bending, where the body comports itself in response to an outside power: either in deference (to bend one’s knee) or in pain.

⁵³ In the Italian, “helpless” and “defenseless” are “*l’inerme*”. See the translator’s introduction (2011: vi-viii) and Cavarero’s account of the etymology (Ibid. 30) for further discussion.

necessity is vulnerable and helpless, the helplessness of the one subjected to torture is “produced artificially [...] In this sense, torture belongs to the type of circumstance in which the coincidence between the vulnerable and the helpless is the result of a series of acts, intentional and planned, aimed at bringing it about” (Ibid. 31).

The example of torture makes clear that while it is the violation of the helpless body that most frequently and visibly arouses repugnance, what is significant is that it is the singular uniqueness that this body avows that is at the heart of the scene of horror. This is important as for Cavarero, while the body (and especially the face) is an exemplar in exhibiting the singular uniqueness of the human, so too is the voice, not least because the voice for Cavarero is a properly embodied phenomenon (2005: 4). Cavarero’s account of horrorism needs to be retroactively read back into her earlier text *For More than One Voice*, where two examples both demonstrate the origins of the notion of horrorism but also stress the vocalic significance of the phenomenon, something that is overlooked if one limits oneself to *Horrorism*. These two examples are centred around two people: first the nymph Echo as narrated by Ovid; and second the child Hurbinek, as narrated by Primo Levi.

Echo

In *For More than One Voice* Cavarero is centrally concerned with moments where voice becomes disembodied, and here the myth of the nymph Echo is a prime example. Of the three well-known versions of the myth (two from Ovid and one from Longus) Cavarero focuses on Ovid’s original telling. Here, Echo - “a loquacious nymph [...] possessed of a typically feminine rhetorical talent” (Cavarero 2005: 165) - distracts Juno through her words “while the other nymphs bed Jupiter” (Ibid.). Juno takes revenge on Echo by condemning her to “repeat the words of others” (Ibid.), but a repetition that is “superimposed on the words that the speaker is pronouncing” (Ibid. 166) so that only the last few words of Echo’s repetition are heard. After this event Echo encounters Narcissus in a wooded glade. Echo is hidden from view behind a bush, repeating the words that Narcissus proclaims; however, only Echo’s final words are distinctly heard by Narcissus:

the young boy invites her to join him. “Come here and let us meet [*huc coeamus*],” he says. And the voice of the nymph repeats, “Let us meet [*coeamus*].” Her response is naughty. For without the *huc*, *coeamus* alludes to coitus. The nymph goes on to make the situation worse by jumping out of the woods and throwing her arms around Narcissus.

Scandalized by her ardor, the boy then declares that he would rather die than couple with her; and Echo, automatically, invites him to couple, or rather copulate, with her (Ibid.).

Rejected by Narcissus, Echo begins to “wither away” (Ibid.) leaving “a pure voice of resonance without a body [...] the beautiful nymph is sublimated into a mineralization of the voice” (Ibid.). Echo becomes echo, the disembodied acoustic repetition of voice.

The withering away that Cavarero identifies is significant: Cavarero describes this as a “nullifying” (Ibid. 167) of Echo’s body, and it is because the body is nullified that there is the “definitive dissolution of a uniqueness” (Ibid.). But in what sense is the body “nullified” here? There is certainly a nullifying when Echo’s body is reduced to stone, and importantly, as Cavarero highlights, “not the stone of a statue, but rather stone in general: rocks, boulders, mountains” (Ibid.). A statue would still reflect a uniqueness, even if in a reduced and sullied form. As stone, a part of the Earth but not, significantly, the soil (which would be akin to a burial and place Echo too close to a form of returning autochthon), Echo’s uniqueness is effaced. But this is the finality of her dissolution: can the same be said for what occurs before? And further, what of the temporal dimension of this withering away? As Cavarero describes it, Echo’s withering away has “certain anatomical details: first her flesh dries up, then her humors vanish, and then her bones turn to stone” (Ibid.). This is clearly a *process*; a violent and, importantly, a painful process. In this process Echo does not so much “lose her body” (Ibid.) or have her body nullified; rather, following Scarry, it seems that Echo’s body is *most* present in this painful withering away: for the one exposed to extreme pain their body is felt as “overwhelmingly present” (Scarry 1985: 46). There is certainly an ultimate nullifying, as Echo’s human form is effaced in a manner which denies her the human ritual of burial (and, following Sophocles’ *Antigone*, we might ask the question who mourns for Echo?),⁵⁴ but prior to this final nullifying, while there is certainly the *threat* of absolute nullification, more importantly there is the processual deconstruction of the body and its concomitant singular uniqueness.⁵⁵ If one only focuses on the nullifying of Echo’s body as the “definitive dissolution” (Ibid.) of Echo’s singular uniqueness, one effaces the pain which, as Scarry makes clear, is so central to extreme violent exploitation. Put the other way around, one can only conclude that Echo loses her body by ignoring the pain of a processual dissolution which makes the body not lost but on the contrary *overwhelming*, indeed, becomes overwhelming in

⁵⁴ Cf. Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim* (2000).

⁵⁵ Cf. Cavarero’s reading of Polynices’ imperiled disfiguring by wild beasts, and Antigone’s desire to protect her brother’s “integral form” through burial (2002: 32-33).

direct relation to the absence of the *semantike* of *logos*. After all, Echo's experience perfectly illustrates the implicit devocalisation of *logos* that it is suggested is central to the structure of Scarry's account of torture. Cavarero notes that Echo's voice "results, like residual material, from its subtraction from the semantic register of *logos*" (Ibid. 166). Just as Scarry claims that in "the thick agony of the body [...] this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another" (1985: 35), so too Cavarero argues that

If [Echo's] sounds, separated from the context of the sentence, come together to form words that still signify something (or something else), then this is a matter for the listener, not the nymph [...] Echo is no longer a *zoon logon echon*; she no longer possess *phone semantike*. She is instead pure *phone*, activated by an involuntary mechanism of resonance (2005: 166-167).

Echo's violent and painful dissolution is not incidental to this process but is central. Although the temporal order of events does not match the account found in Scarry (in that Echo loses her semantic capacity prior to the infliction of violence on her body), nonetheless it is important that the violent, painful, processual character of her withering away is related in proximity to her "desemanticization" (Ibid. 167). It is worth noting that in Longus' account of Echo, her fate is to have her body torn to pieces so that only her voice remains (2002: 57).

Although Cavarero suggests that there is a "definitive dissolution" of Echo's uniqueness in the nullifying of her body, she does make clear that this uniqueness was already in an imperilled state: Echo's uniqueness was already in a state of precarity in the 'echo' of Echo's voice; Echo's voice as echo "does not possess" (Ibid.) uniqueness. Cavarero goes on:

Echo's voice is, in fact, not *her* voice; it does not possess an unmistakable timbre, and it does not signal a unique person. It simply obeys the physical phenomenon of the echo, repeating even the timbre of the other's voice. It is a mere acoustic resonance, a voice that returns, foreign, to the one who emitted it. The juxtaposition of Echo and Narcissus is therefore perfect. The absolute ego of Narcissus, for whom the other is nothing but "another himself," corresponds to the reduction of the vocalic nymph to a mere sonorous reverberation of the other. The mechanism of repetition in the voice produces the annulment of uniqueness (Ibid. 167-168).

Two aspects of the scene concern Cavarero: the first is Echo's voice becoming a voice in general, a fact of nature that can be reproduced by anyone who, standing in front of a mountain, shouts; the second is Echo's voice being a particular voice, but a particular voice of *another* (in this instance Narcissus). In both cases what is problematic, for Cavarero, is the effacement of uniqueness; either in generality (the echo can be anyone's) or in specificity (the echo is not Echo's and is in fact Narcissus'). But nonetheless, if one sidesteps the violence of Echo's withering away what is missed is still the process of the processual dissolution of Echo's uniqueness, which contains within it the threat of final nullification but is not reducible to this final nullification. In this way Echo's experience is a scene of horror. The responsibility for her violation may, in Ovid's tale at least, fall somewhere between Juno and Narcissus in a way which obfuscates the violence of the devocalisation of *logos*, but that violence is nonetheless integral to the meaning of the scene. Indeed, Cavarero's reading almost perfectly mirrors Scarry's account of torture: Narcissus' "absolute ego" corresponds to Echo's "sonorous reverberation" in precisely the same way that the torturer's "swelling sense of territory" (Scarry 1985: 36) corresponds to the prisoner's "small and shredded world" (Ibid.). Further, however, by reading the experience of Echo as a form of horrorism one can see that what is proper to the horror is not simply the final nullification of Echo's body, but more significantly the suspended state of dissolution her uniqueness, expressed through her body and voice, is placed in.

Hurbinek

In the closing of *For More than One Voice*, prior to her appraisal of Jacques Derrida, Cavarero offers some brief reflections on the other side of her thesis of vocalic uniqueness; that is, the destruction of this uniqueness (foreshadowing the work Cavarero will do in *Horrorism*). Following Arendt, Cavarero takes the Nazi *Lager* as a principle moment in the history of this destruction. Cavarero takes as her subject an account offered by Primo Levi, of the appearance of a child of approximately three years of age in the days after the liberation of Auschwitz (Levi 1987: 197-198). The child could not speak any discernable language; he was given the name Hurbinek. Although he could not speak, the child repeated a series of sounds in a manner that suggested a variation on a particular theme, which it was presumed were attempts to signify meaning, either his name or "to eat", or "bread"; or perhaps "meat" (Ibid. 198). For Cavarero, the destruction of voice and with it uniqueness, particularly the destruction of voice in a child (that absolutely defenseless existent) is of utmost importance: Cavarero's account of what it is to be human rests on this uniqueness. The

destruction of this uniqueness exemplified in the *Lager* is thus not so much a challenge to her thesis (indeed, the opposite could be said to be true) but it does pose a challenge to the ethical efficacy of such a thesis. Of course, the challenge of the Holocaust to philosophers is not unique to Cavarero; nonetheless, this is an especially pressing issue for Cavarero given the primacy she affords to the vocalic as an expression of the particular, relational, singular uniqueness of the human. As Cavarero herself argues, “[a]ny present day reflection on horror must, sooner or later, come to terms with Auschwitz” (2011: 34).

Cavarero points out that “[t]he other deportees therefore attribute to the articulated sounds of the child the intention to signify” (2005: 211), a conclusion Cavarero seems content with. Cavarero goes on: “Hurbinek’s voice, precisely because it modulates variations on a theme, already makes its destination to speech perceptible” (Ibid.). In Hurbinek’s vocalic expressions, which further do not appear arbitrary but rather are related by a presumed theme that is approached through the variation and modulation of the vocalic (one can think here of musical improvisation), Cavarero hears Hurbinek’s “destination to speech” (Ibid.). Earlier, Cavarero has suggested that “speech is [voice’s] essential destination” (Ibid. 209); that, although both humans and animals share a voice, it is the destination to speech which distinguishes the human voice:

[t]he humanity of human beings plays out precisely along the division (which is rooted in the vocalic) of this destination. Which means the interweaving of voice and speech, which is not necessary [*sic*] synchronous, cannot be severed without sacrificing humanity itself; this goes for both animal voice and the devocalized logos (Ibid. 209-210).

“Hurbinek is saved” (Ibid. 211) precisely because of his voice’s destination to speech, a destination to speech which is identified by the modulations and variations around a particular theme, which may be his name, or may be something to eat, but in either case cannot be identified by its semantic content. On the register of the semantic, Hurbinek’s speech is “a nonlanguage that sinks into the abyss of the nonhuman” (Ibid.); but, by focusing on the register of the vocalic, Cavarero maintains that the “act” (Ibid.) of Hurbinek’s “sonorous articulations [...] already intones the truth of a voice that is destined to speech and that is thus peremptorily human” (Ibid.). Note that Cavarero chooses to highlight Hurbinek’s “sonorous *articulations*”: this is something more than mere sonority, mere vocality, presumably distinguished from *phone* by the modulations and variations around a theme; these variations mark Hurbinek’s vocality as *articulations* and therefore destined for speech (even if not yet speech), which crucially

makes them (and by association Hurbinek) “peremptorily human” (Ibid.). “Rather than being the tragic little exemplar of the nonhuman” Cavarero argues, “he is the announcement, under infernal conditions, of the quintessence of the human that the voice destines to speech” (Ibid.). So not only is the voice destined to speech, it also *destines* something to speech, this something being the announcement of the quintessence of the human. The voice sets this announcement of the quintessence of the human on its way. It is not the announcement itself, but neither is it “an inarticulate cry” (Ibid. 212):

[r]ather, [Hurbinek’s] is a voice in which the acoustically perceptible phenomenon of uniqueness, here emphasized by the lack of access to the semantic, modulates itself with experimental variations on a theme; it mimes the musicality of speech, the relational fabric of resonance, the echo that comes from the mouth for the ear of the other (Ibid.).

Before Hurbinek’s death soon after being found, he “[tasted] the human intonation of speech” (Ibid.) which “tells us that his tragedy is not like that of the ‘children of the wild’ who are raised without human contact” (Ibid.); that is, Hurbinek was not an animal.

If for Cavarero what distinguishes the human from the animal is that the voice of the human is “destined to speech” (Ibid. 13), then Hurbinek’s case makes this explicit: he was saved precisely because the sonority of his voice expressed modulations and variations which demonstrated the destination of his vocalisations to speech, even if this speech was denied to him at his death. Much weight is therefore placed on these modulations and variations - these experimentations on a theme - in that without them Hurbinek would be consigned to Levi’s “drowned” (1989); he would not be “free” (Levi 1987: 198). It is necessary to pause here and ask a series of related questions. What would Hurbinek’s voice be (and consequently what would *Hurbinek* be) without these variations and modulations which mark his destination to speech? By extension, what work is the variation and modulation doing and what qualifies it for this job? What of the other deportees who bear witness to Hurbinek’s articulations?⁵⁶ The concern is that if the prelinguistic voice of the human is only distinguishable from other animals through the voice’s “destination to speech” (Cavarero 2005: 209), then the interruption of this destination renders the one vocalising either infantile or animal. As has been noted, ‘infantile’ would be the more accurate description (the animal’s voice is not destined to speech) except that, in Hurbinek’s case, he is already an infant. If, as it has been

⁵⁶ Cf. Agamben’s comments on Hurbinek in *Remnants of Auschwitz*: “Perhaps every word, every writing, is born [...] as testimony. This is why what is borne witness to cannot already be language and writing. It can only be something to which no one has borne witness” (2002: 38).

argued, in the horror of torture there is a separation of *phone* from *logos* - a violent splitting of the ambivalence of *logos* - then following Cavarero voice is also separated to speech, in that speech is voice's essential destination. Torture is an interruption of this essentiality: it works on this essentiality, placing speech an eternal distance away by maintaining the prisoner's singular uniqueness in a state of suspended dissolution. Cavarero ends her account of Hurbinek by noting that "[h]e is the warning - albeit extreme - to every rethinking of ontology that aspires to radically reestablish the bond between speech and politics" (2005: 212). This is no doubt true, but it is equally true for an ontology that reestablishes the bond between speech and what it is to be human. Cavarero qualifies her account by highlighting that "[t]he voice is invoked here because of its destination to speech, but in such a way that speech is never authorized to erase the reciprocal communication of uniqueness that the voice announces and destines to it" (Ibid. 210), but as Cavarero's reading of Hurbinek shows, an interruption of this destination to speech is of central concern.

Voice's "Destination to Speech"

This is precisely the same issue one is challenged with in Scarry's account of torture. If one begins by privileging speech as central to the human, as Scarry implicitly does, then one is ineluctably drawn to characterising those whose speech has been radically interrupted as being somehow less than human (whether infantile or animal). Cavarero offers some resources to avoid this conclusion: for Cavarero, voice first communicates not only its essential destination to speech, but *uniqueness*, a properly human quality:

[e]very human voice is obviously a sound, an acoustic vibration among others, which is measurable like all other sounds; but it is only as human that the voice comes to be perceived as unique. This means that uniqueness resounds in the human voice; or, in the human voice, uniqueness makes itself sound (Ibid. 177).

Focusing on the necessary uniqueness that is expressed through the voice rather than the voice's essential destination to speech avoids the essentialisation of speech as the defining characteristic of the human: whether or not Hurbinek's vocalisations reveal their destination to speech (and thus his humanness), his voice is, to begin with and of necessity, expressive of his singular uniqueness that is proper to the human. This would require moving Cavarero's account away from that of Arendt: for both Cavarero and Arendt, the uniqueness of humans and their destination to speech are entwined

phenomena and should not be extricated from one another.⁵⁷ Cavarero does not want to do away with speech, but rather wants to insist on the simple fact that speech cannot occur without vocalisation, and that vocalisation communicates uniqueness. Cavarero poses a challenge to any thinking of speech that would refuse this embodied uniqueness in the name of a disembodied realm of metaphysical truths:

[b]y rooting speech immediately in the body, which is the voice's source and chamber of resonance, the vocal first of all situates the act of reciprocal communication over and against a universal conception of language that turns the speakers into fictitious entities (Ibid. 206-207).

She goes on:

[...] it is not a matter of overcoming or erasing speech, but rather of keeping the primary sense of speech in proximity to the relational plurality of voices that originate speech, or that materialize it, as it were, by making it sing (Ibid. 210).

But in this process of offering a counter-account of speech, Cavarero not only fuses speech to the uniqueness of voice but also, inevitably, enacts the reverse: voice is concomitantly fused to speech; voice is destined *to* speech. If it is the case that “[w]hat in speech convokes the relation among speakers is, first of all, the voice” (Ibid. 208), then for what reason does uniqueness need to be tied to speech in the form of voice's essential destination? Cavarero argues that “the voice that sacrifices speech to the subversive effects of an absolute pleasure risks crossing the threshold of the animal realm” (Ibid. 209). If one were restricted to a discussion of politics this point would hold some valence, particularly if one is willing to accept that what is proper to politics is speech. And indeed, Cavarero's discussion of the distinction between the animal and the human occurs in a section of *For More than One Voice* concerned with the politics of *logos*, articulated via, among others, Arendt. But as can be seen in the example of Hurbinek, Cavarero slips out of this political realm to make speech essential to the communication of human uniqueness via the voice. This seems an unnecessary step if *phone* already expresses uniqueness, a uniqueness that cannot be stifled by the eradication of *semantike*.

However, the position that insists on uniqueness being proper to being human - as opposed to voice's destination to speech - itself is not immune from challenge: it is necessary to ask after the conditions that make possible the revelation of this

⁵⁷ See Arendt's *The Human Condition*, where Arendt argues “human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings [...] Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness” (1998: 176).

uniqueness. If there are such conditions - and surely there must be, since as it has been demonstrated Cavarero seems content to maintain the distinction Aristotle formulates between *political* animals and mere animals (Ibid. 209) - then the assertion of the humanity of the body in pain can be undermined by inhibiting the conditions that would allow for the revelation of a person's uniqueness. Put in a different manner, it could be argued that Cavarero's account of vocal uniqueness pays insufficient attention to what Jacques Rancière identifies: that any account of voice and speech is always a *partage*, a particular partitioning, which first determines which vocalisations count as proper to the human (Rancière 1999). It might be objected that Cavarero is trying to sidestep this debate by emphasising speech's inevitable dependence on the vocalic and the significance not of the *content* of speech but of the fact that *someone* is speaking. But this can only take one so far: it is necessary to ask why the vocalisation of an animal does not signify a singular, unique being; and if this question can be asked of the animal it can also be asked of the slave. Cavarero's dependence on an account of human voice's destination to speech now becomes more apparent, even if it does not resolve the tension. What is required is a situation where the asking of the question becomes impossible; a no doubt impossible request for any ontology which can still be described, in one form or another, as committed to a type of humanism. Rather than situating a defense of the human in vocalisation's destination to speech, it would be better to focus on Cavarero's insistence that singular uniqueness is not a *metaphysical* uniqueness *in general*: uniqueness is not proper to Man, or even Woman, but instead proper to men and women (and many others) in their specificity. If this is a non-generalisable uniqueness it is also a uniqueness that can only be articulated in relation to others: uniqueness of necessity only becomes apparent in a plurality of others; one cannot be unique without others to be unique in relation to. The posing of the question 'is this voice the voice of a human?' already presumes a generalised, universal conception of *the* human (as opposed to *this* or *that* human) against which the sonorous emission can be measured, and this is precisely what Cavarero is rejecting. Perhaps, then, uniqueness cannot be grounded in any anthropological fact but instead receives its meaning through its actualisation; through its reciprocal assumption, its convocation. Uniqueness is not a metaphysics, perhaps not even an ontology in the way that Cavarero's figuring of the vulnerable existent might be. Uniqueness would then be closer to Rancière's account of equality, which is assumed and enacted. For Rancière,

[e]quality is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a

mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it (1999: 33).

If, as I will argue in my fifth chapter, there is an excess and evasion proper to uniqueness, then this is because it cannot be derived as a property of being, not only because of Cavarero's refusal of metaphysics, but also because of uniqueness' emergence between people. Indeed, it is this ecstatic quality of uniqueness - its relationality - that is exploited in torture.

Hurbinek's uniqueness was not effaced because his voice's destination to speech was undermined, just as the uniqueness of the prisoner in the scene of torture that Scarry presents us with is not undermined because the *semantike* of their *logos* has been stripped away. Indeed, Scarry's account of torture makes evident something that is not clearly noted in Cavarero's account of horrorism. Throughout Cavarero's examples of horrorism, whether taken from the text *Horrorism* or retroactively read into the examples of Echo and Hurbinek in *For More than One Voice*, what is presumed central to horrorism is the "ontological crime" (2011: 29) of the destruction of singular uniqueness in the helpless. However, Scarry's account of torture offers good reasons to suppose that what is horrifying in horrorism can also be thought of as the opposite of this formulation. That is, not only is killing not proper to horrorism, but further, neither is it not simply (or not only) the destruction of singular uniqueness: additionally, it is the placing of this singular uniqueness into *a suspended state of dissolution*, where the final extinguishing of this singular uniqueness may or may not be threatened, but in either case is always imperilled. On this reading what is especially grotesque in torture is the prolongation of the singularity and uniqueness of the prisoner: the violence of torture is premised on the repeated violation of this singular uniqueness which therefore requires a certain sense of 'care' to ensure its sustenance. Without the prolonged targeting of this singular uniqueness torture would be a generic violence or killing.⁵⁸ This complicates Cavarero's account of the ethical valence of uniqueness and singularity. The violation of the singular uniqueness of the prisoner is not just a particular aim or strategy of torture: this would be a generalised recognition of singular

⁵⁸ An important exception to the violence of torture targeting the singular uniqueness of the prisoner are the iconic images of U.S. torture at the Abu Ghraib detention facility. As Cavarero notes, the Abu Ghraib prisoners "are anonymous bodies, often photographed from behind or with hoods on their heads in order to cancel the singularity of their faces [...] the humiliation consisted of a dehumanization at the hands of the director, who, in the frame of the shots, intentionally covered the facial features of uniqueness and annulled them" (2011: 113). Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to imagine that what is proper to torture is the annulling of uniqueness, even if this was no doubt central to the torture depicted in the images from Abu Ghraib. Torture may resolve itself into an annulling of uniqueness, but first it must recognise and maintain this uniqueness, and it is this moment that distinguishes torture from other forms of violence.

uniqueness (the Human is singular and unique) and thus at best only a partial recognition of singular uniqueness. Rather, the violence of torture precisely depends upon the torturer recognising and exploiting *this particular* singular uniqueness of *this particular* person: not a singular uniqueness in general, but revealed in the intimate proximity of the torturer and the tortured. It is this relational intimacy that is exploited in torture, this recognition of a particular singular uniqueness, which in other instances would be a necessary condition for the establishment of reciprocal or nonreciprocal care, while in torture is grotesquely inverted. It is crucial that the torturer maintains, sustains and prolongs the singular uniqueness of the particular person in front of him or her. If in Cavarero's work there is an ethical impetus to understand *who* someone is rather than *what* someone is (2000: 50), in the 'idealised' account of torture that Scarry offers us the ethical valence of the 'who' gets inverted: the torturer exploits this 'who' as a means to the further infliction of suffering. Torture is no doubt an exemplar of what Cavarero means by horrorism, but far from effacing the singular uniqueness of the prisoner the torturer instead offers it a gross reverence.

Romeo's "Singular Flesh"

Cavarero's *For More than One Voices* ends with a discussion of Derrida's reading of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In this reading Cavarero offers a critique of Derrida, arguing that Derrida overlooks the fact that the "ontological status" (2005: 235) of Romeo - "the singularity of the human being loved by Juliet" (Ibid.) - is communicated not by his name but rather by his voice. For Cavarero, "[r]ecognizing Romeo's voice, the young girl recognizes the uniqueness of the loved one, separable from the proper name" (Ibid.). Cavarero's reading of the scene offers a clear account of her insistence on the voice as an embodied phenomenon expressive of the singular uniqueness of a person, and further that this uniqueness can be accounted for without recourse to the voice's "destination to speech" (Ibid. 210), as it has previously been suggested in this chapter. What becomes clear in Cavarero's reading is that uniqueness is most apparent when freed from the proper name; that is, when it is communicated through voice, as is the case in Shakespeare's balcony scene where, shrouded in darkness, "the dialogue unfolds between two people who do not see one another" (Ibid. 237). Juliet recognises Romeo's uniqueness by his voice, "beyond the name itself, beyond speech and even beyond language" (Ibid. 238). Romeo's name, although it "evokes uniqueness" (Ibid.), in fact interrupts *who* Romeo is by focusing instead on *what* he is; that is, Romeo is a Montague. But as Cavarero notes,

Juliet, as is natural for lovers, does not love what Romeo is but rather who he is. She loves Romeo's uniqueness, and asks him to separate himself from that proper name that, while it announces the uniqueness of the one who bears it, renders the reality of their love improper, in the context of the feud between Montague and Capulet (Ibid.).

Romeo's uniqueness is situated in "the physical, corporeal element of the voice" (Ibid.), not his name "which belongs instead to the verbal register" (Ibid.). Crucially for Cavarero, "[t]he name is not flesh; still less is it singular flesh. The voice, however, is" (Ibid.). On Cavarero's reading, Juliet wishes to "separate" (Ibid.) Romeo's embodied uniqueness from his disembodied name: "if the problem is how to separate the embodied uniqueness from the name - from that word, the proper name, that already alludes to the uniqueness - then the voice is what allows for this separation" (Ibid. 239). Cavarero's previous coupling of uniqueness to voice's "destination to speech" (Ibid. 209) has been lost here; indeed, it has been actively undermined to the extent that Cavarero is hostile to the name: "the solution lies", Cavarero suggests, "in parting from the proper name and in separating it from the embodied uniqueness of the one who bears it. So that this very uniqueness, finally freed from the name Romeo, can take another name" (Ibid. 239). Without parting from the proper name one's uniqueness cannot take another name: "the proper name is nothing but an inessential, and thus modifiable, addition [...] in the voice there resounds a singularity that can leave speech aside [...] The voice is the way in which the exquisitely human uniqueness emits its essence" (Ibid. 239-240). Cavarero could neither be clearer nor further from an account of uniqueness that situates it in voice's destination to speech.

There is a valorisation of embodied vocality in this account of Cavarero's, precisely to the extent that the embodied voice expresses uniqueness; conversely, it is clear that the proper name should be separated from voice to the extent that the proper name effaces this uniqueness. This theme is present throughout Cavarero's work, explicitly seen in the examples of Echo and Hurbinek whose suffering is tied up in the destruction of their uniqueness, and manifest in the various examples of contemporary violence that Cavarero deploys in *Horrorism*. To finish, however, it is necessary to return to Scarry's account of torture that complicates this division between, on the one hand, the horrors of the effacing of an embodied uniqueness and, on the other, the human flourishing associated with the sonority of the voice. For if Romeo's uniqueness is to be celebrated as it is expressed in his embodied voice, freed from his disembodied name, then in Scarry's scene of torture we see the reversal of this process. Central to the horrorism of torture is the separation of voice from name. For

Scarry, one's use of language and one's sense of "self and world" (1985: 35) are "deconstructed" (Ibid. 20) in torture, and in contrast the body - the particular, singularly unique body of the one experiencing extreme pain - becomes ever more present. If for Romeo and Juliet the separating of name from voice and body is a condition for the flourishing of their love, in torture the same separation is a condition for a paradigmatic instance of horrorism. If what Juliet loves in Romeo is his "singular flesh" (Cavarero 2005: 238) expressed first in his voice, in the horror of torture there is the production of "singular flesh" in the extreme: "the body and its pain are overwhelmingly present" (Scarry 1985: 46). Crucially, what changes is not a proper regard for embodied uniqueness in the case of Romeo and Juliet's love and a disregarding of embodied uniqueness in the scene of torture. In torture, as it has already been argued, there is a gross reverence for the singular, embodied uniqueness of the one tortured. Torture imperils this singular, embodied uniqueness - it maintains it in a suspended state of dissolution - but it does so not by disregarding uniqueness but by giving uniqueness its utmost attention. Cavarero is not wrong to recognise the value of uniqueness, its proper expression in the voice, or its indifference to the semantic content of speech. But as Scarry's scene of torture indicates, the horror of horrorism can be aroused not only by the disregarding or annulling of singular uniqueness but also by its grotesque reverence.

Chapter Five: Reading Cavarero on Violence and Narration

So far in my thesis I have argued that the theme of visibility is central to the work of Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero. For Rancière, politics involves the making visible of forms of existence that otherwise cannot be seen, whereas for Butler it is violence that varies in its visibility and that necessitates political intervention. As was seen in the last chapter, Cavarero's work is also concerned with visibility, here played out around the question of uniqueness. Cavarero sits somewhere between Rancière and Butler in that her account of uniqueness concerns the visibility of particular existents, however it comes to matter because of the histories of violence that inhibit the emergence of uniqueness; something that was made clear in comparison with Elaine Scarry's account of torture in *The Body in Pain*. As a consequence, a central question of Cavarero's is when and how the sense of another's uniqueness emerges - how it becomes visible - often despite violence.

For Cavarero, one way uniqueness becomes visible is through narration. A concern with narrative touches on all of Cavarero's work, but it is most prominently addressed in *Relating Narratives* (2000) and 'Narrative Against Destruction' (2015). It is in the latter text that Cavarero explicitly takes up the question of the relationship between narrative and violence, arguing that narration is able to offer restitution to the sense of one's uniqueness that is a casualty of the violence of genocide. However, as I will argue, the status of a uniqueness targeted for destruction is ambivalent in Cavarero's work: Cavarero argues both that uniqueness is susceptible to annihilation, as in the Nazi extermination camps, while also suggesting that uniqueness is not, finally, destroyed. A return to *Relating Narratives* is necessary to make sense of this ambivalence, however even here a uniqueness that is deprived of the conditions for its meaning - a plural scene that can sustain uniqueness' "totally expositive" (Cavarero 2000: 20) character - is left as a *paradox* that is not fully accounted for.

I read Cavarero's account alongside Miklós Nyiszli's biographical narration (and Primo Levi's re-narration) of the momentary emergence of a young woman from an Auschwitz gas chamber. Nyiszli's narration is an exemplary instance of a failure to maintain a sense of uniqueness when giving an account of another: Nyiszli's narration fails to offer a sense of the figural unity of the *who* of the young woman, something Levi's re-narration avoids. To make this clear I return the scene back to Cavarero, contrasting it with her analysis of the narration (and re-narration) of the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus. This contrast helps make sense of the paradox of a "totally

expositive” (Ibid.) uniqueness that exists despite the conditions for its existence being undermined: I suggest it is necessary to thematise an excess proper to uniqueness, an excess that is especially prominent in scenes of narrativity.

In my second chapter I noted that Judith Butler’s notion of apprehension can maintain both a negative and a positive valence. On the one hand, apprehension is a mode of knowing that operates in the wake of derealising violence. For Butler, derealising violence undermines the visibility of the life of the person undergoing violence: they are alive and yet their life is not perceived; they are, in this way, socially dead, falling outside of schemas of recognisability and intelligibility that police what constitutes the human (Butler 2008: 215; Patterson 1982: 38). The recognition open to those who fall outside of the norm of the human is one of apprehension. Apprehension “can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition” (Butler 2010: 5); it is a “mode of knowing that is not yet recognition, or may remain irreducible to recognition” (Ibid. 6); the derealised is perceived “in ways that are not always - or not yet - conceptual forms of knowledge” (Ibid. 5). On the other hand, apprehension can function apart from derealising violence. Understood in this way, apprehension is not just an abject form of being (mis)recognised, but a mode of visibility proper to the sense of the uniqueness of an existent. One *apprehends* another’s uniqueness, in a manner not reducible to conceptual, cognitive forms of knowledge. Cavarero’s intermittent qualifier to the visibility of another’s uniqueness - that one is given a *sense* of another’s uniqueness - is pertinent here. In Cavarero’s Italian, *sense* is not *senso* (the direct translation of the English, both with their roots in the Latin *sensus*) but rather *sapore*, which might be translated as *flavour* or *taste*. To get a flavour or a taste of another’s uniqueness (or of one’s own uniqueness, as Cavarero frequently intimates) is precisely not a conceptual, cognitive form of knowledge: it carries an embodied immediacy that bypasses cognition, signifying a particular aspect that can be discerned despite it being intermingled with other aspects.⁵⁹ The mode one comes to know uniqueness via can be thought of as apprehension. Apprehension here is decoupled from derealising violence and becomes an element of an emancipatory politics, one that has as its subjects those who exist despite the dominant schemas of intelligibility that bestow recognition: fugitive forms of existence that evade visibility.⁶⁰ In this

⁵⁹ For more on ‘sense’ and *sapore* see Paul Kottman’s ‘Translator’s Introduction’ to Cavarero’s *Relating Narratives* (2000: xviii, n. 39).

⁶⁰ If this notion of apprehension gives sense to forms of knowing of uniqueness, then it does so without ridding itself of its fundamental ambivalence. As the etymology of the word makes clear, and seen plainly in its various usages in English, to apprehend is to reach out (*ad*) and seize something (*prehendō*). The ‘seizing’ carries most of the word’s meaning, but the prefix is also important: the ‘*ad*’ signifies ‘towards’, so apprehension is an active seizing out from oneself towards another. The significance of this becomes clear when one contrasts apprehension with

chapter, in addition to interrogating the visibility of uniqueness in the context of violence, I begin to develop this sense of apprehension.

Destruction, Narrative, Uniqueness

In 'Narrative Against Destruction' (2015) Cavarero reads the work of W. G. Sebald, focusing on the manner in which Sebald's work narrates the biographies of those exposed to the violences of the Nazi concentration camps. Cavarero notes that, "faced with the fact of extermination" (Ibid. 5), many authors writing after the second world war "were able to identify with clarity the crucial relationship between destruction and narration, between the dismantling of the human being perpetrated by the totalitarian machine and the saving power of life stories that restore the human status of uniqueness to the victims" (Ibid.). Following Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1962), Cavarero notes that it is the "absolute erasure" (2015: 5) perpetrated by totalitarian extermination that necessitates this process of storying. The challenge to such a project, however, lies in the "inexplicability and on the excess" (Ibid. 6) of the events of extermination "with regard to our categories of understanding and our standards of judgement" (Ibid.), a position most famously articulated by Primo Levi throughout *If This is a Man* (1987) and *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989). For Cavarero, Sebald negotiates this challenge by narrating the life stories of the detainees of the camps: "[t]o rewrite their biographies becomes the way for Sebald to avoid direct confrontation with the inexplicability of the horror, while at the same time it preserves the effects of such inexplicability in the personal story of those whose destiny has been marked by the destructive machine" (Ibid.). In this way, Sebald picks up the challenge noted by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, of preserving

the uniqueness of experience in the face of its theorization, and [...] the shock of the unintelligible in the face of its interpretation; with the preservation, that is, of reality itself in the midst of our own efforts at interpreting it and through the necessary process of its textualization (1992: xx).

The challenge for Cavarero (as well as for Laub and Felman) is on the one hand to

comprehension: the 'com' prefix signifies the bringing of things together, so comprehending can mean seizing all parts of something (resonant with its meaning of 'understanding'), but also seizing something *with others*. In this latter sense, comprehension would be a properly social form of apprehension, and thus perhaps a better notion than 'apprehend' in accounting for the sensing of uniqueness, given uniqueness' fundamental sociality (its "totally expositive" (Cavarero 2000: 20) character). One can also see this latter notion of 'comprehend' at work in Rancière (translated as 'understand' rather than 'comprehend' in the English (1999: 44-47)).

avoid the risk of “the horror of the perpetrated destruction” (Cavarero 2015: 7) becoming meaningless because of its excess in relation to received ethical and political categories, while on the other to not efface this excess in a way that would falsify the truth of the extermination camp. For Cavarero, Sebald successfully takes up this challenge by confronting “the aporia of narrating the unspeakable [...] in giving sense to an embodied uniqueness, precisely that which the Nazi laboratories have sought to erase from the earth” (Ibid. 8). It would not be enough to leave the horrors of destruction unspoken: “[i]f it is not named, narrated, translated in literature, even in this case, then the inexplicability of horror remains sealed in the silence of the defenceless victims, from whose perspective Sebald always speaks” (Ibid.). In this way Sebald does not restore the lives of those exposed to the extermination camps as such; he rather restores the damage and destruction wrought on these lives, a damage and destruction that would too often remain silent (if not invisible). In particular, for Cavarero, the form of “biographical narration” (Ibid.) avoids forcing the events of the Shoah to conform to “a conceptual framework, a system that gives sense” (Ibid.); instead, it “assembles the fragments of a life experience that disclose the meaning of the uniqueness of that very life” (Ibid.), indeed, disclose this meaning in the face of uniqueness’ imperilled annihilation.

If there is a role for narrative to play in relation to lives exposed to violence (a violence that encompasses the story of these lives as well as the materiality of these lives), and if narrative functions to maintain something of the uniqueness of those exposed to violence, then Cavarero’s deployment of uniqueness to make sense of scenes of destruction is not immediately clear. On the one hand, it appears that Auschwitz was precisely the paradigmatic instance of the annulling of singular uniqueness. Writing in *Horrorism* (2011), Cavarero argues that the “individual identities” (Ibid. 42) of the detainees were “systematically nullified” (Ibid.); the Nazi Lager was concerned with the production of a living being “in which the uniqueness of every human being, and hence the necessarily unique dimension of a life that concludes with death, has been annihilated” (Ibid. 43). On the other hand, it seems that Cavarero wants to insist that despite the extreme violence of Auschwitz singular uniqueness is somehow retained:

[t]he narratable self, whose fragments are collected, is here above all a wounded, traumatized, destroyed self, brought by force to the edge of the abyss of the inhuman. What is in question here is not the narrative unity of the identity of a life, or a self [...] Rather, what is in question is the narratability of the lives themselves, still, again, and despite everything, in

human terms (2015: 10).

In this way the life exposed to Auschwitz retains “narrative unity” but has lost its “narratability”. How can uniqueness both be annulled in the *Lager* and yet somehow be present in the biographical accounts offered by Sebald or others? What is the role of narratability in sustaining the singular uniqueness of these lives? How does uniqueness maintain visibility?

To try and make sense of these issues it is necessary to return to Cavarero’s *Relating Narratives* (2000), where Cavarero insists that a crucial aspect of the value of relating narratives is that one’s story is told by another. This telling makes visible one’s *who*, as distinct from one’s *what*, and it is the *who* that is properly expressive of one’s uniqueness. Further, this *who* is utterly expositive, indeed, this is precisely why the telling of one’s story *by another* is significant. For Cavarero, another’s telling of one’s life-story makes clear the “figural *unity*” (2000: 1, emphasis original) of one’s existence, which does not mean that the telling determines what this unity will look like, but rather that the telling ensures that a *sense* of this unity is possible; the telling makes “tangible” (Ibid. 20) the figural unity of one’s *who*. One requires “*another perspective*” (Ibid. 3, emphasis original) in the telling of one’s life-story because the meaning of one’s life-story is generated by one’s actions, and therefore any account that one offers of one’s life-story will always be provisional since these actions are still being traced. The telling of one’s life-story by another is thus faithful to “a uniqueness of personal identity, which, far from being a substance, is of a totally expositive and relational character” (Ibid. 20). Without a “scene of plurality” (Ibid.) where one appears to others, one’s appearance is undermined, and thus so too is one’s sense of *who* one is, in that the apprehension of this *who* is constituted by the presence of others.

In the context of Auschwitz, the detainees’ narratability was radically undermined precisely because the plural scene of appearance, which for Cavarero sustains the “totally expositive” (Ibid.) character of uniqueness and is thus a condition for narratability, was also undermined in the detainees’ exposure to the violences of the camp. Relating the narrative of one whose narratability was undermined makes tangible a sense of the figural unity of the *who* of the detainee. However, the status of uniqueness is still unresolved in this account: Cavarero appears to want to insist that uniqueness is both utterly expositive and thus exposed to annihilation and yet is not, finally, extinguished. It is clear that narrative plays an important role in negotiating this paradoxical status of an imperiled uniqueness that both is and is not destroyed, but precisely how it does this is left underspecified in Cavarero’s account. To try and make sense of this aspect of Cavarero’s argument, I turn to a story told by Miklós Nyiszli

(1960: 88-93), a Hungarian-Jewish physician recruited into the Auschwitz Sonderkommando by the SS, and recounted by Primo Levi (1989: 38-40). I then contrast this telling with the various tellings of the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus, a myth Cavarero draws on to think through the status of uniqueness and the challenges surrounding its visibility. Through this contrast, what will become apparent is the necessity in thematising a notion of excess as proper to uniqueness, which can make sense of the paradoxical status of a uniqueness that is both totally expositive and yet not absolutely nullified in isolation; a fugitive uniqueness that escapes its capture and evades its solitary confinement.

Emergence and Singularity in Auschwitz

Miklós Nyiszli's story concerns a young woman of sixteen years of age who, after being placed in a gas chamber with many other recent arrivals, is found on the floor of the chamber still alive. For Levi this is a story that "deserves to be meditated upon" (1989: 38). The men of the Sonderkommando, charged with the "horrendous everyday work" (Ibid.) of "sorting out the tangle of corpses, washing them with hoses and transporting them to the crematorium" (Ibid. 38-39) are "perplexed" (Ibid. 39): their trade is death, but "this woman is still alive" (Ibid.). The Sonderkommandos show kindness to the woman: "[t]hey hide her, warm her, bring her beef broth" (Ibid.). She is utterly disorientated, exposed to the humiliation and suffering of the sequence of arrival at Auschwitz without understanding it:

[s]he has not understood, but she has seen; therefore she must die, and the men of the squad know it just as they know that they too must die for the same reason. But these slaves, debased by alcohol and the daily slaughter, are transformed; they no longer have before them the anonymous mass, the flood of frightened, stunned people coming off boxcars: they have a person (Ibid.).

In the face of a repeated exposure to, and active participation in, the horror of the gas chambers, the men of the Sonderkommando are debased: their world is a world of anonymous figures, whose singularity is radically effaced on entry to the camp and then obliterated in their extermination. In this regard, it is not simply the woman's temporary survival that is miraculous but further that her singularity punctuates the deadened, deadening rationality that permeates the camp to the point where the possibility of hope is extinguished. For a brief moment the woman appeared to the Sonderkommando as "the single individual, the *Mitmensch*, the co-man: the human

being of flesh and blood standing before us, within the reach of our providentially myopic senses” (Ibid. 40). Her emergence (despite the “providentially myopic senses” common to all save the “saints” (Ibid.)) is not the counterexample that proves hope can flourish in infernal conditions: her ‘survival’ was only temporary; she was soon presented to a member of the SS who concluded that she was to be killed by “a bullet in the back of the neck” (Nyiszli 1960: 93). Even if she did not understand, she had seen too much: if older she might have been “convinced to stay quiet about what has happened to her” (Levi 1989: 40), but at the age of sixteen she has no “sense” (Ibid.) and, understanding or no, she could not emerge as a witness; it was already an affront to the rationality of the camp that she had emerged as a singular being to begin with. The woman becomes a paradox, the presence of a person in a place where she could not have been: there is no hope in Auschwitz, and *she*, in all of the singular particularity that is carried with the pronoun, was there.

If the emergence of the young woman in Auschwitz is not a sign of hope’s eternal flourishing but rather the instantiation of a paradox (or, at best, “a ludicrous determination to live” in David Rousset’s words (1947: 29)), her paradoxical emergence is nonetheless ethically and politically significant, and as such asking after the conditions that subtend such a paradoxical emergence becomes an important task. What seems crucial is that the woman appears *to* someone, or rather, to many people, that is, the members of the Sonderkommando. She also appears to the SS officer, and this is important as well, for it demonstrates again that her appearance is not of itself a sign of hope, and that appearance alone does not carry ethical weight (even if, in most instances, appearance is a necessary condition for the possibility of any ethics as such). Crucially, however, she also appears to the one who reads the words on the pages of Nyiszli and Levi’s books. Finally, Nyiszli and Levi do more than simply recount her existence: her appearance is mediated through their respective words; their words act upon her appearance, her emergence takes the form it does in part through their active involvement in the construction and recounting of that form. This is, of course, precisely Levi’s concern at the beginning of *The Drowned and the Saved*: that the events of the Holocaust become more difficult to recount with precision owing to their existence primarily in Levi’s memory (constituting him as a “narratable self” (2000: 34) in Cavarero’s words), and owing to the way memory becomes “crystallised” (Levi 1989: 12) through the repeated storying of the events.⁶¹ If in recounting the story of the paradoxical emergence of the young woman Levi also acts on this story and thus acts

⁶¹ For Cavarero, “[t]he effect of a life-story, whatever the form of its tale, always consists in a reification of the self that crystallizes the unforeseeability of the existent” (2000: 35-36). See also Judith Butler’s ‘Primo Levi for the Present’ in *Parting Ways* (2012: 181-204).

on a particular aspect of her emergence (crucially different to a claim that Levi *creates* the emergence of the young woman, which would rob her of her material particularity and offer to Levi powers beyond any human; the woman is not, in Cavarero's words, "a construction of the text, or the effect of the performative power of narration" (2000: 35)), what is interesting is that this phenomenon is not only restricted to the one narrating (or re-narrating) her story. Indeed, if Levi mediates one aspect of her emergence (her emergence as story) then those others to whom the woman emerges, the members of the Sonderkommando and the SS officer, also mediate her emergence and are consequently not passive receptacles to her emergence but are part of the conditions of the form of her emergence. And as indicated, her emergence occurs in relation to those who, on picking up the books of Nyizsli and Levi, read the words contained: the woman emerges to the reader, a fact which reveals the act of reading to be precisely one that conditions her emergence as much as it inscribes the limits of the acting subject.

The emergence of the young woman in Auschwitz would seem to be an extreme instance of the limits of narrative unity. One is offered a glimpse of her life at its catastrophic end, her life-story unknown. This is not to say that she is without a history: to equate an absence of a life-story with the absence of a history would be to repeat the violence that was deployed precisely to rid the world of the woman's existence in the past, present and future. But it is to say that her life-story, in being taken up by Levi and recounted, is deployed in a relational medium (the written biographical testimony) that testifies to the self's necessary sociality; that is, to its narratability. Indeed, for Cavarero the absence of the content of the woman's life-story from our knowledge is incidental to our apprehension of it:

[t]o the experience for which the *I* is immediately, in her unreflecting sense [*sapere*] of existing, the *self* of her own narrating memory - there corresponds a perception of the other as the *self* of her own story. It does not matter whether the story of the other is known in detail, or whether it is totally unknown. The other always has a life-story and is a narratable identity whose uniqueness also consists, above all, in this story (2000: 35).

If knowledge of the content of the life-story does not matter for one's perception of another as a narratable self, nonetheless the content of the life-story does condition the sense of the unity of the *who* that is made tangible in a life-story's telling. In this way the telling of the story - its form, style, tropes etc. - matters, since a story can be told that, while offering a sense of the other as a narratable self (the extension of the sheer fact of existence as emergence to others), undermines the figural unity of the *who*

whose life, even if only a fragment, is narrated. However, if for Cavarero one's uniqueness and one's life-story are inextricably bound together, then it is necessary to ask how a sense of one's narratable self can emerge given that uniqueness is "*totally* expositive and relational" (Ibid. 20, my emphasis). In isolation, how does one appear if "[o]ne always appears to someone" (Ibid.), if "[o]ne cannot appear if there is no one else there" (Ibid.)?

This issue is made stark in Nyiszli's original telling, where the form of his narrative omits and effaces aspects of the relational scene that he was a part of, and thus interrupts the uniqueness of the young woman's narratable self. However, as it will be suggested, Cavarero's insistence that appearing is "the only principle of reality" (Ibid. 21) needs to be supplemented with a recognition of the excess of this utterly expositive existent. That is, relationality exceeds its temporal and spatial instances. This point requires moving beyond Cavarero, for whom relationality is always "a material, physical relationality that is in the here and now" (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 139). The scene of plurality may start in one's immediately-proximal exposure to another (indeed, as Cavarero notes, this is one of the characteristics of the natal scene (2000: 21)), however within the field of narratability this plural scene of reciprocal self-exposure is contorted to extend into a myriad of sometimes contradictory locations and temporalities. First, however, it is important to understand the manner in which the conditions for the apprehension of the uniqueness of another are undermined, prior to their being exceeded. For this, Nyiszli's account proves exemplary.

This is how Nyiszli describes his witnessing of the woman's emergence:

[s]he looked around her with astonishment, and glanced at us. She still did not realize what was happening to her, and was still incapable of distinguishing the present, of knowing whether she was dreaming or really awake. A veil of mist clouded her consciousness. Perhaps she vaguely remembered a train, a long line of box cars which had brought her here. Then she had lined up for selection and, before she knew what was happening, been swept along by the current of the mass into a large, brilliantly lighted underground room. Everything had happened so quickly. Perhaps she remembered that everyone had had to undress. The impression had been disagreeable, but everybody had yielded resignedly to the order. And so, naked, she had been swept along into another room. Mute anguish had seized them all. The second room had also been lighted by powerful lamps. Completely bewildered, she had let her gaze wander over the mass huddled there, but found none of her family. Pressed close

against the wall, she had waited, her heart frozen, for what was going to happen. All of a sudden the lights had gone out, leaving her enveloped in total darkness. Something had stung her eyes, seized her throat, suffocated her. She had fainted. There her memories ceased (Ibid. 89-90).

But of course, these are not the woman's memories but rather Nyiszli's speculation of what her memories might have been. Nyiszli's account begins as fantasy: "[p]erhaps she vaguely remembered a train, a long line of box cars which had brought her here" (my emphasis). The account then shifts, as in the next sentence Nyiszli states "[t]hen she had lined up for selection and, before she knew what was happening, been swept along by the current of the mass into a large, brilliantly lighted underground room". Is Nyiszli still speculating here? Clearly he must be, since at this moment the woman has only just become conscious and not yet spoken to Nyiszli. And yet Nyiszli continues with an assurance and a narrative sleight of hand that presents his speculation not simply as the possible memories of the woman, but as the facts of what occurred. Even as Nyiszli recounts entering into conversation with the woman she is denied her own voice:

I received the first reply to my questions. Not wanting to tire her, I asked only a few. I learned that she was sixteen years old, and that she had come with her parents in a convoy from Transylvania (Ibid. 90).

One hears her responses via what Nyiszli "learned"; her voice, despite being audible to Nyiszli, is effaced in his narrative account, existing only in *noetic* form. The woman is granted the privilege of existing in Nyiszli's mind, almost a product of his imagination, as if rather than narrating the woman's life Nyiszli were authoring it, or rather narrating his own fantasy. Rather than offering a sense of agency to the woman's actions, Nyiszli's narration robs the woman of agency. She ceases to be the person who was in front of Nyiszli and becomes a character in a story he is the author of; that is, Nyiszli ceases to be the narrator of her life-story. Her narratable self recedes, replaced by Nyiszli's autobiographical narratable self. The possibility of a certain sense of restitution disappears in the form of Nyiszli's description; or rather, the dangers of the project of narrative restitution itself are realised. The objection to Nyiszli's narration then is not that his account does not match up to reality: it is not that his speculation of what occurred to the woman is unlikely to have happened (on the contrary). What matters is that Nyiszli's account fails to be faithful to the relational scene that Nyiszli was a party to: within this context Nyiszli's speculation, however plausible, functions to compound his account's obscuring of *who* the woman is; to inhibit the visibility of her uniqueness.

Eurydice, “The use of her but for a while I crave”

Nyiszli's account's failure to narrate the *who* of the woman can be better grasped if one relates his account to an example of narrative failure that Cavarero draws on in *Relating Narratives*: the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus. Eurydice is the wife of Orpheus, the renowned poet and musician. She is killed after being distracted while running to escape the embrace of Aristaeus, not seeing a venomous serpent that bites her ankle. Orpheus is distraught, singing songs of mourning; such is his grief that he descends into Hades to attempt to retrieve his wife. Through his music and song he convinces the gods of the underworld to return Eurydice to life - “[t]he use of her but for a while I crave”, he entreats them (Ovid 2002: 296) - the gods' one condition being that he not turn around to look at her until they both reach the surface. However, as they approach the end of their ascent, Orpheus, uncertain that his wife is following, turns around, and Eurydice slips back into Hades.

Cavarero draws on the story as it is found in Virgil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as Rainer Maria Rilke's poem 'Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes' and, finally, Hilda Doolittle's poem 'Eurydice'. In each version the representation of Eurydice shifts: in Virgil her voice and perspective are briefly staged; in Ovid, Eurydice's only words are a farewell, which Orpheus scarcely hears; in Rilke she utters the single word “Who?” in response to Hermes' cry “He has turned around!” (1945: 33); while in Doolittle she becomes an autobiographical narrator. For Cavarero, the Eurydice myth as found in Virgil and Ovid presents a Eurydice who is marked primarily by an “un-relation” (2000: 101), illustrated by “the separation of the two lovers” (Ibid.) at the moment of Eurydice's second death. In Rilke's interpretation this is pushed to the extreme, as Eurydice is presented as absolutely passive and self-enclosed, her single utterance of “Who?” notwithstanding. Unlike Virgil and Ovid, Rilke makes Eurydice “the central figure of the myth” (Cavarero 2000: 104), however here Eurydice is “wrapt in herself” (Rilke 1945: 32): Eurydice thinks “not of the husband going before them, nor of the road ascending into life” (Ibid.); her “great death [...] was so new that for the time she could take nothing in” (Ibid.). For Cavarero this Eurydice is “in her absolute solitude without any relation to the other, without any memory, and without any story” (2000: 104). She is “a Eurydice who inhabits the narrative context, without, however, belonging to it [...] The *who* of her question therefore appears as a word that, while inserting her voice into the plot of the Rilkean tale, nonetheless keeps her external to it” (Ibid. 105).

Eurydice's story, in its various re-tellings, resonates with that told by Nyiszli, and

not simply because “the Orphic trope is ubiquitously present in post-fascist culture” (Hell 2010: 127). In both the myth of Eurydice and Nyiszli’s story, a woman is condemned to death and yet is reanimated in infernal conditions, only for a final, fatal instant to end her paradoxical emergence. In both, a woman emerges in relation to another: Orpheus for Eurydice, Nyiszli for the woman. And in both, a crucial question hangs over each woman’s narratability, and thus over the responsibility that comes with offering a narration of another’s life. There is also incongruity between the two accounts. First, Nyiszli is not the lover of the woman: Nyiszli is not motivated out of love to save her, and their story is not a tragic romance. Second, unlike Orpheus, it does not seem that Nyiszli turns around, and thus Nyiszli is not the cause of the woman’s final demise in the manner that Orpheus is of Eurydice’s (indeed, Nyiszli attempts to postpone the woman’s death by negotiating with the SS officer). One could go further and suggest that if Orpheus is *responsible* for failing to retrieve Eurydice from Hades (a point that is already contested), Nyiszli is not similarly responsible for the woman’s death; however this would be to work within a moral-legal framework that was undermined in the context of the concentration camp, as Giorgio Agamben has suggested (2002: 20-21). Finally, whereas Virgil, Ovid and Rilke narrate the story of Orpheus (despite, for the most part, keeping Eurydice external to it), Nyiszli is both narrator and protagonist. It is this dual role that contributes much to the problematic nature of his narrative account. If Nyiszli inhabited a relational scene with the woman, why not narrate her words? Why indulge in extended speculation if he was exposed to the truth of the scene at first hand? It is as if Orpheus, on leaving Hades, were to sing the tale of what occurred, but rather than maintain the relational scene of appearance he was party to, he instead glosses over any reciprocal self-exposure (after all, “he does not call her, does not communicate, does not ask anything” (Cavarero 2000: 106)) and only speculates on Eurydice’s existence in Hades, omitting any words Eurydice spoke to him. On this reading, Nyiszli’s account is unfaithful to the “self-exhibiting of unique beings within a plural scene” (Cavarero 2000: 124) which “are already inextricably interwoven with one another” (Ibid.).

Nyiszli’s dual role as narrator and protagonist is also what refuses him access to a reworking of the scene. Cavarero contrasts Rilke’s account of Eurydice to the one offered by Hilda Doolittle (more commonly known by her initials H.D.), where H.D. rewrites the myth by making Eurydice the autobiographical narrator of her experience. H.D.’s account refuses the tragic reading of the myth that dominates interpretations; instead, H.D. has Eurydice accuse Orpheus of “arrogance” and “ruthlessness”: “if you had let me wait / I had grown from listlessness / into peace, / if you had let me rest with the dead, / I had forgot you / and the past” (1986: 51). Orpheus’ inability to not turn

around is shifted from a mark of his “overflowing passion” (Cavarero 2000: 106), to a cruel mark of control; an anxiety of being forgotten by her, of her inhabiting a space fundamentally apart from him. For H.D.’s Eurydice, when Orpheus turns it is as if he sees in her face not the unique existent that is she, but simply the sign of himself: “what was it you saw in my face? / the light of your own face, / the fire of your own presence?” (1986: 52). For Cavarero, H.D. makes Eurydice an “active centre” (2000: 107) of the narrative and, by asking what Orpheus sees when he gazes on her as he turns around, Eurydice “usurps the usual privilege of the other’s perspective” (Ibid.).

One might think, then, that Nyzli himself, by presenting the experiences of the woman that one does not have access to, is making her an “active centre” of his narrative: Nyzli could be thought of as gifting a narrative account of the woman’s life, in a way which she was denied by the architects of the Nazi genocide. And yet his gift, if it is a gift, is in a sense unwanted: precisely because one knows that Nyzli is speculating about the possible thoughts of the young woman, and further effacing his part in this speculation and thus misleading the reader, uniqueness is not returned to her. We do not have the woman, but a fantasy of Nyzli’s. Nyzli’s fantasy is the story of any detainee on their arrival; except it cannot be the woman’s, as by offering a generalised experience - an experience proper to the *any* - then the woman - the who, or the you or, for Cavarero, the *tu* (Ibid. 91) - disappears, or rather, becomes indistinct. When she offered Nyzli an account of herself we know only the information that he chose to impart. Perhaps this was all the information she provided, but this biographical account is stripped of the particular meaning that it carried as it was enunciated in her voice.⁶² In Cavarero’s words, one could say that Nyzli’s account “risks frustrating the reciprocal appearance [*comparire*] of *uniqueness* that qualifies the dynamic of recognition as an ethic” (Ibid.). Levi’s account is all the more important for its faithfulness to the woman’s uniqueness simply by his refusal to indulge the fantasy of Nyzli. Nyzli is, of course, narrating his life-story, not the woman’s, and as such the charge that his account fails to be faithful to the relational scene of which she is a part may be unwarranted: one could retort that Nyzli never wished to tell the woman’s life-story; that if one receives a sense of her life-story - of her narratable self - then this is incidental to Nyzli’s telling of his own life-story. And yet, it is unclear to what extent the woman’s life-story is (or, better, *could be*) ‘incidental’ to Nyzli’s, and, if it is not as incidental as it might seem, to what extent a responsibility might emerge to narrate her life-story that Nyzli was party to, a responsibility that Nyzli’s account fails to meet. Nyzli’s story, despite the stylistic form, is autobiography, not biography. Like Rilke’s

⁶² See Cavarero’s *For More than One Voice* (2005).

representation of Eurydice, Nyiszli, despite offering an account centered on the woman, makes the *who* of the woman external to the scene. Indeed, Nyiszli goes further than Rilke in that he removes the woman's voice entirely from his narrative, thus making the woman's voice external to his narrative in a literal manner.

Excess, Evasion

It might seem that Nyiszli's story primarily distinguishes itself from Orpheus' in the fact that Nyiszli did not 'turn around'. But perhaps Nyiszli did turn, only his turn occurred later, after the liberation of Auschwitz and when Nyiszli came to write his biographical account of his experiences of the camp (the brief emergence of the woman an incidental moment in his story). The scene of the woman's emergence thus needs to extend to encompass Nyiszli's writing itself. When Orpheus turns, what motivates his turning is an uncertainty: he questions his knowledge of Eurydice's presence and so, requiring reassurance, turns to perceive the image of his wife. For H.D.'s Eurydice, as has been noted, this is a mark of Orpheus' "arrogance" and "ruthlessness" (1986: 51). His turning to look is "a way of knowing and capturing" (Butler 2004a: 97) Eurydice, to fix her in his mind, to banish uncertainty, an uncertainty that he cannot bear despite the injunction clearly levelled at him not to turn. And so, in the process of knowing Eurydice - a knowledge achieved not through the dynamic experience of voice but rather the object-permanence of sight - she slips into immateriality and back into Hades. Cavarero notes that sight implies "an active position of the subject, who not only can open and close her eyes when she wants to but is not affected by the objects of her vision [...] Sight secures, in other words, a position that is detached and uninvolved" (2002: 508). In gazing on Eurydice - Orpheus active in contrast to Eurydice's passivity - Orpheus does not engage in a mutually relational scene: Eurydice is incidental to his knowledge of her. Orpheus' knowledge corresponds to Eurydice's *what*, precisely to the extent that her *who* can only emerge in a relational scene of reciprocal self-exposure. The narrative provided by Ovid and Rilke only presents the gaze of Orpheus, and the possible interruption of this non-relational scene by the voice of Eurydice is foreclosed by Orpheus' failure to simply call out to his wife in the midst of his anxiety.

As has been noted, an absence of voice is also central to Nyiszli's account. Nyiszli does speak to the woman, and she does return the gesture with her own voice, but her voice is rendered mute in Nyiszli's telling of his story. In the act of presenting the scant facts that Nyiszli gleans from the woman - that she is sixteen, that she came from Transylvania and arrived at Auschwitz with her parents - Nyiszli represents the woman as a knowledge utterly dependent upon his gaze. Nyiszli transforms the

reciprocal scene of vocalic mutual self-exposure - Nyiszli asking questions, the woman answering those questions - into a non-reciprocal accounting *of* the woman. Despite the fact that, unlike Orpheus the poet, Nyiszli does call out to the woman in his telling of his story (and, by proxy, the woman's story), Nyiszli returns the scene to a unidirectional gaze that secures a knowledge of the woman at the expense of *who* she is. In this sense, Nyiszli's 'turn' is temporally disjointed, occurring after the woman's death when her voice is effaced in Nyiszli's account of himself.

If Nyiszli and Orpheus share a desire for the certainty of knowledge then, at the same time, this desire also carries a sense of capture. Judith Butler makes this point in relation to Eurydice, noting that "the gaze through which she is apprehended is the gaze through which she is banished. Our gaze pushes her back to death, since we are prohibited from looking, and we know that by looking, we will lose her" (2004a: 95). Butler goes on:

[w]e were not supposed to look back to what may not be seen, but we did; we broke a certain law, a law that would have mandated that we look only and always forward to unambiguous life. We turned around, needing to know, but it was this need to know, to know with certainty, that undid us, for we could not capture her that way. And when we sought to have her through knowing her, we lost her, since she cannot be had that way (Ibid. 96).

If this desire for knowledge of Eurydice is also a capturing of Eurydice, it should be stressed that this desire for knowledge (and consequently capture) is marked by failure: although it was thought that, in turning, "looking would be a way of knowing and capturing [...] it turned out that she was uncapturable, that capture will not be the way in which we might experience her" (Ibid. 97). Eurydice slips away, becoming immaterial, ghost-like, for Butler a sign that signifies - at a psychoanalytic register - a traumatic loss that "cannot be handled by anyone, anywhere, where the loss signifies what we cannot master" (Ibid. 96-97). Writing of the paintings of Eurydice by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, Butler notes that the image of Eurydice slipping away "emerges from a past which was said to be unrepresentable, where a certain representation nevertheless emerges against the stricture that is imposed upon representation" (Ibid. 96). Although Butler is intervening in the context of Ettinger's psychoanalytic practice, her comments also indicate that despite the forms of representation that efface Eurydice's relational, expositive existence, nonetheless something of Eurydice evades the capture that is enacted via forms of representation that both refuse the presence of her voice and are structured around the gaze of Orpheus. This is another way of saying that, although in

Ovid's telling of Orpheus' actions Eurydice's *what* is represented at the expense of her *who*, nonetheless the *who* of Eurydice is not eternally banished. The *who* of Eurydice emerges only in relation with another, but if this is the case then it is also true that a failure to maintain the relational scene, which is a condition for the apprehension of this *who*, is only ever a temporary failure: the conditions for Eurydice's *who* exceed any particular instance of their (failed) enunciation. The failed representation of Eurydice does not capture her, precisely because her *who* can always exceed any representation of it: Eurydice's *who* can re-emerge as her life-story is picked up by another and re-narrated. Her gaze is affirmed, or her voice emerges.

Indeed, in Virgil's earlier telling, unlike Ovid, this second death *is* punctuated by Eurydice's voice:

'Orpheus,' she cried, 'we are ruined, you and I! / What utter madness is this? See, once again / The cruel fates are calling me back and darkness / Falls on my swimming eyes. Goodbye forever. / I am borne away wrapped in an endless night, / Stretching to you, no longer yours, these hands, / These helpless hands.' (1982: 141).

It is not simply the punctuation of her words that corrects the unidirectional self-exposure in Ovid's narration but, as Julia Hell notes, so too is Eurydice's gaze deployed in contrast to the dominant insistence on the import of Orpheus' turning (2010: 128). For Virgil, Orpheus sees Eurydice vanish "like smoke into thin air" (1982: 141), but Eurydice also is "unable anymore / To see him as he vainly grasped at shadows / With so much more to say" (Ibid.). Who it was that had "so much more to say" is unclear in Virgil's account: the line could be qualifying the desire of either Eurydice or Orpheus, although it is not unreasonable to assume both would have wanted to continue their conversation if it were possible. In either case, the presence of Eurydice's voice and the switch in perspective maintain a plural scene within which both Orpheus and Eurydice can emerge as expositive and relational.⁶³ This possibility is closed down in Ovid and Rilke, just as it is closed down in Nyiszli's telling of the young woman's emergence from the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Here the issue is not Nyiszli's account's failure to change the perspective to that of the young woman: as a protagonist in the story Nyiszli would make the mistake of authoring her life rather than relating their mutual self-exposure, as he does when he speculates about her possible experiences prior to entering the gas chamber in a style that simultaneously effaces this speculation. Instead, it is the absence of the woman's voice *when she did indeed*

⁶³ This does not necessarily mean that the scene is marked by equality or justice; the relating of the scene is simply faithful to Eurydice's *who*.

speak to Nyiszli - an aspect of what Cavarero has elsewhere described as the devocalization of *logos* (2005: 33) - that undermines the narrating of the *who* of the woman, this *who* being fundamentally expositive and relational.

And yet, the woman evades Nyiszli's capture of her: she re-emerges in Levi's telling in a manner that is faithful to her *who* while also exceeding his telling. How does Levi stay faithful to this excess? To say that Levi is faithful to the excess of meaning attached to the woman's emergence - to her evasion of capture - is not to say that Levi causes this evasion and excess: evasion and excess occur despite any representation that would capture meaning. In being faithful to the excess and evasion of the woman's emergence Levi, in his apprehension of the woman, simply refuses to evacuate her *who* from the scene he presents. The excess and evasion of the woman is indifferent to the specific sites of its representation: this can be most clearly seen in the fact that Nyiszli's story is the gateway to the woman's emergence despite also failing to represent her *who* and this *who*'s evasion and excess.⁶⁴ The poeticity of the text - its "polysemous" (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 134) quality, or what Jacques Rancière might call its "literarity" (2004: 103) - is something Nyiszli has no control over: it is the condition for his story being appropriated by Levi, even as it at the same time undermines Levi as the guarantor of this excess and evasion.

What, then, is the relation of this excess to the use of narrative *against destruction* (Cavarero 2015)? If, following Cavarero, narrative is deployed in the face of destruction, then it is also true that this is motivated out of a destruction of narrative to begin with. The status of the narratable self whose conditions of narrability have been radically undermined is left underspecified in Cavarero's 'Narrative Against Destruction'. In *Relating Narratives*, Cavarero argues that the narratable self - the *who* of the unique existent - "remains, paradoxically, an unexpressed uniqueness" (2000: 113) when the relational scene of mutual self-exposure, which is a necessary condition for the emergence of the *who*, breaks down: they are a unique existent despite uniqueness emerging only in the in-between of a scene of mutual self exposure; a nonsensical insular-unique-existent despite uniqueness only being *sensical* in its utterly expositive quality. What needs to be asked, then, is when uniqueness becomes 'sensical', which, following Rancière, is also to ask when it becomes *sensible*.⁶⁵ Cavarero does not explain why this remains a paradoxical uniqueness rather than simply the undermining of uniqueness. In the example through which she is working in

⁶⁴ "Indifference", Rancière says, "means two things: first, it is the rupture of all specific relations between a sensible form and the expression of an exact meaning; but it is also the rupture of every specific link between a sensible presence and a public that would be its public, the sensible milieu that would nourish it, or its natural addressee" (2013: 18).

⁶⁵ See the seventh thesis of Rancière's 'Ten Theses on Politics' (2010: 36).

this instance - that of unrequited love, where no amount of self-exhibition will maintain the *who* of the one whose love is unreciprocated - Cavarero suggests that this “on occasion, leads to suicide” (Ibid.); that suicide can become the tragic manner in which one demands the other recognise who one is. And yet the refused reciprocal self-exposure - what one could think of as a solitary confinement after capture - nonetheless results in a paradoxical uniqueness rather than the evisceration of uniqueness. This paradox can be made sense of if the uniqueness of the narratable self is thought alongside the *excess* proper to the *evasion of capture*; an excess and evasion seen in the narratable selves of both the young woman in Auschwitz and Eurydice. If there is an excess that can be thought alongside uniqueness - the narratable self’s evasion of capture - then it resides in the ever-open possibility of its re-emergence, itself a condition of not only the “Excess of Words” (Rancière 1994: 24-41) but also the excess of perspectives, which leave the “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2010: 36) riven in “homonymy” (Rancière 1994: 33).

As a historical reality the young woman in Auschwitz did not finally evade capture: she was murdered, just as six million Jews and five million other ‘*Untermenschen*’ were murdered. This fact should not be obscured through a focus on the narratability of the self and the play of discursive redeployment.⁶⁶ But neither should one downplay her repeated emergence beyond death, in the incidental narration of Nyzsli and the re-narration of Levi, since in doing so one would lose the possibility of identifying these scenes as ethically significant, and consequently lose the possibility of critique which Nyzsli’s account demands. If this emergence is to be marked then it will be via apprehension: a mode of knowing that negotiates the *seizing* or *laying hold* of the figural unity of another; a knowing (*comprehension*) which is not necessarily a capturing (*apprehension*); a vulnerable, fugitive sociality made visible in the tangible, reciprocal convocation of precarious lives.

⁶⁶ Cf. Cavarero’s critique of Jorge Luis Borges: “[i]n [Borges’] story, in which the lives are swallowed up, the relations become exclusively textual, or contextual. The text denies the reality from which it had originally drawn its inspiration. The representation, instead of re-presenting reality, swallows the originary scene and erases it” (2000: 127).

Chapter Six: Butler and Cavarero's Insurrectionary Humanism

So far in my thesis I have traced the theme of visibility in the works of Rancière, Butler and Cavarero, in particular focusing on its expression in the relationship between politics and violence. In this chapter I focus on this relationship, noting the ways that the ontology of vulnerability at the heart of Butler and Cavarero's work emerges from scenes of violence. I argue that Butler and Cavarero's ontology of vulnerability is better thought of as a paraontology, and that the account of humanness that emerges via this paraontology should be understood as an *insurrectionary humanism*.⁶⁷ To return to my first chapter, this insurrectionary humanism is an example of the poetics of politics that I identified as central to Rancière's work: Butler and Cavarero make visible an insurrectionary account of humanness that is disruptive of dominant conceptions of the human. This account is not posited in the abstract, however. As I have demonstrated in the preceding four chapters, Butler and Cavarero's work emerges in the context of violence. What motivates the poetics of politics that is their insurrectionary humanism are, in part, these scenes of violence.

As an *insurrectionary* humanism it is a humanism that is marked by uprising, revolt and mutiny, that is not posited in the abstract but intervenes in an always already given set of power relations and violences; it redistributes who and what is visible and sayable, decoupling certain bodies from certain capacities and creating the conditions for new forms of existence. As an insurrectionary *humanism* it enacts this insurrection around the locus of the human. I describe Butler and Cavarero's work as an insurrectionary humanism rather than a mere humanism, antihumanism, or posthumanism (Butler in particular has been associated with all of these)⁶⁸ because none of these conceptions prioritise the deployment of humanness as an intervention in dominant conceptions of the human. This is not to say that insurrectionary accounts of humanness cannot be thought as anti-, post- or mere humanisms; rather, it is to say

⁶⁷ On 'paraontology', cf. Fred Moten's 'Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)' (2013: 742) and his 'The Subprime and the beautiful' (2013a: 240). See also Cavarero's account of inclination, which is precisely the distortion of the rectitudinous ontology of the western political subject (2016). On 'insurrectionary humanism', cf. Judith Butler's "insurrection at the level of ontology" (2006: 33). Cavarero's relationship to an insurrectionary humanism may need to be complicated by her insistence on the posture of inclination in her most recent work (2016): the Latin root of 'insurrection' is *īnsurgō*, which signifies 'rising up', with its roots in the Latin *regus*, 'to lead', or 'to rule'. This, however, is beyond the scope of my thesis.

⁶⁸ For example, see Butler as offering a humanism in Honig (2010), an antihumanism in Weberman (2000), and a posthumanism in Ruti (2015).

that the notion of an insurrectionary humanism stresses intervention as its primary frame of analysis and thus makes clear something that is not overt in the other conceptions. This point should not be belaboured however: it is not my intention to offer a fourth term alongside anti-, post- or mere humanism; rather, I am using the term to delineate an aspect of Butler and Cavarero's work that I think is important and has been overlooked in the secondary literature. No doubt an insurrectionary humanism shares something of a mere humanism, an antihumanism and a posthumanism, even if it is not fully congruent with any of these terms. To make this clear, I critically engage the literature that sees Butler and Cavarero as offering a new humanism, stressing that reading Butler and Cavarero in this way misses the insurrectionary quality of their conceptualisations of humanness. I argue against accounts of their work that see them as developing a politics *from* an ethics or ontology: on my reading the staging of an insurrectionary account of humanness, often via the ethical or the ontic, *is* politics. The secondary literature too often imagines Butler and Cavarero's politics occurring as a *consequence* of their ethics or ontology, rather than as the *staging* of this insurrectionary ethics or ontology. Although I specify some of the content of Butler and Cavarero's insurrectionary humanism, building on my previous four chapters that have touched on their accounts of vulnerability and uniqueness, my primary argument concerns the way this ontology is deployed in their work and how the secondary literature understands its functioning.

Ontology and Violence

As I have suggested, Butler and Cavarero's respective accounts of humanness should be understood as a form of politics as Rancière might understand it. This requires doing a little work with Rancière: although Rancière is clear that he is not offering a theory of politics and that instead politics must be thought in its specificity, as I have demonstrated in my first chapter he is ambivalent when it comes to thinking the deployment of ontology as politics. Nonetheless, it is my contention that Rancière's thought can be pushed in this direction and that this is helpful in making sense of much scholarship that precisely deploys an ontology as an intervention in what is visible and sayable: an "ontological conflict" (2009a: 119), in Rancière's words.

Rancière's one "condition" (Ibid.) in thinking politics as an ontological conflict is that one "opt out" (Ibid.) of offering foundations for "knowledge and action" (Ibid.) that do not recognise the fact that a foundation "is always a 'might be' or an 'as if', which is reached afterwards, at the end of a process" (Ibid.). Foundations are constructed stagings, always provisional, and ideally only apparent in hindsight. In Sina Kramer's

words, “without a clear account of a method of rendering foundations contingent, or of rendering ontologies provisional, we tend to repeat the political move to establish an apolitical ground on which we can found a politic” (2015: 25). Although both Butler and Cavarero begin with particular foundations in their theorising, nonetheless these foundations function as a “‘might be’ or an ‘as if’” (Rancière 2009a: 119). For Butler,

[h]umanness is not something given, it is a differentiating effect of power, but we need the term because without it we cannot understand what is happening [...] Why go back to humanness? Well, because these concepts, these really important ideals, have not left us, they continue to form us. And there is a new way of understanding them that starts with the idea that they do not have a single form and that, in fact, their regulation operates politically to produce exclusions that we must challenge. For someone to say that a person who is considered non-human is, in fact, human means a resignification of humanness and emphasises that humanness can work in another form. On occasions it is important to use the term precisely in the way that the Human Rights discourse sometimes does: taking someone to whom the defining characteristics of humanness are not attributed and affirming that person is human is a performative act that redefines humanness in terms of liberation, as emancipation. It is not a question of searching for what was already there, but of making it happen (Birulés and Butler 2009).

One can see, then, that Butler’s staging of humanness is a way of “making [humanness] happen”; an active, performative moment of intervention within a dominant conception of humanness, a dominant conception that renders unintelligible those who do not conform to the particular normative ideal of the human, mobilised within the extant order. For Butler there are cases where “[o]ne has to remobilize the ‘human’ in order to create it anew, to give it, through performative force, a life where it has not had one before” (Butler in Kirby 2006: 153). Butler stages humanness - in particular vulnerability as central to humanness - as a “‘might be’ or an ‘as if’”, which heeds the dangers of a constitutive exclusion concomitant with any declaration of humanness, but does not therefore shy away from making such declarations (Butler 2010: 76-77). Inge Arteel’s notion of the “catachretic human” (2011: 83) in Butler’s work is helpful here: as a *catachretic* human, this notion of humanness is used incorrectly, improperly. Speaking of Antigone, Butler notes that “[i]f she is human, then the human has entered into catachresis: we no longer know its proper usage” (2000: 82).

Cavarero is also explicit in noting the contestatory character of her ontology:

she claims that

[w]hen I speak of the ontology of uniqueness, I intend precisely and above all a contrast with traditional ontology, which is constructed through the negation of uniqueness with abstract and universal categories such as the subject (or the *anthropos*, the individual, and so on) (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 137).

For Cavarero, “it is necessary to use words with bad intentions (*cattive intenzioni*), situating them in a different context that can overwhelm and recodify them, pushing those terms towards unpredictable meanings” (Ibid.). ‘Ontology’ is precisely such a word for her:

[m]y challenge consists of clearing out the philosophical ontology that takes “being” to be an abstract and universal category and replacing it with an ontology that instead signifies being with every human being in her/his corporeal and unrepeatability uniqueness. I deliberately use words in an incorrect and disrespectful way to strike at philosophy’s heart, avoiding any reverence (Ibid. 138).

Elisabetta Bertolino suggests the notion of “strategic essentialism” (Ibid. 139) to understand Cavarero’s ontology of uniqueness, which Cavarero says she is happy to accept, “provided that this essentialism is practiced with the worst intentions toward the phallogocentric tradition” (Ibid. 140). In a similar manner, Cathrine Ryther explicitly links Cavarero and Rancière by arguing that Cavarero uses her ontology of uniqueness “strategically to create a stage upon which her *specific political intervention* can be deployed” (2013: 5, emphasis original).⁶⁹

For Cavarero and Butler then, their stagings of an ontology of humanness begin

⁶⁹ Ryther’s article is, to my knowledge, the only comparison of Cavarero and Rancière in the literature. While I agree with Ryther that Cavarero’s ontology of uniqueness should be thought as a staging and thus as a moment of politics as Rancière understands it, I think Ryther is too generous in her analysis of Cavarero’s account of politics. For Ryther “[l]inking plural uniqueness to the appearance of politics is [...] not to claim a philosophical truth, but an active, egalitarian contestation of a specific and naturalized determination of who counts and how” (2013: 5). Instead, I would argue Cavarero’s account of politics is *both* a philosophical truth *and* an active intervention in who counts and how. That is, Cavarero’s linking of uniqueness to politics is properly theoretical and, unlike Rancière, does not build in an impropriety at the heart of her particular account. Thus, Ryther argues that “[p]lurality is [...] the space for the active and specific contestation of freedom-as-uniqueness, rather than the universal prerequisite space for any active contestation of the political question of how the human is counted whatsoever” (Ibid.). It is difficult to see how even an “active and specific” plurality does not offer a ground to political contestation, especially when this plurality, for Cavarero, is not simply the space for the staging of uniqueness but is co-constitutive with “the incontrovertible *fact* of a fundamental ontology” (Cavarero 2002a: 513).

with foundations, however these foundations are consciously deployed both to create the conditions for previously unimaginable forms of existence to maintain some form of intelligibility, and to disrupt prevailing conceptions of humanness. In this way one could argue that their respective ontologies of humanness are better thought as paraontologies, signifying that these ontologies not only operate *beside* ontology (“an insurrection at the level of ontology” (Butler 2006: 33)) but also are *distorted* ontologies and further *distort* prevailing ontologies: a parataxic parody of ontology. The disruption of prevailing ontologies of humanness matters because of the attendant violences associated with these prevailing ontologies. As Olivia Guaraldo notes in relation to Butler and Cavarero, “[p]olitics and ethics must be thought of within the context of an undeniable violence that, at the same time, is the cipher of an undeniable relationality” (2008: 113). In this sense, scenes of violence become a negative foundation conditioning the urgency of the staging of an insurrectionary account of humanness. As I will demonstrate, this can be seen in both Cavarero and Butler’s work.

For Cavarero, her and Butler’s work “focuses on the need to radically re-examine violence, connecting it to an ontology that demonstrates an ontology ingrained in humanity” (2011a: 163). In this way relational ontologies of vulnerability do not simply rearticulate the human but intervene in violences: in Cavarero’s words

“[t]he true target of [the relational model] is not, in fact - or not only - the philosophical genealogy of the subject; it is the violent practices of domination, exclusion, and devastation of which the subject itself is an accomplice [...] The emphasis on vulnerability, in the relational model invoked here, is therefore first of all an accent on politics, ethics, and the social. The choice of assuming vulnerability as a paradigm of the human, far from an abstract speculative move, is instead rooted in the analysis of concrete situations (2016: 13).

This aspect of Cavarero’s work comes out most forcefully in her discussion of the Holocaust. As I demonstrated in my fifth chapter, Cavarero suggests that there is an ethical valence in narrating the life stories of those who have been exposed to extreme violence. This narration does not suggest “a universal value” (Cavarero 2015: 10) of the human. Instead, it is a “restitution of a possible sense for humanity itself, through the tale of the injured and the wounded” (Ibid.). As a “restitution”, Cavarero highlights that this humanity can only be figured in the light of its destruction; and further, that what is offered is only a “possible sense” for humanity. These qualifications are important, as they make clear that to determine an account of the human from *and yet separate to* the destruction of the human would be a mistake, in that the “possible

sense” of the human preserved in the face of its destruction can only be made sense of in this context and not apart from it. To detach this “possible sense” of the human from the scene of its destruction would be to lose both the provisionality of this sense of the human and the urgency of its articulation: these qualities are not incidental to the “possible sense” of the human that Cavarero posits but on the contrary are central to its meaning. If “narrating life stories” (Ibid.) is a process of “rehumanization” (Ibid.), then this is not a positing of the human apart from its destruction, but rather is a process of “redeeming the meaning of the human from the ruins of the inhuman” (Ibid.): for Cavarero, “[t]he humanity that is recovered is a lacerated humanity” (Ibid. 11). As a consequence, “what remains of the human consists precisely in this capacity of questioning the inhuman” (Ibid.). The “scandal” (Ibid.) of the inhuman sets the “infinite task [...] to radically rethink the human in light of its unspeakable destruction” (Ibid.). In this way, Cavarero insists that “there is an ethical and even ontological urgency in the necessity of [...] narration, almost as if every recounted story, snatched from oblivion, saves a possible sense of the human from its absolute negation and destruction” (Ibid. 14).

Biographical narration thus not only directly opposes the destruction of life-stories, but can only be understood when considered in the light of this destruction:

[w]hen it comes to biographical writing, and even more so, when history is produced through extreme horror, narrating is not merely “reconstructing” the thread of a life story; it is above all opposing the work of destruction that has devoured life itself. It is ultimately a making against destroying, a creating against demolishing, a doing against undoing (Ibid.).

Something is missed if one thinks processes of making, creating and doing apart from the destroying, demolishing and undoing that warranted them in the first place. These scenes operate almost as a negative foundation, conditioning the urgency of a project that is concerned with recovering not just the stories of people whose lives would otherwise be forgotten, but the ontological status of humanness as such (tied up as it is with the possibility of the storying of these lives). An account of what it is to be human, invariably composed of histories, narratives and ontologies, is important precisely because humanness itself was the target of the horror of the camps; it is humanness that was destroyed, demolished and undone.⁷⁰ As such the end goal of such accounts are not primarily attempts at descriptive accuracy; they are strategic, polemical, performative interventions; accounts of humanness - that is, the *making, creating* and

⁷⁰ Cf. Hannah Arendt (2003: 135).

doing of humanness - which struggle with and against the fact of the *destroying*, *demolishing* and *undoing* of humanness. As I have suggested, one should therefore describe these accounts as insurrectionary humanisms.

Of course, these insurrectionary humanisms - or perhaps, accounts of insurrectionary humanness (or even insurrectionary accounts of humanness) - are themselves motivated by certain “normative aspiration[s]” (Rushing 2010: 291), and simply opposing the destruction of humanness offers one few clues as to what these aspirations should be. This does not mean that one either cannot, or should not, make such claims. Rather, it is to recognise the provisionality of these claims, their contingency, their poeticity and, above all, the scenes of destruction from which they emerge. In saying that these accounts of humanness emerge from scenes of destruction one has to be careful: they do emerge from such scenes, but in their emergence they are also acting on these scenes themselves. Indeed, how one makes sense of destroying, demolishing and undoing is mediated by particular expressions of humanness. In some extreme cases the destroying, demolishing and undoing can only be recognised after the entity that has been exposed to these processes has emerged, a point that Judith Butler makes forcefully, and which I explored in my second chapter.⁷¹ The emergence of the human, then, at the same time becomes a way of manifesting a certain sense of violence, a violence that itself mediates how humanness is made sense of (as well as, so often, obscuring itself in the process).

In this way it would be a mistake to read Cavarero’s account of humanness apart from destroying, demolishing and undoing because her account is inextricably intertwined with said destruction. To do so would be to reduce her account to a mere humanism grounded in its appropriate human ontology. And if Cavarero’s account maintains an ontology, it is my contention that the true ground for the account of humanness that is being worked with is not such an ontology but rather destroying, demolishing and undoing: that is, violence and violation.⁷² Cavarero’s ‘ontology’ of uniqueness is in this way an ontology stripped of its metaphysics. It is premised not on a particular account of being but on the mundane recognition that everyone is different from every other one, and that the meaning and significance of this uniqueness is utterly expositive: it does not reside *within* but emerges *between*. In Cavarero’s words, “the ontological status of the *who* - as exposed, relational, altruistic - is totally *external*”

⁷¹ See, for example, Butler’s ‘Violence, Mourning, Politics’ in *Precarious Life* (2006: 19-49).

⁷² The corollary of this position is that an account of the human that stages itself apart from violence and violation needs to be treated with critical suspicion, save for it betraying itself as an Enlightenment humanism tacitly premised on a particular subject that legitimises the violation those subjects who are in any way incongruous to its figuring of the ‘proper’ human (Braidotti 2013: 36).

(2000: 89). In this way, as Elisabetta Bertolino notes, it is Cavarero's very use of ontology that paradoxically "de-essentializes ontology" (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 133). Despite her reticence about the notion of performativity as it is found in Judith Butler's work (Ibid. 141-142), Cavarero's approach to theorising, narrating and storying is grounded in a recognition of their performatively efficacious qualities, an aspect that is pressing precisely in the context of the destruction wrought on the ontologies, narratives and histories of those who have been exposed to extreme violence.

Just as Cavarero's account of humanness is explicitly staged, and further staged in relation to violence, so too is Butler's. For Butler, her account of vulnerability - that, as socially embodied beings, we are of necessity vulnerable, even if this vulnerability is differentially distributed - is not so much an ontology but rather an "insurrection at the level of ontology" (2006: 33). As I will go on to argue, this suggests that charges of humanism leveled at Butler miss the mark: as Fiona Jenkins has argued persuasively, Butler's positing of vulnerability cannot simply be substituted in as a type of intellectual upgrade for our presumed self-sufficiency, "whereby one hegemonic conception of the subject succeeds another" (Jenkins 2007: 158). This would miss the transformational power that the poetic operation of Butler's theorising maintains; its "poetics of politics" (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 116) in Rancière's words. If we imagine Butler's account of humanness as substituting and succeeding a demonstrably defunct conception of the human, then the schemas and rationalities that sustain this defunct conception remain unchanged. Danielle Petherbridge makes this mistake when she claims that "Butler's appeal to vulnerability seeks to contest the liberal conception of an autonomous, individualistic subject as the norm for ethics and politics *and to replace it* with one based on vulnerability and interdependence" (2016: 593, my emphasis). Instead, when Butler stages an embodied relationality it is not simply offered as a replacement, precisely because it calls into question (or perhaps, more strongly, suspends) the rationality that sustains the concept it would be replacing.

As I demonstrated in my second chapter, the insurrectionary ontology of humanness that Butler stages is premised on a particular account of violence. This can be seen, as Cavarero indicates, in the etymology of the word 'vulnerability': the *vulnus* in the word signifies 'wound' in the Latin (Cavarero 2011: 30; 2016: 158-162). For Butler, violence is an ever present possibility. She does not argue that violence is everywhere, but neither is she willing to entertain a conception of nonviolence that is premised on an absence of violence. As I have already indicated, violence varies in its visibility precisely because when one makes claims about what it is, one is also making a claim about the entity exposed to violence (that is, that it is properly violable). One might want to resist this (refusing the argument that property damage equals violence)

or one might want to affirm it (insisting that the ‘corrective surgery’ enacted on intersex infants is a form of violence (Butler 2004: 4)), but in either case there is a constitutive politics to any account of violence, one that imbricates violence with accounts of humanness.

Hesitation, Provocation

So far I have argued that Butler and Cavarero’s work should, on their own terms, be understood as an insurrectionary humanism: their accounts of humanness are not posited in the abstract but are performative, poetic stagings thought in relation to forms of violence. They are thus enacting a form of politics, a politics that can be thought in relation to the account offered by Jacques Rancière. In Rancière’s parlance, their work is an intervention in a distribution of what is visible and sayable; it is a poetics of politics. Butler and Cavarero’s ontology of vulnerability - their respective accounts of humanness - has been the object of analysis in recent secondary literature, in particular around the relationship between ethics, ontology and politics. However, as I will go on to demonstrate, the conception of politics worked with in these analyses misses the poetics of politics that, I am arguing, is central to Butler and Cavarero’s stagings of an insurrectionary humanism.

Ann Murphy identifies a “hesitation” (2012: 91) in Butler and Cavarero’s staging of humanness. This hesitation occurs at the divide between an ontological claim - the human as vulnerable (Butler) or vulnerable and unique (Cavarero) - and a prescriptive or normative ethical obligation: for Murphy, “although both uniqueness and precariousness elicit a summons or an appeal to ethics, both Butler and Cavarero evince hesitation when it comes to giving these figures any normative or prescriptive content” (2011: 586).⁷³ For Murphy the trope of vulnerability needs to be understood as ethically ambiguous, opening the possibility of both care and violence (2012: 65).⁷⁴ Cavarero notes that “[t]he vulnerable body, since it is a body that can be wounded, exposes itself to the wound and, for the same reason, is a body that exposes itself to care” (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 142).⁷⁵ This ethical ambiguity facilitates a hesitation, which might *suggest* normative or prescriptive ethical claims but cannot, in and of itself, *guarantee* these claims. Indeed, for Murphy it is precisely the absence of

⁷³ Cf. Sara Rushing’s conceptualisation of Butler’s thought as a “politics of dissatisfaction” (2010: 286).

⁷⁴ See also Danielle Petherbridge, for whom “vulnerability is characterized by ambivalence in the sense that it designates neither positive nor negative states of being or forms of relationality but contains the capacity for either or both” (2016: 591).

⁷⁵ See also Cavarero (2016: 158-162).

prescriptive or normative obligations that sets the stage for an understanding of responsibility (even if the content of this responsibility cannot be guaranteed by any ontology); in Murphy's words "this hesitation is not cause for anguish or pessimism, but is rather the hesitation in which responsibility is born" (2011: 588).

I believe Murphy is correct in her recognition of the ambiguity in Butler and Cavarero's thought concerning the relationship between ethics and ontology. Further, her delineation of the moments of hesitation in Butler and Cavarero's thought is helpful: although Cavarero is clear about the limits of the "ethic" (2000: 87) she is drawing from her ontology of uniqueness - for Cavarero ontological uniqueness is not "a principle whose ethic can be *deduced*" (Ibid.) - Butler is more willing to suggest normative claims that might follow from the ontology of vulnerability she is postulating, even if she often qualifies these normative claims.⁷⁶ However, by focusing on moments of hesitation in Butler and Cavarero's work Murphy misses the political stakes of the postulation of an insurrectionary conception of humanness. For Murphy, the ontology suggested by Butler and Cavarero should be understood as a "provocation" (2012: 99) of an ethics; by staging a particular ontology both Butler and Cavarero *provoke* an ethical response, even if the content of this response cannot be guaranteed.⁷⁷ Murphy's notion of provocation indicates the politics of thinking the human differently that I have suggested is central to the work Butler and Cavarero are doing, however Murphy does not see this as political. Instead, for Murphy, much like Butler, politics is underspecified. Murphy argues that "when the ethics of vulnerability are thought in the domain of politics, their promise appears to be ambiguous" (Ibid. 68) and that it "consequently remains unclear what type of politics the realities of dispossession and exposure gesture toward" (Ibid. 71). For Murphy then, politics is only of concern as a *consequence* of ontological presuppositions. However, it is my argument that this misunderstands what constitutes politics and thus under emphasises the significance of the deployment of insurrectionary accounts of humanness in Butler and Cavarero's work.

I argue that the political moment does not follow as a consequence of ontological claims but sets the scene from which ontological claims are manifest. Indeed, this setting of the scene may (but not must) occur via an ontological claim:

⁷⁶ See, for example, Butler's suggestion that the dispossession proper to embodied beings "opens up another kind of normative aspiration within the field of politics" (2006: 26). See also Sara Rushing's reading of this normative aspiration as "livability" (2010: 290-292).

⁷⁷ Cf. Fiona Jenkins' discussion of the notion of trouble in Butler's early work, where she argues that "the experience of looking at the image of the cover of *Gender Trouble*, of undergoing the disturbance it provokes, offers an allegory not only for the provocation that can be taken to inhere in such an 'anomalous' scene but also for what we might think of here as the compulsion of response bound to the inherent failure of the norm to fully constitute the 'real'" (2010: 100).

politics here would be the insurrectionary staging of a counter-hegemonic ontology. However, in either case, what matters is that politics does not succeed ontology - it does not emerge from an ontology, dependent upon an ontology - but rather constitutes it, even when ontology is the mode that politics takes in its actualisation. In this way Butler and Cavarero are not developing a theory of politics - they are not doing political theory - rather, Butler and Cavarero both enact a politics in their ontological staging of an insurrectionary account of what it is to be human. Murphy's theorising of an ethics of provocation comes close to this, but does not make the connection to the staging of vulnerability as the *political* moment that constitutes the ontological/ethical.

For Murphy, Butler and Cavarero's ethics and ontology should be thought of as co-constitutive in a way that refuses "to situate either of these two domains of philosophical inquiry in a relation of causation, hierarchy, or primacy with regard to each other" (Ibid. 99).⁷⁸ This may be true, however it is my argument that if ethics and ontology are co-constitutive for Butler and Cavarero, this co-constitution nonetheless depends upon a primary political moment; or better, the *deployment* of this ontology/ethics *is* politics. In saying this I am not claiming the importance of politics over either ethics or ontology; indeed, thinking of their relationship in temporal terms too easily encourages a notion of causation that does not capture the relationship between politics, on the one hand, and ontology and ethics, on the other. Thinking temporally and thus causally, the danger would be an insistence that since politics precedes ontology and ethics, what really matters is an analysis of politics; ethics and ontology is at best superfluous or at worst depoliticising. This argument can be seen in Clare Woodford's *Disorienting Democracy* (2016), where Woodford argues that "we need to distinguish Butler's 'politics' in the identification of subversion as exploitation of the iteration of norms, from her turn to policing in the form of a loosely psychoanalytic ethics" (Ibid. 169). One also finds this argument in Bonnie Honig's 'Antigone's Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism' (2010), where Honig argues that the "ethical turn" (Ibid. 23) seen in, for example, Butler's account of vulnerability, is not only a "turn away from politics" (Ibid.) but further is a form of "antipolitics" (Ibid. 6). In a related manner, Sam Chambers argues that Butler's post-2001 writings (her "turn to ethics" (2014: 52)) offer an account of "'the social' [...] that merely falls back on a liberal, aggregative model" (Ibid.). Chambers continues:

Butler's ontology of vulnerability and finitude, as it emerges in her most

⁷⁸ Cf. Jenkins, for whom Butler's "suspension of a definitive answer to any question about 'what we are'" (2010: 109) marks her thinking on vulnerability as "immediately ethical" (Ibid.). See also Sara Rushing, for whom "the diagnostic, normative, ethical and political are deeply intertwined for Butler, though they are not reducible to each other" (2010: 285).

recent writings, serves the purpose of standing in for a more rigorous account of the social formation. And this substitution, I suggest, proves to be a poor one, since it reduces Butler's work to the terms of liberal political philosophy (Ibid. 53).

However, what Chambers, Woodford and Honig miss is the possibility of the political mobilisation of the ethical subject; not political as a consequence of an ethics but rather political in the staging of this insurrectionary subject. In this way, while I share Honig's concerns with "mortalist humanism" (Ibid.) - particularly one premised on a universal, "postpolitical" (Ibid. 16) subject of grief - I take distance from Honig's insistence that it is necessary to see "grief and lamentation in political not ethical terms" (2010: 10). If the modality that politics is actualised via is the ethical or the ontic then a rigorous analysis of what this ethics or ontology might be is important; indeed, this is the great strength of Cavarero and Butler's work. However, as important as the ontology/ethics developed by Butler and Cavarero is, for the purposes of my thesis its analysis will have to be put to one side as my object of enquiry is not Butler and Cavarero's ethics or ontology *per se*, but rather their ethics and ontology as a politics.

A New Humanism?

Honig is not alone in arguing that the recent turn to vulnerability is the manifestation of a humanism. However, again, the insurrectionary quality of this humanism is frequently missed in the analyses of the secondary literature. Ann Murphy insists that "the ethical ontologies of Butler and Cavarero gesture toward a new humanism" (2011: 587), arguing that

[t]he humanism that emerges when these thinkers are brought together powerfully grounds claims for rights, protections and equity in a language that can still account for the uniqueness of each human body, even as these bodies are understood as part of a global community in which each is vulnerable to the other (Ibid. 589).

For Murphy, what tempers humanism's "vulnerability to being corrupted and co-opted" (Ibid.) is the moment of hesitation she identifies in Butler and Cavarero's thought, one that "marks the movement of a humanism that does not aspire to be absolute and immalleable, but that instead honors the contingency and imperfection that mark any attempt to think the human" (Ibid.). Clearly there is a relationship between humanism and the thought of Butler and Cavarero, in that each are working with particular

conceptions of humanness. However, describing their work as a “new corporeal humanism” (Ibid.) is problematic: humanism is not simply susceptible to being “corrupted and co-opted” (Ibid.) and “responsible for the dehumanization of women and the racialized violence of colonialism” (Ibid.); humanism is *constituted* in this violence. To insist that their work is a humanism, even one that is attentive to the violences inherent in the conception of humanism, is, as I have argued, to lose sight of Butler and Cavarero’s refusal of dominant conceptions of what it is to be human, and the crucial role this refusal plays in furnishing their own paraontologies of humanness. Further, as Fiona Jenkins notes with reference to Butler,

[t]here is much in Butler’s account [of precariousness] that is aimed at undoing the individualizing logic that seeks to determine the proper attributes of proper beings - rationality, language, or even vulnerability perhaps; attributes that would entail a corresponding moral response (2013: 111-112).

For Jenkins precariousness and vulnerability should be thought of as “a *modality* of being, not a *property* of beings” (Ibid. 111). This is, in part, Murphy’s point too, but her account of a “new humanism” (2011) encourages a thinking of the human apart from the violences that warrant this new conception in the first place. It effaces the context that motivated the staging of this insurrectionary conception of humanness - its situatedness - and implicitly maintains that the notion of the human derived from Butler and Cavarero’s work possesses a validity beyond its particular context because each author enacts a hesitation and thus “honors the contingency and imperfection that mark any attempt to think the human” (Ibid. 589). Butler and Cavarero do maintain this hesitation, however it is my argument that their accounts of the human should not first be located in this hesitation but rather in relation to the violences that warrant a rethinking of humanness. In this way, as I have argued, their thought is not simply a new humanism but an insurrectionary humanism; it does not posit the human in the abstract but delineates an account of humanness in relation to a particular account of the human (male, sovereign, autonomous, impermeable, rectitudinous) and the violences associated with this conception (even as this relation is one of heterogeneity).

Sina Kramer comes close to articulating this insurrectionary methodology in her article ‘Judith Butler’s “New Humanism”: A Thing or Not a Thing, and So What?’ (2015). Kramer argues, *contra* Honig, that those describing Butler’s work as a mortalist humanism miss “the nature of Butler’s performance: that is, they treat Butler as if she were performing an ideal theory when she is performing a critical theory” (2015: 33).

For Kramer, the claim that Butler maintains a mortalist humanism depends upon a “reification” (Ibid. 26) of the distinction between politics, ontology and ethics - that is, “politics and its conditions” (Ibid.) - which, following Murphy (Murphy 2011: 588-589; Kramer 2015: 32), misses the co-constitutive character of each of these modes of analysis in Butler’s thought. However, Butler, for Kramer, “leaves herself open” (Ibid. 36) to this reading both by equivocating over whether one can draw normative claims from her account of vulnerability (Ibid. 33), and by not being explicit in noting the contingency central to her methodology (Ibid. 37). Nonetheless, for Kramer there is something “unavoidable” (Ibid. 35) about an appeal to foundations - “an appeal to a transcendental moment within the immanent sphere of politics” (Ibid.) - that necessitates a response “at the level of method” (Ibid. 36). In particular, it is necessary to stress “how these transcendentals” (Ibid. 37) - that is, the outside of politics understood as ethics or ontology - “are provisional” (Ibid.). Otherwise, as Kramer suggests, “these foundations seem, well, a bit too foundational” (Ibid.).

It is this provisionality of Butler and Cavarero’s ontological foundations that I want to stress is crucial to understanding their thought. However, unlike Kramer, I argue that rather than thinking this foundation in relation to politics (either as after politics, or prior to politics, or external to politics) the staging of this foundation itself should be thought as the enactment of politics. To do otherwise is to implicitly maintain a sphere of politics or the political that, even when thought of as agonistic, polices what counts as recognisable political behavior. This can be seen in Honig’s suggestion that “[t]he agon of consensus and dissensus is what Rancière calls *politics*” (2010: 21) from which an “agonistic humanism” (Ibid. 4) can be derived, centred on “[p]arody, mimicry, and citation” (Ibid. 20). Thinking of politics as “[t]he agon of consensus and dissensus” is to place politics too close to a particular sphere with its concomitant proper activity. As a consequence, Honig, in Kramer’s words, “tends to reify the distinction between politics (pleasure, natality, agonistic humanism) and the a-, anti-, pre- or extrapolitical (ethics, mourning, mortalist humanism)” (2015: 37). For Kramer “the relation between a delimited field of politics and its conditions” (Ibid.) does need to be recognised, a relation that can be thought of as “the irruption of the transcendental within the immanent sphere of politics” (Ibid. 38). However, in equating politics with immanence the specificity of politics is lost, and the door is left open to politics maintaining a proper agonal, provocative, hesitant ethos. Instead, by identifying politics as the staging of a contestatory, heterogeneous conception of humanness (as the irruption of the transcendental within the immanent that Kramer highlights) both the anti-political universalising of grief that Honig is concerned with and the (equally anti-political) reification of politics, ethics and ontology that Murphy and Kramer are concerned with

can be avoided.

In this chapter I have argued that Butler and Cavarero's respective stagings of an insurrectionary account of humanness should be understood as a form of politics, drawn from the work of Rancière. I argued that Butler and Cavarero's insurrectionary humanism - the paraontology of vulnerability they both work from - is not postulated in the abstract but rather is necessitated by scenes of violence: this violence may be enacted in the name of the human (for example the human associated with a restrictive sense of a proper bodily morphology which cannot include the intersex infant), or it may be enacted against humanness as such (for example, the destruction of the humanness of the detainees of the Nazi death camps). In either case, it is these scenes of violence that motivate an insurrectionary staging of humanness (for Butler and Cavarero one founded on vulnerability), and it is the poetics of this staging that make descriptions of Butler and Cavarero's work as a humanism lacking.

Chapter Seven: (Anti-)Arendtian Politics in Rancière, Butler and Cavarero

In the first chapter of my thesis I argued that Rancière is not offering a political theory. Instead, his account of politics is, in his words, a “poetics of politics” (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 115): it is a polemical intervention that cannot exist in metaphysical abstractness and makes visible forms of existence that were previously insensitive. His politics is improper because it is always, first, a contestation over what is proper to politics. As a consequence Rancière cannot tell us what enactments (or non-enactments) are political; the question his work suggests is not ‘Is this politics?’ but rather ‘*What if this were politics?*’. Further, in my previous chapter I argued that the insurrectionary humanism found in the work of Butler and Cavarero should be understood as an instance of this poetics of politics, to the extent that it offers a contestatory *partage du sensible*. What is political about Butler and Cavarero’s work is not a consequence of the insurrectionary humanism they deploy via their paraontologies of vulnerability; rather, the staging of these accounts of humanness *is* politics, a politics made urgent by the violences of the extant conception of the human that Butler and Cavarero are revolting against and making visible through this very staging.

In the final two chapters of my thesis I bring together insights gleaned from Rancière, Butler and Cavarero to trace the limits of a politics centred around the theme of visibility. I do this not because I believe the types of activity or inactivity I discern are properly political, but because they are in danger of being overlooked if one starts with Rancière’s politics (particularly his politics as it is expressed in the first few chapters of his seminal text *Disagreement* (1999)). As I demonstrated in my first chapter, Rancière’s politics can too easily be read as being limited to moments where one demonstrates one’s equality to those who are unable to perceive it, via the construction of a common world; a *mise-en-scène* which is also a *mise-en-sens*, to paraphrase Claude Lefort (1988: 11). As a consequence, the (in)activities of those who are indifferent to extant orders, even if they enact this *mise-en-scène/sens*, are not seen as politics. By focusing on the ways politics makes visible forms of existence that could not otherwise be seen, Rancière is in danger of depoliticising forms of existence indifferent to visibility.

To make this clear I engage in debates concerning the relationship between Rancière, Butler and Cavarero’s thought and that of Hannah Arendt’s. Arendt is one of

the common threads that runs between Rancière, Cavarero and Butler, as well as being an exemplar of a politics concerned with themes of visibility. Cavarero is deeply indebted to Arendt across her work, in particular to Arendt's thinking on politics and her account of uniqueness.⁷⁹ With the publication of Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015a) the link between Cavarero and Butler has grown tighter as Butler explicitly and centrally engages Arendt to think through forms of collective protest, or in Butler's words, borrowing from Arendt, forms of "acting in concert" (Butler 2015a: 88; Arendt 1998: 162). Rancière's account of politics can also be thought in relation to Arendt, however here the relationship is far less convivial. Rancière's conception of politics can be understood as a critical response to that of Arendt's; indeed, this is explicit in his 'Ten Theses' (2010: 28-30; 2011b: 3).

Sam Chambers has made this latter point forcefully, insisting that thinking Rancière in relationship to Arendt is to make the mistake of spatialising Rancière's account of politics (2013: 45-50). It is my argument, however, that there is much to be gained by thinking Cavarero and Butler's Arendtian politics in relation to Rancière's distinctly anti-Arendtian politics, and that a spatiality of Rancière's politics can be thought that does not fall foul of the dangers that Chambers identifies. Further, thinking Rancière and Cavarero together pulls Cavarero away from her explicit account of politics developed in close conversation with Arendt and towards the implicit politics that imbues much of Cavarero's other work, which, I argue, deviates from Arendt in important ways. As I will suggest, this means Cavarero can avoid falling foul of Rancière's critique of Arendt's politics. Further, this enables one to apprehend a tactility and tangibility to the activity of politics in Rancière, too easily obscured either by an over-emphasis of politics as a demonstration of equality to those who would refuse it, or as a ruptural break that founds a pure political realm, or by an insistence on politics being an impure activity *vis-à-vis* the police (Chambers' corrective to the previous readings). As I have intimated, this politics will often be indifferent to the extant order, and will be marked by a fugitivity that operates apart from economies of visibility; a form of sensing thought via the ambivalence of *apprehension* and its juxtaposition to *comprehension*. This thematisation does not determine the propriety of politics; it is simply a particular way politics can be thought, one made urgent by its potential effacement in light of readings of Rancière such as Chambers'.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Cavarero's *Relating Narratives* (2000), 'Politicizing Theory' (2002a) and *For More than One Voice* (2005).

Rancière's Impurity

In *The Lessons of Rancière* (2013) Chambers argues that political theorists make a mistake if they collapse the thought of Rancière with that of Arendt. Chambers notes a growing tendency for theorists to make this move, and even in the cases where Rancière's thought is best utilised in relation to Arendt - where his thought is read with its differences recognised in a manner that refuses to totalise it - Chambers worries that the mere proximity of a reading of Rancière alongside Arendt is already to leave one in danger of spatialising Rancière's thought, and thus encouraging one to read Rancière as a proponent of a pure politics. In Chambers' words, there is a

broadly Arendtian approach to politics that includes insights from Rancière - this adds to the general sense that whatever Rancière is up to in his account of politics, it appears to be largely compatible with Arendt's theory. And because the standard account of Arendt is the territorial one, the decision to read Rancière alongside Arendt may take readers in the wrong direction, that is, towards pure politics (Ibid. 49).

Chambers wants to enact a "de-linking" (Ibid.) of Rancière from Arendt because of Rancière's rejection of a pure political sphere. Instead, for Chambers, Rancière's politics should be thought of as "impure" (Ibid. 62): a "redoubling" (Chambers 2013: 62; Rancière 2011b: 6) of politics and an irremediable mixing with politics' corollary, the police. Rancière's description of politics as a "break" (1999: 30) with the police order - as well being a "symbolic rupture" (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 124) consisting of "interruptions, fractures" (1999: 137) - might encourage one to conceive of his politics as the establishment of spaces apart from the ordering of the police; spaces where politics can occur in its pure form. It is this conception that Chambers, rightly, wants to refuse, instead insisting that politics is not a realm but rather a particular logic - premised, for Rancière, on an "assumption of equality" (Ibid. 30) - that breaks with the logic of the police but does not inaugurate a space of politics as a consequence. As Rancière argues and Chambers insists upon, "there is no place outside of the police" (Rancière 2011b: 6; Chambers 2013: 62). It is on this basis that Chambers refuses Arendtian readings of Rancière, insisting that Arendt's public sphere is unhelpful in thinking through Rancière's account of politics.

The notion of the "break" that politics enacts captures something of what Rancière means by political activity, however it also elides Rancière's insistence that politics does not have to be "spectacular" (1999: 30); indeed, it may also be quotidian, even "modest" (2009a: 117), such as the night-time activity of nineteenth century

French workers, “playing at flâneurs, writers, or thinkers” (2012: viii). In either case, “political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order” (1999: 30). This activity of *undoing*, carried out via a “mode of expression”, recalls less the dramatic, ruptural, spectacular actions evocative of the romanticised heroes of Greek myth (even if it does not disallow these actions), and more a repeated, tactile, tangible activity that is, nonetheless, “expressive” in a “heterogeneous” (Ibid.) manner. Throughout his writings on politics Rancière privileges one mode of expression above others: that of speech, the “equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” (Ibid.) who, presuming to have access to *logos’ semantike*, escape the mere noise, the *phone*, of those animals who are nonsensical as properly political. Further, as I have noted, this insistence on the possession of speech is demonstrated to those who otherwise would not, or cannot, hear it. It is clear that Rancière does not want to limit political activity to speech alone, and yet his repeated recourse to modes of expression situated at the phonic register leaves those other modes of expression - ones further from the heroes of Greek myth and closer to the tactility of the repeated, everyday occurrences of undoing - less easily graspable; less tangible in his work and in its expression in the secondary literature. This increases the significance of Rancière’s notion of the *partage du sensible*, variously translated as the partition / distribution of the sensible, which acts as an umbrella term of which the police is a particular instance.⁸⁰ As politics becomes less defined solely as an activity that disrupts police orders and more as an activity that reconfigures the *partage du sensible* - instantiating both forms of existence which cannot be made sense of and novel modes of apprehension - then the ruptural, heroic, political break recedes from view, and processes of *undoing* - gestures, words, movements, and song enacted by “ambiguous actors” (2011b: 11) - are more easily apprehended.⁸¹

Chambers has good reasons for being wary of thinking Rancière in relation to Arendt. For Arendt, whatever the proper content of political acts, what matters is that these acts occur in public, that is, in the public sphere, as distinct from the private sphere and the social sphere. Arendt argues that the rise of the social in the modern age (which she traces from the seventeenth century) has collapsed the distinction between the public and the private - the realms of, respectively, “necessity and freedom” (1998: 73) - thus inhibiting the possibility of moments of “excellence” (Ibid. 49) that are properly expressive of man’s (for Arendt it is always ‘man’s’, or at best, ‘men’s’)

⁸⁰ For more on the *partage du sensible* see Davide Panagia’s “‘Partage du Sensible’: The Distribution of the Sensible” (2010).

⁸¹ As Rancière notes, “[a]ll my historical research had been aimed [...] at showing that the history of social emancipation had always been made out of small narratives, particular speech acts, etc.” (2011b: 9).

freedom: in Arendt's words, "our capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private" (Ibid.). One may enact forms of excellence in one's home, or one may be excellent in one's labouring, but unless this excellence is expressed in the presence of others then it fails to signify man's freedom as a political animal. Importantly, expressing excellence in the parochial presence of one's friends is not enough for Arendt: it is the public sphere that offers the stage on which excellence can flourish as it is only when one is freed of necessity - the mere life of everyday reproduction - and exposed to those who are also rid of this necessity that one can distinguish oneself from others, that one's actions and speech become meaningful, and that one can enter into the annals of history. As Arendt says,

[e]very activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors (Ibid.).

It is here that the gap between Rancière and Arendt would be at its widest, and these issues that Chambers is drawing on when he argues that linking Rancière with Arendt is to purify Rancière's conception of politics; for Chambers, making this link would be to presume that "as Arendt protects against the encroachment of the social onto the realm of action, Rancière would protest against the expansion of police orders in such a way as to crowd out politics" (2013: 39). Put simply, for Rancière politics is not premised on its proper sphere but is defined "solely by its form" (1999: 32). Rancière's conception of politics, whether spectacular or quotidian, does not accommodate a pure political realm in the manner that Arendt theorises.

Instead, for Chambers, Rancière offers not a pure politics but an "impure" (2013: 49) politics, and further, a politics which "renders impure" (Ibid.). As Chambers notes and Rancière stresses continuously, politics is an *activity* and thus its impurity is processual; it is a doing, not a static object or realm. And if it renders impure - if political activity blends its objects with police (Chambers 2013: 49; Rancière 2011b: 5) - this does not mean that politics and police are collapsed in a zone of indistinction, but rather maintain at once "a blending that is always also an othering" (Chambers 2013: 49). Politics, for Chambers, must be "other to police, but not purely other" (Ibid. 50). He accounts for this in Rancière's thought by making use of the conception of a "doubled politics" (Ibid. 58) which is "never simply itself" (Ibid.): politics always carries with it "an original taint" (Ibid.) that it cannot escape from and that undermines its proper

distinctness from the police in a fundamental manner. This doubled politics may imbue a “politicalness” (Ibid. 60) on certain activities, but this is distinct from a thinking of a political sphere which inaugurates (or creates the conditions for) politics; again, it is clearly distinct from Arendt’s thinking.

Chambers is thus correct in his identification of the significant difference between Rancière’s thought and Arendt’s, and also in his identification of the collapsing of Rancière’s thought with Arendt’s, prevalent in recent secondary literature (Ibid. 46-47). I want to pause, however, and ask if something is missed if Rancière’s critique of Arendt is primarily framed as identifying the danger of a spatialised, pure politics; that is, I think we miss the complex way Rancière imagines political space, in a way which I do not think is fully captured by an insistence on politics’ impurity. More specifically, I think a critique of Arendt that emphasises the grounding of politics in speech and action - “word and deed” (Arendt 1998: 176)⁸² - not only gets to the fore of Rancière’s critique in a manner which the critique of pure politics does not, but more significantly allows one to conceptualise a space of politics not simply as an impurity, but as a paradoxical, heterogeneous instantiation, which certainly is not pure, but is neither simply or only a complex mix of impurity. To be clear, Rancière’s politics *is* an impure politics: my point is simply that if we privilege this metaphor we at the same time limit a thinking of the *space* of politics. This is a problem not so much because it deviates from the proper reading of Rancière, but rather because I am more hopeful than Chambers in the productiveness of a dialogue between Rancière and theorists who we could call post-Arendtian (such as Cavarero and Butler), and who might offer further definition to the already significant work offered by Chambers in his subtle and rigorous delineation of Rancière’s conception of politics.

As such, in what follows I want to draw some links between the work of Rancière, Cavarero and Butler. As I have indicated, the latter two theorists are both indebted to the thought of Arendt for their thinking of politics, but both also maintain a critical distance (stronger as it is in Butler). As such, Rancière is able to identify some critical limits to their thought, which at the same time means he can help identify the strengths of their own distancing from Arendt. However, I also want to suggest that Rancière’s thought is not, or does not need to be, as allergic to Arendt’s as Chambers presents. As Chambers is at pains to stress, Rancière is not working with the thought

⁸² Arendt’s insistence on the centrality of speech as the distinguishing characteristic of man as a political animal can be seen starkly in the prologue to *The Human Condition*: for Arendt, the fact that political decisions should not be left to scientists is demonstrated not by scientists’ willingness to develop nuclear weapons, nor their naivety in not believing these weapons will be made use of, but rather “the fact that they move in a world where speech has lost its power” (1998: 4).

of Arendt; but he *is* working *against* her thought, in a manner that, I would suggest, has left its mark on Rancière's work.⁸³ The critical resources Rancière offers should be brought to bear on forms of post-Arendtian politics, but rather than targeting something Chambers calls a purity, I think it is better to focus on the privileging of speech as proper to politics that lingers in these accounts and that therefore destines politics to visibility. This dependence on speech is especially pronounced in Cavarero, whereas, as I will go on to show, Butler goes further in de-linking speech and politics in her use of Arendt. This will, I hope, allow for the elaboration of a sense of political space in Rancière's work which it is otherwise difficult to maintain in the context of Chambers' exemplary account of the incompatibility of a territorial account of politics with Rancière's conception. This will not be a refusal of Chambers' argument, rather this notion of political space will be developed in part through the resources offered in his critique. It should be stressed that the link between speech and politics is itself closely linked to the notion of a pure political sphere, but nonetheless I want to insist it matters how this issue is framed. Again, I think it helps to conceptualise a paradoxical, heterogeneous space of politics; not a space understood as 'the political' (or *le politique* in the French), which occurs in some readings of Rancière and which Chambers has correctly rejected (2013: 50-57), but neither simply a rendering impure of 'politics' (or *la politique*). This is another way of saying that if we properly think politics as impure, we are in danger of reproducing something strikingly similar to an Arendt-inspired liberal agonism, where our most pressing task becomes reconfiguring the police order to make it most susceptible to politics, which, despite its noble aims, is another way of evacuating politics. As I will go on to indicate, Butler and Cavarero can help us flesh out the relationship between politics and space in a way that does not destine them to visibility. In this way, Butler and Cavarero's proximity to Arendt is what opens them to critique from Rancière, while also allowing them to move beyond Rancière.

A Space of Politics?

The eighth thesis of Rancière's 'Ten Theses on Politics' reads:

The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in

⁸³ As Rancière says of his relation to Arendt's thought, "[l]et's just say there's some ground for agreement, coupled with a very strong disagreement" (Hallward and Rancière 2003: 202).

one (2010: 37).

It would seem then that if Rancière rejects a conception of a pure politics, he is not also, necessarily, rejecting a spatialised politics. Perhaps the way to negotiate this issue is to place the stress on the former part of the argument: that the problem is less with space and more with space being the foundation of politics, which is another way of saying that Rancière's problem is more with the words and deeds that contribute to the grounding of this space. One can read Rancière as suggesting that politics configures its own spaces, and that these spaces are always superimposed atop, or, better, *within*, other spaces, in a paradoxical, heterogeneous manner. In his article 'Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?' Rancière argues, contra Arendt, that the rights of man are rights precisely to the extent that a political dispute is opened up; to the extent that the inscription of rights is verified. As such, Rancière suggests that "political space [...] only ever emerges in the very *gap between* the abstract literalness of the rights and the polemic over their verification" (2010: 72). Two things are interesting here: first is Rancière's identification of "political space"; second, his linking of this space with a "*gap between*" (a *gap between* which gets italicised in his text). In an essay directly responding to Arendt (and in many ways the corollary to the equally anti-Arendtian 'Ten Theses on Politics') the significance of the italicised *gap-between* is unlikely to be incidental, and if it is, I would suggest that it should not be read as incidental. This is not the "in-between" (Arendt 1998: 52) that Arendt stresses and Cavarero and Butler draw on: Arendt's in-between and the gap manifest is one between the unique existents of a plurality, where a relational scene is constructed through the particular forms of perception and perspective: it relies on "the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised" (Ibid. 57). By contrast, Rancière's gap between is the gap between a political claim and its verification; it is precisely the interruption of the construction of a common world.

However, perhaps these are not as incompatible as it may first seem. Arendt's in-between is both a relating and a separating: "[t]o live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (Ibid. 52). This simultaneous relating and separating places Arendt's in-between closer to Rancière's *partage du sensible* (of which the police is a corollary and which politics reconfigures): in Davide Panagia's words, Rancière's *partage du sensible* is "variously translated as 'partition' or 'distribution' of

the sensible” (2010: 95) and is “a term that refers at once to the conditions for sharing that establish the contours of a collectivity (i.e. ‘*partager*’ as sharing) and the sources of disruption or dissensus of that same order (i.e. ‘*partager*’ as separating)” (Ibid.). One could therefore argue that Arendt’s in-between is more properly the opposite of politics, to the extent that politics is understood as a ruptural activity that breaks with police orders that are themselves aspects of the *partage du sensible*. However, if politics can also be understood as a part-taking - as a reconfiguring through repeated gestures, acts, performances, bodily comportments, phonic emissions etc. - then, I would suggest, it carries with it a spatiality which touches on this *partage*. This becomes more significant in relation to Cavarero and Butler and their improvisations (and critical distancing) around the theme of Arendt’s in-between. In both Cavarero and Butler the in-between is first about the generation of a world within a world; a heterogeneous, paradoxical world that emerges between people in their traditional and not-so-traditional forms of politics.⁸⁴ For Rancière, as I have already indicated, political activity is a “mode of expression” (1999: 30) that “undoes” (Ibid.) the order of the police, evocative of a careful and enduring work - a form of bodily comportment - of unpicking the threads of an order, and further, re-weaving these threads in a manner that cannot be made sense of within that order. The question, then, is how we make sense of the space that this practice instantiates.

Cavarero’s Politics

Cavarero offers an explicit account of politics in her article ‘Politicizing Theory’ (2002a). Here, in the journal *Political Theory*, Cavarero notes the conceptual opposition of the notions of ‘politics’ and ‘theory’. For Cavarero, following Arendt, politics both emerges from and is constitutive of plurality: it is “a shared and relational space generated by the words and deeds of a plurality of human beings” (Ibid.). By contrast, theory, “[i]n its Platonic declension” (Ibid. 506), signifies one’s *noetic*, solitary, disembodied encounter with a pure realm of ideas via “the eyes of the mind” (Ibid.). Therefore, “[b]ecause of their opposing characteristics, theory and politics are incompatible” (Ibid.). Theory, for Arendt and Cavarero, becomes the dominant way politics is made sense of in the western tradition, and thus politics is “[s]tripped of its own characteristics, that is, of

⁸⁴ One can compare this to Arendt, when she describes a child born of two lovers as the “insertion of a new world into the existing world” (1998: 242); the only thing that can break the spell of the all-encompassing in-between of the lovers’ world is the child, that both relates the lovers - that they “hold in common” (Ibid.) - yet also separates them.

plurality, action, and the direct involvement of agents” (Ibid. 511). Instead, politics becomes a process of ordering: taking its cue from the Platonic contemplation of a divine cosmic order, the activity of politics is first concerned with the ordering of a community. In Cavarero’s words “political theory thus cancels the unpredictability of plural interaction that constitutes the *proprium* of politics and replaces it with the predictability of order” (Ibid. 512). In a move that recalls Rancière, for Cavarero “[t]hat which the Western tradition calls ‘politics’ is in reality a model of depoliticization that, beginning with Aristotle and, even more so, Plato, expels the plural and relational dimension of politics; in fact, it reacts to the contingent and uncontrollable character of this dimension” (Ibid. 513). For Rancière, in his analysis of Plato’s republic as an originary instance of this ordering,

[t]he good city is one in which the order of the *cosmos*, the geometric order that rules the movement of the divine stars, manifests itself as the temperament of a social body, in which the citizen acts not according to the law but according to the spirit of the law, the vital breath that gives it life (1999: 68).

Instead, for Cavarero, rather than thinking political theory as theorising politics, one would be better to think it as “*politicizing theory*” (2002a: 512).⁸⁵

Cavarero and Rancière would both agree that until one thinks politics in its “specificity” (Rancière 1999: xiii) or thinks its “*proprium*” (Cavarero 2002a: 512) a fundamental misunderstanding of what political activity is continues, and further, this thinking *actively opposes* politics’ specificity or its *proprium*. And while they would also agree on the ordering inherent in what has come to be called politics (and would both understand their accounts of politics as being opposed to this ordering), it should be clear that there are, nonetheless, significant differences in their thinking of politics. In particular, these differences centre on how politics is grounded, or rather, the necessity of grounds to begin with. As I have demonstrated, for Rancière politics is precisely ungrounded: it neither depends upon a prior ground for its operation, nor actualises this ground in its operation (even if, as I want to suggest, it does generate something of a space of politics). By contrast Cavarero’s Arendtian politics is explicitly positioned as emerging from particular conditions: those of plurality and, more significantly, the words and deeds which actively express one’s uniqueness, which find a stage in the public sphere and thus constitute the political sphere. Plurality is “the incontrovertible *fact* of a fundamental ontology or, if one prefers, of a radical phenomenology” (Ibid. 513-514),

⁸⁵ Cf. Bonnie Honig’s *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993).

and “politics adopts and fulfils the ontology of plural uniqueness” (Ibid. 514). The equivocation of “fundamental ontology” and “radical phenomenology” is significant in Cavarero’s thinking: it gestures towards the fact that her ontology is markedly different to what one would normally think of as an ontology, premised not on metaphysics but on the mundane recognition of the specificity of each existent, a specificity that refuses the proper subjects of politics such as “Man, the subject, the individual, the person” (Ibid. 520); all for Cavarero “fictitious entities” which are ordered and organised by the western tradition’s thinking of politics (Ibid. 514). But however different her thinking of ontology is (to the point where it might be better to think of it as a “radical phenomenology”), nonetheless Cavarero insists on linking this “incontrovertible *fact*” with the activity of politics. Cavarero in this way inherits something of Arendt’s dependence on the political animal as an Aristotelian *zoon logon echon*; a living being who has *logos*, or what we can call reasoned speech. Cavarero argues, in response to those that accuse Arendt of being a neo-Aristotelian, that Arendt’s use of speech is different from Aristotle’s in that it does not express “that which is good, right, useful, and harmful for the community but instead consists in the ability to express and communicate to others the uniqueness of the speaker” (Ibid. 517). Politics “does not coincide with a general form of discipline that neutralizes the risky, unpredictable, contingent, and unruly effects of plural relationality; rather, it becomes that which protects and guarantees the spaces opened by this relationality” (Ibid. 515). No doubt this is different from Aristotle (and even different from Arendt), but the critique remains largely the same. Uniqueness, actively expressed through the relationality of speech and action, becomes the condition for politics, at which point one is again theorising politics from the grounds of another “*arkhê*” (Rancière 1999: 13).

As such, if there are resonances between Cavarero and Rancière’s accounts of politics, there are also significant differences. However, while Cavarero formally offers an account of politics in ‘Politicizing Theory’, her thinking of politics can be detected in many other parts of her work, often presenting the sense of an account that does not sit as closely to Arendt and so one that might prove more useful in thinking through what, on Rancière’s terms, one can think of as a space of politics. Indeed, Cavarero’s intellectual work in general - that is, her methodology - should be thought of as maintaining a politics in a manner that is very close to that of Rancière. This becomes clear in her first monograph published in English, *In Spite of Plato* (1995), and in particular her engagement in this text with a particular figure of the western tradition: *The Odyssey’s* Penelope. Cavarero identifies a space of politics indifferent to the extant order of the palace on Ithaca, which thus goes beyond Rancière given Rancière’s insistence that politics involves making visible forms of existence that are

otherwise insensitive. Cavarero identifies a space manifest between Penelope and her handmaids, but I also want to suggest a space is manifest between Adriana Cavarero herself and Penelope.

Penelope

In *In Spite of Plato* Cavarero proclaims that she is stealing women from Plato's oeuvre and resignifying them for other ends; what we might call a kleptomaniac, improper methodology. She does this with an irreverence that is central to her methodology. I highlight Cavarero's methodology not to indulge the curiosities of biography, nor to mark Cavarero out as a unique scholar (the practice is far from hers alone), but because it is theoretically significant. Cavarero's text - and, indeed, all of her work - is deeply improper.⁸⁶ Her work studiously and diligently reads Plato and many other 'classic' scholars, and then resituates the women that emerge along the way in places where they are not meant to be, or emphasises forms of doing and saying that properly should have been passed by as incidental, and instead makes them the crux of how a scene is to be understood. Cavarero is not only clearing space for new forms of conceptualisation but is also performatively enacting the theory that she explicates. Cavarero says:

[t]his is how my technique of theft works: I will steal feminine figures from their context, allowing the torn-up fabric to show the knots that hold together the conceptual canvas that hides the original crime (Ibid. 5).

The "original crime" that Cavarero mentions is "the original act of erasure contained in the patriarchal order, the act upon which this order was first constructed and then continued to display itself" (Ibid.). This, for Cavarero, is the erasure of sexual difference, the construction of a conception of the human who is presumptively male, and the offering of a place for women as a "functional subspecies" (Ibid. 3), "deporting the feminine into the destiny of Man" (Ibid.). Cavarero's method is a process of, in her words, "tearing apart the seams of the mother figure" (Ibid. 7) which exposes

an underlying canvas so thick as to be almost perfectly capable of concealing its secrets. Yet when the needle turns in the opposite direction (of birth) this canvas is so thin that it easily unravels (Ibid.).

For Cavarero then, the act of stealing simultaneously instantiates a feminine figure

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Cavarero's "use of words with bad intentions (*cattive intenzione*)" (Bertolino and Cavarero 2008: 137).

meaningful on her own terms, and further, demonstrates the complicity and dependency of the patriarchal symbolic order on this obscured figuration. Her stealing could then be understood as staging a “wrong” (1999: 9) as Rancière understands it: “the original nexus of *blaberon* and *adikon*” (Ibid.) which is revealed in the moment of her appropriation of the women of the western tradition. Cavarero’s metaphor of the “torn-up fabric” repeats throughout her discussion of her methodology in the introduction to *In Spite of Plato*:

[m]y approach is inspired by the delight I take in unweaving the threads of these ancient texts so that the new design appears more easily [...] In my act of undoing, some theoretical knots of classical philosophy have been patiently untangled (1995: 7-8).

The metaphor is not arbitrary. It prefigures the analysis that Cavarero offers of one of the women she steals from Plato (and Homer): Penelope the weaver, wife of Odysseus. For Cavarero, “my Penelope works on two different looms. The first composes the different figures of a feminine symbolic order. The second unties the matted threads of the fathers’ tapestry” (Ibid. 7). Cavarero, in her stealing and reweaving of Penelope’s story, works on both looms as well.

Penelope is a weaver and thus her role is to weave, a job established for her (and enforced by “her arrogant little son” (Ibid. 22)) “as woman, and most of all as wife” (Ibid. 12); the proper, sensible activity associated with her particular bodily morphology. She is “assigned a place, a role, a time, and a function” (Ibid. 16). But as Cavarero notes, Penelope enters into an unusual rhythm of weaving followed by a night of labour unweaving the work she has already woven. Her husband Odysseus is abroad - ten years fighting in the Trojan War, ten years returning from this war - and Penelope is being hounded by many potential suitors, eager to claim her as their wife and, consequently, usurp Odysseus. Penelope’s night-time unweaving appears nonsensical: “a labor disrupted and rendered useless by undoing” (Ibid. 12). However, this appearance masks a particular strategy of Penelope’s: Penelope will only marry one of the potential usurpers on completion of a burial-robe to be gifted to Laertes, Odysseus’ father, and so her unweaving, sat in the weaving room with her fellow handmaids, eternally delays her marriage to the potential usurpers, keeping them at bay (Homer 2008: 14). In Cavarero’s words, “through this monotonous, rhythmic, unending work, she prolongs the time of her seclusion” (1995: 11) which “keeps Penelope’s anomalous space open” (Ibid. 12). This rhythm of weaving and unweaving (or doing and undoing) allows Penelope and her handmaids to maintain a paradoxical space apart from *and yet within* the patriarchal order that structures the rest of the workings of the palace,

particularly the halls of debating populated by her potential suitors and her “arrogant little son” (Ibid. 22). She does not do this out of a devotion to Odysseus; instead, “by endlessly weaving and unraveling she defines her own place, where she is the wife of no one” (Ibid. 12). Indeed, for Cavarero this rhythmic labour is transformational of Penelope: “Penelope *is* this unending work of weaving and unweaving” (Ibid.). Unlike Odysseus - the hero of a great history and enactor of great acts, oriented towards a “restless future” (Ibid.) - Penelope’s work is situated in the present, in a particular place and a particular time. She does not travel; she is in every sense “under siege” (Ibid. 11). And yet in the construction of a particular place and a particular time, in the unbeknownst *stealing* of this place and this time, Penelope “turns a preconstituted *place* into a locus of signification where one can acknowledge perspectives denied by the previous context” (Ibid. 13). She is under siege, and yet in saying this we have captured something of Penelope, in that her work and the world she generates is also marked by an *indifference* to those who would lay siege to her.⁸⁷

When Odysseus does finally return, Penelope does not recognise him, unlike his father, his nurse and his dog who all see Odysseus through his disguise as a beggar. For Cavarero, “when the two spouses finally recognize each other, Penelope’s tale ends along with her own existence in the unique posture of doing and undoing” (Ibid. 14). It was, after all, never her tale, it was Odysseus’, and her brief emergence in this narrative is incidental for Homer, even as Cavarero creates the conditions for another sense of Penelope to emerge. In Cavarero’s words, “the story of Odysseus forms the broader setting that contains and surrounds this minor episode” (Ibid.). Penelope is under siege again, this time not from her suitors, or her “arrogant little son” (Ibid. 22), or from her position as wife, but rather from the narrative itself. In this way Odysseus’ return imperils Penelope in her entirety; but also, for Cavarero, Penelope’s mis-recognition (or refusal of recognition) of Odysseus

has the symbolic beauty of a final gesture of resistance, a final holding back within the place removed from the logical order of narration. This mode of narration demands that the anomaly of the feminine figure be recontained without trace (Ibid. 14).

No surplus, excess, or remainder can be tolerated; in Rancière’s words “there can be no time out, no empty space in the fabric of the community” (1999: 68). Odysseus’ heroic story gestures towards totality: it *apprehends* Penelope; she is arrested and perceived.

⁸⁷ Cf. Harney and Moten’s *The Undercommons* (2013: 17-20).

Despite the threat of being “recontained” in Odysseus’ story, nonetheless, for Cavarero, Penelope’s rhythmic weaving and unweaving maintains an “impenetrable” space:

[t]he dilated time, the endless, cadenced sameness that Penelope weaves is *impenetrable*. She has no other defense or place but the dimension that comes out of her hands, and weaves her quiet time of self-belonging, taking this time from men’s tempo, which is greedy for events (1995: 14).

This impenetrability thus marks both a space *and* a time: “by unraveling and thereby rendering futile what little she has done, she weaves her impenetrable time [...] an absolute time removed from history’s events” (Ibid.). How do we understand this impenetrability? Penelope’s “unpredictable and impenetrable time and space” (Ibid. 16) is not impervious because of the strength or surety of its defences: she is not behind the barricades but within the weaving-room. Rather it is the nonsensical, “absurd and unpredictable” (Ibid. 17) character of this space and time that renders it impenetrable:

Penelope’s time cannot be touched by events, precisely because it cannot be reduced to one of the two tempos that are alien to it: the tempo of men’s actions and the tempo of wifely domestic production. Unlike the pressing intrusion of the ‘new’ that characterizes action, this tempo, in fact, has the cadence of an infinite repetition (Ibid. 16).

Penelope’s night-time activity refuses the binary offered within the patriarchal order, instead enacting a time which cannot be made sense of within this order. Penelope thus demonstrates the contingency of the distinction Arendt depends upon, of a public, political sphere that offers great words and deeds a sense of reality, juxtaposed to a private, nonpolitical sphere of domestic reproduction: “[i]f measured against the action of the hero, Penelope’s time is empty; if measured against standards of domestic service, it is futile” (Ibid. 17). Crucially, if Penelope disidentifies from the patriarchal order, she does so not simply in relation to its standards, judgements and values. If this were the case the time she generates would simply be “negative” (Ibid.), a “pure denial” (Ibid.), taking place “under the sign of the patriarchal order it intends to deny, implying its own dependence on that order” (Ibid.). Rather, for Cavarero, Penelope’s space and time is both a refusal but, just as important, it is also the enactment of “its own measurements and standards” (Ibid.) which “displaces the patriarchal order, setting up an impenetrable distance between that order and itself” (Ibid.).

Cavarero recounts Odysseus’ death not via Homer but via Dante, where Odysseus, in the Latin, becomes Ulysses. Unlike in Homer, where Odysseus is killed

by his unrecognised son, in Dante Ulysses makes one final trip back out to sea and is drowned during a storm (Dante 2008: 158-159). According to Cavarero “[f]or this hero Ithaca is a place of repose, but his real element is the sea, his freedom is the unforeseen, and his valour is risk-taking” (Ibid. 19). The sea represents the new, the stage within which great words and deeds are announced and imbued with a vitality absent even in the debating halls of the palace on Ithaca. Ulysses’ death at sea is thus, for Cavarero, the “appropriate” (Ibid.) location for his demise: “[t]he hero cannot grow old and die at home, for he is precisely the ‘elsewhere’ of an action hungry for events” (Ibid.). The island of Ithaca, by contrast, is Penelope’s home, marked not by great words and deeds but by the rhythmic, regular, embodied gestures of her and her handmaids, weaving together. The seashore “is her experience of the frontier” (Ibid. 20); from the perspective of the patriarchal order this frontier is a “finitude” (Ibid. 21) which functions like a prison. However, seen with “Penelope’s eyes” (Ibid.),

this finitude would become a confinement where the self-belonging she has won carves out a proportionate space around her [...] the seashore now becomes the extreme limit of Penelope’s space, not as a prison, but as something that excludes an alien world inhabited by men (Ibid.).

Is this a pure political sphere that Penelope, in her separatism, inaugurates? As we have seen, it is, for Cavarero, an *impenetrable* space and time, one that is generated by the activity of Penelope and her handmaids. And yet, it is impenetrable not because of the defences it erects, but rather because it operates according to a different logic to that of the patriarchal order: a logic that neither recognises the great words of the debating halls, or the great deeds of the sea, or even the domestic work of the weaving room. What emerges in the instantiation of this heterogeneous logic - that is both within and without the palace, within and without the sea, a world within a world - is a certain form of sociality, one that maintains a particular cadence, tactility and posture, and that exists in indifference to the order which, properly, should have it captured;⁸⁸ as Rancière notes, “[p]olitics [...] starts with this tiny modification in the posture of a body” (2009a: 117). Following her intellectual labour, this Penelope finally becomes apparent to Adriana Cavarero; Penelope is sensed - Cavarero receives a flavour (*un sapore*) of this Penelope - in a way that, presumably, she was not before, and if she is apprehended by Cavarero then perhaps she is not also captured. Cavarero says:

⁸⁸ If Odysseus’ story is inscribed through his actions in his unending nautical adventures, Penelope’s is inscribed through the weaving enacted by her and her handmaids. One thus has “two ways by which writing is inscribed in a space” (Rancière 2004: 100). Penelope’s weaving as writing manifests “a certain world, a certain way in which writing makes a world by unmaking another one” (Ibid.).

I see her laughing with her handmaids, together in a group, weaving garments to suit their needs, and telling of how they kept the suitors at bay, of how they discovered the joy of being with each other, working and thinking together. I see her. I see her, in that amazing island that now separates two estranged worlds with a mythical clarity. She speaks of birth and rootedness, rather than death and adventure. I see her looking out from the windows at the edge of the raging water that separates her and her handmaids from the heroes' deeds, and allows them to stand on their own ground where their gestures weave an initial space for a kind of feminine freedom that will no longer be threatened [...] We women will have to leave Penelope's Ithaca. But precisely because Penelope was able to stop there, we will be able to leave a *place* without forgetting or losing it (1995: 22).

The space generated by Penelope and her handmaids' repeated gestures is only an "initial" space; it offers a "kind of" feminine freedom; it is a space that women "will have to leave". And yet because it is there, tangibly, then there is somewhere to leave; and without somewhere to leave the process of leaving cannot occur.

Cavarero sees Penelope, sees her repeatedly, almost a moment of divine revelation. Penelope is revealed to Cavarero, but Cavarero also reveals Penelope. A second space then emerges, or a (re)doubling of the first space: a space between Penelope and her handmaids, and between Cavarero and Penelope.

Butler

Like Cavarero, Judith Butler offers resources for thinking a space of politics that emerges obliquely from the thought of Arendt, however Butler goes further than Cavarero in attempting to undermine the relationship between politics and certain activities proper to its expression. In her most recent book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015a), Butler, following many theorists before her, calls into question the public / private divide that Arendt depends upon in *The Human Condition*.⁸⁹ For Butler, Arendt "quite emphatically distinguishes the private sphere as one of dependency and inaction from the public sphere as one of independent action" (Ibid. 44). However, for Butler, independent action "is predicated upon a disavowal of those living and interdependent relations upon which our lives depend" (Ibid.). Further, this notion of an independent agency evacuates the body from what it is to act

⁸⁹ See, for example, the fourth chapter of Bonnie Honig's *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993: 76-125).

politically by privileging speech as “the model of the political action” (Ibid. 45). The body comes to be associated with the domestic sphere of reproduction and necessity, and as such “the foreign, unskilled, feminized body that belongs to the private sphere is the condition of possibility for the speaking male citizen” (Ibid.). Therefore, for Butler, “[i]f the body remains at the level of necessity, then it would appear that no political account of freedom can be an embodied one” (Ibid. 47). There is an ambiguity here, however. Is Butler advocating a recognition of the ways the body comes to signify within the political sphere, or is she advocating a recognition of the private sphere as, in some sense, also political? Put another way, can the realm of necessity be meaningful in political terms whether or not the body remains at its “level” (Ibid.)? If the argument is that the political realm is also, always, embodied, this may be true, but it leaves unchallenged the distinction between the political and the nonpolitical to begin with. Taking seriously the realm of necessity in terms distinctly apart from an Arendtian political sphere becomes the more radical gesture. Butler wants to enact something of both of these maneuvers, however because the distinction is not clearly drawn the more radical project of not just changing what it is to be political but calling into question the existence of this realm becomes subsumed in the former. Thus, Butler notes that for Arendt “necessity can never be a form of freedom” (Ibid.) and challenges Arendt with “the possibility that one might be hungry, angry, free, and reasoning, and that a political movement to overcome inequality in food distribution is a just and fair political movement” (Ibid.).⁹⁰ Here, necessity motivates politics, and may even alter what is recognisable within the political sphere, but it also maintains the distinction between the political and the nonpolitical that does so much work in depoliticising necessity to begin with. Instead, necessity needs to be thinkable politically in a way that is divorced from the political; in a way that is not destined to the political realm as the salutary transformation of this realm but rather as that which refuses thinking politics in terms of realms to begin with.

This ambiguity concerning the relationship between politics and necessity is in part a consequence of Butler’s equivocation concerning the object of her enquiry:

⁹⁰ For Arendt labouring - the aspect of the *vita activa* that reproduces the requirements of life and is thus linked to necessity - is not simply unpolitical (such as, for her, work) but further antipolitical. Labouring is “an activity in which man is neither together with the world nor with other people, but alone with his body, facing the naked necessity to keep himself alive” (1998: 212). Plain here is Arendt’s prejudice against the possibilities of need, necessity and reproduction establishing themselves as political, or even offering any form of sociality at all. This contrasts markedly with Saidiya Hartman’s notion of a politics of redress (1997: 51). We could ask why it is that Arendt cannot perceive distinctness in the realm of necessity; why the redress of the pained body is not expressive of distinctness. One could ask why the labour of Penelope’s handmaids, as detailed by Cavarero, does not constitute a being-together and an expression of uniqueness.

Butler, following Arendt, speaks of a “plurality” (Ibid. 59) that is a consequence of the social ontology she is working with and which manifests a generalised “sphere of appearance” (Ibid.), and a specific “public sphere” (Ibid.) which at times seems synonymous with the sphere of appearance while at others seems distinct. Thus, Butler argues

to be precluded from the space of appearance, to be precluded from being part of the plurality that brings the space of appearance into being, is to be deprived of the right to have rights. Plural and public action is the exercise of the right to place and belonging, and this exercise is the means by which the space of appearance is presupposed and brought into being (Ibid. 59-60).

Here one can not only be precluded from the space of appearance but further from plurality; however, if plurality is a consequence of the fact of one’s embodied sociality then it is unclear in what sense one could be precluded from it. In other words, plurality refers not to a spatial realm from which one can be ejected but to a fact of existence. Even the space of appearance, which as Butler and Cavarero note is not spatially fixed but necessarily mobile, contingent and precarious, emerging between people as a consequence of the fact of plurality, can only be thought of as a realm which one can be excluded from if it is conceived as a homogenous totality which follows the contours of the public sphere. This would be to think the space of appearance closer to Arendt’s original account (even if it is not synonymous with this account) than to the correctives that Cavarero and Butler want to enact. Butler is certainly not presupposing a conception of public space as preconstitutive of forms of politics; indeed, as she makes clear, often “the very public character of the space is being disputed” (Ibid. 71). Public space is the object of politics as much as it is the condition. But in the slippage from *public space* to *space of appearance* to *plurality*, an implicit link is drawn which destines political activity to the public sphere, even as this public sphere is being called into question. To be clear, something understood as the public sphere is, sometimes, transformed in political action, just as something called politics does, sometimes, take place in the public sphere. But even as Butler notes that politics crosses the lines demarcating the public and the private “again and again” (Ibid.), the radicality of her and Cavarero’s reworking of the space of appearance is literally domesticated: it is given a *domus*, by always being thought in relation to something called the public sphere, and by being premised on plurality, understood not as a generalised condition but as a particular object. When Butler asks “[h]ow does a plurality form, and what material supports are necessary for that formation? Who enters this plurality, and who

does not, and how are such matters decided?" (Ibid. 77) these are not the wrong questions because of their focus on inclusion and exclusion, but because they mistake plurality for a spatially constituted object that can maintain an inside and an outside; in effect, plurality becomes synonymous with the public sphere. Interrogating the conditions of collective political action is crucial, but the object of inquiry should be the space of appearance, or the public sphere itself, not plurality (and certainly not "a" plurality). This matters because in specifying "a" plurality, and in making this plurality the condition for the space of appearance, the space of appearance is too easily collapsed into the public sphere, either as coterminous with the public sphere or as a counterhegemonic political community with the transformation of the public sphere as its end goal. The space of appearance thought in *indifference to* the public sphere, as heterogeneous to the public sphere, becomes elided, and thus so too do forms of politics that generate and maintain this heterogeneous, indifferent space of appearance.

This critical line of inquiry of Butler's account of politics should not be overstated, however. Butler's discussion is situated in response to collective political demonstrations where the question of the public space has either been a central political demand or a crucial aspect of any making sense of these moments of politics. It is therefore understandable that her use of an Arendtian vocabulary is situated in relation to a notion of the public sphere. And further, Butler does much to destabilise Arendt's privileging of politics as being irremediably tied to words and deeds, with its proper location (the public sphere) and its proper expression (reasoned speech). Most importantly, Butler helps one make sense of Arendt's space of appearance and draws out the dispossessive, embodied relationality that implicitly sustains it. For Butler, the space of appearance emerges in our appearing to another:

I am, as a body, not only for myself, not even primarily for myself, but I find myself, if I find myself at all, constituted and dispossessed by the perspective of others. So, for political action, I must appear to others in ways I cannot know, and in this way, my body is established by perspectives that I cannot inhabit but that, surely, inhabit me (Ibid. 76-77).

One can see that for Butler, if one were to offer politics a location, then it could be said that it "emerges from the 'between,' a spatial figure for a relation that both binds and differentiates" (Ibid. 77). The between is "a spatial figure" but not, necessarily, a clearly defined location; pre-empting the thought of Saidiya Hartman that I will engage in my final chapter, one could say that Butler's space of appearance lacks a "proper locus" (Hartman 1997: 51). Importantly, if politics emerges from this unlocatable location then

politics is not the *possession* of this location precisely because what is central to the space of appearance is its dispossessive character.

In rethinking the space of appearance Butler also challenges the forms of conduct proper to this space, something maintained not only by Arendt but also Cavarero. For Butler, “the political meanings enacted by demonstrations are not only those that are enacted by discourse, whether written or vocalized. Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive” (2015a: 8). In this way,

the body can appear and signify in ways that contest the way it speaks or even contest speaking as its paradigmatic instance. Could we still understand action, gesture, stillness, touch, and moving together if they were all reducible to the vocalization of thought through speech (Ibid. 87-88)?

Butler is here undermining the Aristotelian *zoon logon echon* - the political subject in possession of speech (and possessed by speech) - and further, undermining Arendt’s (and Cavarero’s) insistence on a particular form of bodily conduct that actively expresses uniqueness and is thus proper to the political. Instead for Butler, “[s]ilent gatherings, including vigils or funerals, often signify in excess of any particular written or vocalized account of what they are about” (Ibid.). One might also say that even where political signification is explicit in the form of discourse, nonetheless a meaning endures which is not reducible to the explicit discursive signification. Indeed, for Butler “[a] second sense of enactment, then, emerges here in light of embodied forms of action and mobility that signify in excess of whatever is said” (Ibid.). Further, this political signification cannot be straightforwardly thought of as one’s own: rather, political signification emerges “by virtue of the relation between us, arising from that relation, equivocating between the I and the we, seeking at once to preserve and disseminate the generative value of that equivocation” (Ibid. 9). For Butler then, this “generative value” - the equivocation in the in-between of the space of appearance - can be thought of as the excess of signification proper to any political act: an excess both in the sense that signification exceeds the individual (an ecstatic excess) and in the sense that signification is not finally captured by *logos* (a fugitive excess).

This excessive, generative equivocation of the space of appearance is important, as it helps furnish a sense of the forms of politics of those who would otherwise be positioned as excluded from the political. As Butler asks, “[w]hat political language do we have in reserve for describing that exclusion and the forms of resistance that crack open the sphere of appearance as it is currently delimited?” (Ibid.

77-78). The ambiguity in Butler's thinking of the space of appearance is still present here, in that the space of appearance is simultaneously presented as a generalised realm synonymous with the public sphere and (if less apparent) as a manifestation of a political space heterogenous to this public sphere. Again, this recognition of an ambivalence central to the space of appearance is not incorrect: it corresponds to the similar ambivalence in Rancière's *partage du sensible* which is both the object that politics reconfigures and the mode that this reconfiguration takes; both a sharing and a separating, as Panagia notes (2010: 95). In Butler's words, "the sphere of appearance is both mobilized and disabled" (2015a: 79). However, Butler both places an emphasis on the space of appearance as a generalised regulatory sphere rather than as the manifestation of a heterogeneous political space, and further does not specify this distinction to begin with. Despite being attentive to the forms of exclusion that are maintained within dominant understandings of what politics is, Butler's response is not, *a la* Rancière, to specify politics as precisely this disruption of the bounds of the political, but rather to insist that "politics and power" (Ibid. 78) are prevalent even in moments of destitution: "[t]o be outside established and legitimate political structures is still to be saturated in power relations" (Ibid. 80). In this way Butler correctly diagnoses the issue (a notion of politics that regulates and polices who counts as properly political) while offering a response that situates the problem not with the conception of politics but rather with an inability to extend this politics to account for those who would fall outside of the political. Instead, and following Rancière, politics thought as an ordering, with its concomitant exclusions, is a different kind of politics to a politics thought of as a disruption of this ordering. This does not mean that the space generated through political activity is immune from issues of order and exclusion, but rather that thinking politics only as power elides the specificity of the activity of those who are excluded from (even if constitutive of) the dominant conception of politics.

Again, Butler's conflation of the "sphere of appearance" (Ibid. 78), the "sphere of politics" (Ibid.), the "public square" (Ibid.), the "sphere of the political" (Ibid. 79) and the "public space of appearance" (Ibid. 85) helps reinforce this elision, even as she stresses that "in revolutionary or insurrectionary moments, we are no longer sure what operates as the space of politics" (Ibid. 78). Insisting as Butler does that there are "forms of political agency that emerge precisely in those domains deemed prepolitical or extrapolitical" (Ibid.) is in a sense true, but adding the qualifier "political" to activity which previously was not deemed political and doing this on the basis that this activity is saturated in power relations is to make this activity equivalent to the dominant conception of politics, and thus to reinforce this conception, even as Butler wishes to expose its "violence and [...] contingent limits" (Ibid. 79). In this way, both an insistence

on the dispossessed as being excluded from the political and an insistence on the political extending to encompass the dispossessed is to not think the political action of the dispossessed in its specificity. I believe Butler is grappling with this issue, however the form her argument takes in the pages of *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (in particular its second chapter) leaves its resolution underspecified and ambiguous.

Nonetheless, as I have indicated there is much that can be drawn from Butler's reworking of the Arendtian space of appearance. Her undermining of the Aristotelian insistence on proper forms of political activity; her recognition of the dispossessive character of the space of appearance; and her insistence on an excess to political signification (both ecstatic and fugitive) all do much to furnish a politics that is not simply (or only) the demonstrating of one's equality to those who would refuse it, or the blurring of the purity of politics. Read alongside Cavarero's reading of Penelope, a sense of politics emerges that concerns those who are indifferent to the extant orders (even if they are never outside of these orders); where a shared *aesthesis* is made manifest between those who engage in particular forms of (in)activity; and where these forms of sociality are marked by a recognition that confronts the ambivalence of apprehension. As I noted, this apprehension of another and the space of appearance it manifests might be enacted in the concrete material proximity of another person (or people), but also, contra Cavarero, it might occur in the textual restaging of another's existence (as Cavarero herself does with Penelope). Both forms of apprehension come up against the ambivalence the word maintains, situated in the *prehendō* of its etymology, which signifies the seizing of another (i.e. not only an *apprehension* but an *arresting*). The 'ap-' prefix is also significant, in that it signifies an active, outward seizing of another. In this sense, what Cavarero does when she reads Penelope can be thought as apprehension, but perhaps 'comprehension' might make better sense of the manifestation of a shared *aesthesis*, in that the 'com-' indicates a bringing together of many things, as well as a seizing of things done by many.⁹¹ Further, it carries the ambivalence of Rancière's *partage*, in that the act of comprehension, here thought as communal, brings together many things while also, of necessity, maintaining their separateness.⁹²

This chapter began by insisting that the thinking of political space is important, and that Arendt's limits should be identified not with her conception of political space

⁹¹ Cf. Cavarero's repeated use of the related [*c]omparendo* (2000: 89), *comparizione* (Ibid. 90) and *comparire* (Ibid. 91) in the original Italian of *Relating Narratives*, translated variously as 'appearing together' or 'co-appearance' in the English.

⁹² Cf. Rancière's use of *comprendre* in *La Méésentente* (e.g. 1995: 72-74). My thanks to Lars Cornelissen for highlighting this.

per se, but rather with her grounding of this space on the words and deeds of political actors (words and deeds that require a specific political space for their endurance). Butler and Cavarero demonstrate that an account of political space can be thought that critically makes use of the resources Arendt offers but is not premised on either a purity of this space or on a particular form of conduct. In this way, Sam Chambers' wariness of thinking a Rancièrian space of politics on Arendtian terms can be tempered: to say that politics is impure is true, but this conceptualisation is in danger of eliding the significance of the paradoxical, heterogeneous character of forms of political community, forms that are indifferent to our critical theorisings and, contra Rancière, might be more properly *social* than political (which does not mean that they cannot be, in the last instance, forms of politics). Here we can think with Penelope and her handmaids, "weaving and laughing in their quiet abode" (Cavarero 1995: 30): Cavarero manifests a sense of political space as an anomalous, heterogenous world within a world, marked not by great words and deeds but by the tactile, tangible, repeated gestures of those who manifest this fugitive space through forms of apprehension, comprehension and practices of undoing apart from economies of visibility. Politics is not premised on these actions: these actions are the form that politics takes in this instance; actions that refuse both the role assigned to those who enact them but also the dominant conceptualisations of what constitutes political activity to begin with.

Chapter Eight: Towards a Fugitive Politics

In this thesis I have engaged the work of Rancière, Butler and Cavarero to think through their shared thematic orientation around issues of visibility. Each author is committed to articulating an account of the world that makes visible forms of existence - or forms of violence suffered - that could not otherwise be seen. Through this analysis I have begun to develop a sense of a politics that is in danger of being depoliticised if one is committed to the relationship between visibility and politics. This endangered politics concerns those who exist in indifference to the extant orders that are insensitive to them; who do not make themselves visible. The danger of depoliticising these forms of existence is present in the work of Rancière, Butler and Cavarero, even if they also offer resources for thinking politics apart from visibility. To make this clear, in this final chapter I contrast Rancière, Butler and Cavarero's thought with Saidiya Hartman's work on the Middle Passage and its afterlives. Hartman works at the intersection of politics, violence, narrative and visibility. Her work identifies a particular politics that emerges in relation to the violent histories that she engages with. This is a politics of fugitivity, one that challenges the status of visibility in the (anti-)Arendtian politics of Butler, Cavarero and Rancière: that is, the making visible of forms of existence that were rendered insensitive (Rancière); or the making visible of violences that were rendered insensitive (Butler); or the making visible of the narrative unity of uniqueness that was rendered insensitive (Cavarero). Hartman's fugitive politics holds out that politics might operate apart from economies of visibility: indifferent to (if never outside of) the extant orders of Rancière's police; preceding the ordering of the Arendtian *polis*; evading the capture of the archive and its reiteration in the more or less emancipatory narratives that are wrought from the violent words found there-in.

I begin by detailing Arendt's relationship to visibility, which forms the backdrop of Butler, Cavarero and Rancière's work even if they each distance themselves from her work. As I argued in my last chapter, it is in this distancing from Arendt that each author comes closest to articulating a politics that can be thought apart from visibility. I then outline Hartman's fugitive account of politics that emerges in two ways in her work: first via her analysis of slave sociality on the plantation; and second via her negotiation of the limits of writing accounts of the enslaved. In each instance Hartman is grappling with the politics and ethics of making the lives of the enslaved visible when their very existence is constituted in fugitivity.

Arendt and Visibility

The relationship between visibility and politics is exemplified in the work of Hannah Arendt. As I demonstrated in my previous chapter, Arendt's account of politics casts a shadow over the accounts that Butler and Cavarero maintain, even if they both rework Arendt's thought in thematising a space of politics that is not inaugural of politics, and not a pure political realm, but rather a place marked by a particular, tangible, embodied form of sociality - a being together - from which is manifest a contingent, precarious and heterogeneous space of politics that exists in indifference to visibility. By contrast, Arendt hesitates at the moment when she thinks the inauguration of the political. "[T]he political realm rises" (1998: 198), she suggests,

directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds.' Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it. *It is as though* the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself (Ibid., emphasis added).

This hesitation on Arendt's part, marked precisely at her "It is as though", indicates a tension that she cannot resolve (and corresponds, with different intentions, to Rancière's "as if" (1999: 58; 2009: 16)). What is this precarious pre-political moment, marked by fragility and dependent upon the physical manifestation of the *polis* for its endurance and yet which is also the condition of the political realm itself? Arendt suggests that it can be thought as the deeds and sufferings of those who returned from the Trojan War: "it is as though", Arendt says again,

the men who returned from the Trojan War had wished to make permanent the space of action which had arisen from their deeds and sufferings, to prevent its perishing with their dispersal and return to their isolated homesteads (Ibid.).

Although not a theoretical necessity, it is telling that Arendt draws a relationship between the coherence of the *polis* and a theatre of war that sets the scene for great words or deeds, situating violent conflict as a necessary condition for the emergence of the *polis*. The *polis* gives an endurance to actions that would disperse once the war has ended, a suggestion that would have to be modified in the contemporary era, where violent conflict is not only permanent but is presented as an always-possible

existential threat internal to the *polis* itself.⁹³ In either case, what Arendt identifies is a pre-political existence that necessitates the construction of the *polis*. However, rather than this pre-political existence being spatially and temporally apart from what will become the *polis*, what if it is thought as being the necessary condition of the *polis*' ongoing formation; a form of sociality that *escapes* the *polis* while at the same time *exceeding* the *polis* and operating with a fundamental *indifference to* the *polis*? Arendt concludes that this paradoxical moment of politics' inauguration suggests that

[t]he *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be (Ibid.).

However, this is to conflate two distinct formations that operate in different ways, being governed by separate logics: a logic of immortality (the permanence offered by the *polis*' institutions, laws, sovereignty and sheer physicality), and a logic of the contingent, precarious, aleatory sociality of being-together. The two are related, but not in a reciprocal manner: the former is fundamentally dependent on the latter for its existence as political, whereas the latter, once one lets go of Arendt's insistence on the necessity of the immortality of great deeds, operates in spite of the former.

Arendt says that "action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere" (Ibid.). But what if this space has not so much a proper location as an improper one;⁹⁴ indeed, is this not what, theoretically, necessitates the inauguration of the *polis*, to capture, arrest and domesticate the impropriety of being-together (an irony given that, for the Greeks, the *polis* precisely offered the great deeds of men the chance of an existence outside of the *oikos*)? As Butler has noted, the space of appearance is not possessive but dispossessive (2015a: 77). And if it is to be described as 'pre-political' this is, in a sense, to have already made a mistake: first, politics is misnamed, in that what the sociality of being-together precedes is, as both Cavarero and Rancière note and as Arendt makes clear, a type of ordering proper to the *polis*; and second, through the application of the prefix 'pre-', this sociality of being-together is destined *to* this ordering. The keenest observations of political theorists (in Cavarero's sense) may identify this pre-political being-together and the *polis*' dependence on this form of sociality, however they can only do so via the ordering proper to their discipline, and

⁹³ Cf. Roberto Esposito's 'Community, Immunity, Biopolitics' (2013), and Giorgio Agamben's *Stasis* (2015).

⁹⁴ Cf. Devenney (2011).

thus at the expense of this being-together's radicality.

For Arendt, the *polis* was the guarantor that great deeds or words would achieve immortality and would not be forgotten (1998: 197): man “reveals and confirms himself” (Ibid. 207) - that is, his “unique distinctness” (Ibid.) - “in speech and action, and these activities, despite their material futility, possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance” (Ibid. 207-208). How should one understand the “material futility” of speech and action, and is their enduring quality only a consequence of the fact that they “create their own remembrance”? It is this material futility that prompts Arendt to theorise the *polis* as the model for the necessity of the agonal public sphere: the *polis* alleviates this material futility by substituting its materiality for the revelatory, miraculous character of speech and action. Speech and action thus endure, invested in the materiality of the *polis*.⁹⁵ And yet, speech and action, despite Arendt's insistence on their material futility, nonetheless can find ways of enduring (if endurance is to be our final determinant of their political worth) quite apart from the *polis*. In this way there is a double excess to the *polis* that Arendt thematises: first, an excess of sociality that exists despite the ordering of the *polis* (marked at Arendt's “It is as though” (1998: 198)) and second, an excess of speech and action (and, one should add, phonality and necessity) that endures despite the ordering of the *polis*. As I will go on to demonstrate, Saidiya Hartman's work responds to both of these issues.

Arendt's account of politics is the exemplary case of a politics of visibility, whether this be the visibility of words and deeds as they are enacted in the public sphere, or the visibility of the history of these words and deeds as they are immortalised in the physicality of the *polis*. However, as I argued in my first chapter, there are related issues of visibility in the thought of Rancière. Although Rancière's politics can be understood as a critique of Arendt, nonetheless his critique still leaves politics in danger of being thought as a process of making visible what was previously invisible. It is an irony that Butler and Cavarero, despite their explicit (and not wholly critical) engagement with Arendt, are better able to think forms of politics that are not concerned with demonstrating equality to an extant order, or constructing a common stage where those who could not be seen as political actors can now be seen, or making heard as reasoned speech what was previously only heard as noise. Perhaps the danger stems from Rancière's most famous text on politics - *La Méésentente* (1995)

⁹⁵ Cf. Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985), where, as I argued in my fourth chapter, the body of the tortured alleviates the material futility of the speech of the torturer, here thought as an avatar of the regime that tortures. Scarry also suggests that wounding in war functions to memorialise the immateriality of the beliefs that a war is fought over (Ibid. 113). See also Fred Moten's linking of materiality and maternity in ‘The Subprime and the beautiful’ (2013a: 243:244).

- being written in a particular historical conjuncture, attempting to interrupt Fukuyama's end of history (1989; 2012), Habermas' ideal speech situation (1992) and Lefort's rethinking of the political (1988). Rancière's strategy for doing so was to insist on a fundamental *mésentente* - a misunderstanding, or perhaps a dissension, and not really a disagreement as it is translated in the English title (Rancière 1999) - and to insist that politics operates as a consequence of this *mésentente*; or rather, that politics *is* this very *mésentente*. Rancière was not concerned with resolving this *mésentente*. Instead, Rancière's political actors - the existence of whom the *mésentente* was precisely about - would, in their forcing of their visibility, transform the *partage du sensible* that rendered them insensitive. This is not a *mésentente* being resolved, rather, it is the conditions for the possibility of a *mésentente* being recomposed (1999: 40); a poetic intervention in the distribution of the sensible. However, while the *mésentente* is not resolved in Rancière's *Disagreement*, political activity is nonetheless concerned with transforming the relationship between those who have a place in the extant order and those who are denied a place. Politics becomes the making visible of what was invisible; consequently, a politics of those content to stay invisible or insensitive (one that is in danger of being undermined by one's more-or-less emancipatory valorisation of certain forms of (in)activity) is more difficult to discern when working from the thought of Rancière, particularly his *Disagreement*. The consequence of this valorisation of visibility can be seen in Todd May's *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* (2008), where May asks "if one is invisible, what character can one have?" (ibid. 49), a synonym of Rancière's claim that "[w]hoever is nameless *cannot speak*" (1999: 23, emphasis original). Understood in this way, an absence of visibility renders one characterless and speechless.

Saidiya Hartman's work confronts these issues of visibility, whether they be related to the shining light of the public sphere, the immortality of the *polis* or the making visible of nonsensical ways of doing, ways of being and ways of saying. Further, Hartman makes clear the historically specific issue of demanding a visibility of the violated black body. For Hartman, narrating the lives of those violated during the Middle Passage and its afterlives is a necessary but impossible task: on the one hand, the demonstration of these violences through the narrating of the lives of the violated shines a light on the legacies of racism that continue into the present day; while on the other, the act of narrating these lives reinscribes a certain violence, both by insisting that the violated black body make visible its suffering, but also in the reiteration of the objectification enacted by the initial inscription of the lives of the violated (in, for example, the ledgers of slavers). Butler's commitment to making visible forms of violence that are otherwise rendered invisible (or rendered righteous) is complicated

here, as is Cavarero's commitment to restituting a figural unity of the violated through the narration of their lives. These two issues - the violence of the demand that the black body demonstrate its violation, and the violence of the reinscription of the violence of the slavers' ledgers - are related. In both instances, a fugitive politics emerges in Hartman's work through her negotiation of these issues: in the former through an analysis of the ways slaves entered into forms of sociality in contexts of near-absolute domination; and in the latter through the ways Hartman (and others) apprehend (or, sometimes, comprehend) the speech, voices and sounds that emerge despite inaugural conditions of violence, and despite an absence of the immortality offered by the Arendtian *polis*.

What Hartman's work does, then, is push at the presumption of the value of visibility that is present in Rancière, Butler and Cavarero. This does not amount to a rejection of their accounts of politics and violence; it is simply a marker of the moments in their work where their poetics of politics - their interventions in the distribution of the sensible - reach a limit. The recognition of this limit demands a counter-translation of their own translations of their thought about politics and violence, a counter-translation that calls into question the significance of making visible either one's equality, or one's uniqueness, or one's violation, and instead asks 'What if politics and violence can be negotiated beyond the register of the visible?'. Hartman does not resolve this question; she does not settle for the invisible over the visible. Rather, she confronts the limits of a project concerned with making visible either forms of politics or forms of violence. It is out of this confrontation that another aspect of the relationship between politics and violence can emerge: a fugitive politics that does not necessarily valorise invisibility but instead attempts to exist with others despite the violence of the visible.

The Pained Body as Politics' Improper Locus

At the beginning of *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Hartman notes that Frederick Douglass' account of the beating of his Aunt Hester is "one of the most well-known scenes of torture in the literature of slavery" (Ibid. 3); that it "establishes the centrality of violence to the making of the slave" (Ibid.); that it is "an inaugural moment" (Ibid.) and therefore a "primal scene" (Ibid.) in the "making of the enslaved" (Ibid.).⁹⁶ For Hartman, the scene "dramatizes the origin of the subject" (Ibid.). One would think, then, that Hartman would reproduce Douglass' text, given her concern with "Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America" (Ibid.) to quote her book's subtitle.

⁹⁶ See Douglass (2001: 16).

However, Hartman refuses to redeploy this scene of violence. To quote Hartman at length:

I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity - the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances - and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering (Ibid.).

Instead, as I have noted, Hartman is interested in "the ways we are called upon to participate in such scenes" (Ibid.). Hartman is unequivocal in her refusal of the reproduction of the spectacularity of the suffering black body:

[o]nly more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and the terrible. In this light, how does one give expression to these outrages without exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle or contend with the narcissistic identification that obliterates the other or the prurience that too often is the response to such displays (Ibid. 4)?

It is in this way that Judith Butler's commitment to identifying forms of violence that are overlooked as violence (or are seen as righteously violent) meets a moment of tension: the particular histories of the demand that the black body demonstrate its violation might mean that the impulse to make violence visible should be refused. The tension, as Hartman makes clear, lies between refusing the call to participate in these outrages, while also giving them expression. Hartman negotiates this tension by remaining faithful to "the politics of a lower frequency" (Ibid. 35), a faithfulness that gives "full weight to the opacity of these texts [testimonies of slavery] wrought by toil, terror, and sorrow and composed under the whip and in fleeting moments of reprieve" (Ibid. 35-36). Hartman goes on:

the subterranean and veiled character of slave song must be considered in relation to the dominative imposition of transparency and the degrading

hypervisibility of the enslaved, and therefore, by the same token, such concealment should be considered a form of resistance (Ibid. 36).

Hartman's refusal to restage the scene of Aunt Hester's beating should be read in relation to this concern over the "hypervisibility" (Ibid.) demanded of the wounded black body: this hypervisibility both offers whiteness an "illusory integrity" (Ibid. 32) and immures us to forms of resistance that operated at the level of the subterranean, the veiled, or the concealed. For Hartman,

[w]ithin the confines of surveillance and nonautonomy, the resistance to subjugation proceeded by stealth: one acted furtively, secretly, and imperceptibly, and the enslaved seized any and every opportunity to slip off the yoke [...] I do not mean to suggest that everyday practices were strategies of revolution but merely to emphasize that peregrinations, surreptitious appropriation, and moving about were central features of resistance or what could be described as the subterranean 'politics' of the enslaved (Ibid. 50).

There is a disjuncture between this "subterranean" (Ibid.) politics and the politics of visibility found in Rancière's *Disagreement*. Politics for Hartman is not the demonstration of an assumed equality directed towards those who would refuse it: there is no construction of a common stage "that brings the community and the non-community together" (1999: 55). The reasoned speech of the slave masters is not appropriated: the masters are not forced to reckon with the slaves as beings who possess a soul; beings in possession of *logos* and thus capable of enunciating what is just and unjust (Ibid. 23-26). The slaves do not act as if they were the *demos*, instituting a "singular universal" (Ibid. 39) - a particular wrong - and demonstrating the paucity of the Bill of Rights through the staging of a "syllogism" (2007: 45) or "a montage of *proofs*" (1999: 40, emphasis original). Does this mean Rancière's politics cannot speak to the subterranean politics identified by Hartman? For Rancière

[p]olitical activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard as discourse where once there was only place for noise (Ibid. 30).

What matters is who this making visible or making heard is directed towards. If the audience is those who would not recognise one's equality (or even recognise one's existence) then despite Rancière's politics being a disruption of the conditions that

mediate this visibility it still operates in an economy that reinforces the significance of those who would not recognise equality; politics in this way is concerned with the “relation to the community” (Ibid. 32). As Rancière argues in *On the Shores of Politics*, “[s]elf-emancipation is not secession, but self-affirmation as a joint-sharer in a common world, with the assumption, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, that one can play the same game as the adversary” (2007: 49). This might be a recomposition of the community through the forcing of visibility, but the transformation of the community is nonetheless the end goal. What changes is the manner in which this transformation goes about: not discussion within an ideal Habermasian speech situation, but the disruption enacted by those who could not be recognised as people capable of having a reasonable discussion (Rancière 1999: 49-50). For Rancière, it is not enough that one manifest a world between others who are denied a place in the social order: “the *demonstration* proper to politics is always both argument and opening up the world where arguments can be received and have an impact - argument about the very existence of such a world” (Ibid. 56). What falls by the wayside is the activity of those who act “furtively, secretly, and imperceptibly” (Hartman 1997: 50), and act in this manner not because they believe this to be the most effective strategy for social transformation but because any other activity would be met with the myriad violences of the plantation masters. The world that is manifest between those who mobilise “concealment” (Ibid. 36) as a form of resistance is not also an argument with those who deny the status of the slave’s humanity. On this reading, as long as politics is thought as a making visible directed towards those who would deny equality, then the “subterranean ‘politics’ of the enslaved” (Ibid. 50) is depoliticised.

The “subterranean ‘politics’ of the enslaved (Ibid. 50)” was, for Hartman, “a politics without a proper locus” (Ibid. 51); it was, of necessity, “fragmentary” (Ibid.), “transient” (Ibid.) and characterised by “precariousness” (Ibid.). One could also ask, however, whether this politics without a *proper* locus implies a politics with an *improper* locus (echoing Rancière (2010: 27-44) and Devenney (2011)), which raises the question of both where the (im)proper locus of politics is and how politics’ relationship to propriety functions. If for Arendt the location of politics’ proper locus is uncertain - supposedly found in the materiality of the *polis* but almost “as though” (1998: 198) it emerged between people - then Hartman thematises this (im)proper locus in the subterranean sociality of the pained body. For Hartman,

[w]hat unites these varied tactics is the effort to redress the condition of the enslaved, restore the disrupted affiliations of the socially dead, challenge the authority and domination of the slaveholder, and alleviate the pained

state of the captive body. However, these acts of redress are undertaken with the acknowledgement that conditions will most likely stay the same (1997: 51).

Politics' improper locus, then, would function not only spatially but also temporally, in that the recognition of "the magnitude of domination" (Ibid.) - that furtive moments of resistance would not transform the social order of chattel slavery - would not undermine the political quality of this improper locus; politics is not dependent upon the realisation of a *telos*. If there is to be an improper locus of politics (rather than only an absence of a proper locus of politics) then, following Hartman, this improper locus would be situated around the "pained body" (Ibid.) of the enslaved that furtive moments of resistance attempt to redress; in Hartman's words a "counterinvesting in the body as a site of possibility" (Ibid.). Pain is first situated in relation to the body of the enslaved, however it is also, for Hartman, saturated in the "captivity, dispossession, and domination that engenders the black subject in the Americas" (Ibid.); what Hartman calls "the history that hurts" (Ibid.). For Hartman

[t]he sheer enormity of this pain overwhelms or exceeds the limited forms of redress available to the enslaved. Thus the significance of the performative lies not in the ability to overcome this condition or provide remedy but in creating a context for the collective enunciation of this pain, transforming need into politics and cultivating pleasure as a limited response to need and a desperately insufficient form of redress (Ibid. 51-52).

One can then see the body and its needs as the site of this improper locus of politics, expressed via the "collective enunciation" (Ibid. 51) of pain, even as this attempt at redress is "desperately insufficient" (Ibid. 52). For Hartman these furtive moments of politics are modes of "performance and performativity" (Ibid. 57) which are "determined by, exploit, and exceed the constraints of domination" (Ibid.).⁹⁷ In this way the "contented subject of the pastoral or the heroic actor of the romance of resistance" (Ibid.) are inadequate figures for grasping the character and forms of politics enacted by the enslaved. The political subject of the western tradition - bourgeois, presumptively white and male, maintaining a rectitudinous posture and characterised by acts of will and expressions of speech in the public sphere (all of which are the

⁹⁷ Hartman makes use of both performance and performativity interchangeably, working with and against Judith Butler's account of the performative (see Hartman 1997: 217, n. 20). For Hartman, "[t]he interchangeable use of performance and performativity is intended to be inclusive of displays of power, the punitive and theatrical embodiment of racial norms, the discursive reelaboration of blackness, and the affirmative deployment and negation of blackness in the focus on redress" (Ibid. 57).

measure of his freedom) - not only functions to undermine the possibility of apprehending the subtle forms of politics available to the enslaved, but further constitutes himself in relation to this presumptively non-political condition. Instead, and as Hartman demonstrates, the relationship between resistance and domination for the enslaved is intimate and complex: “the conditions of domination and subjugation determine what kinds of action are possible or effective, though these acts can be said to exceed the conditions of domination and are not reducible to them” (Ibid. 55). The sheer fact of the “direct and simple forms of domination, the brutal asymmetry of power, the regular exercise of violence, and the denial of liberty” (Ibid.) that characterise slavery means that any form of resistance is irremediably tied to this domination even as it refuses and exceeds this domination, what Rancière calls “a supplement to the simple consensual game of domination and rebellion” (2009: 9). These acts of resistance could be (and often were) solitary, but also, for Hartman, there was a crucial social element to many forms of resistance. These were utopian constructions of “community” (1997: 59), however for Hartman this is a community not founded on the *identity* of blackness but rather

by the connections forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, sociality amid the constant threat of separation, and shifting sets of identification particular to site, location, and action [...] contrary to identity providing the ground of community, identity is figured as the desired negation of the very set of constraints that create commonality (Ibid.).

The “surreptitious gatherings” (Ibid. 60) - which were recognised by slaveowners to be a serious threat - were “enactments of community, not expressions of an a priori unity” (Ibid.). This notion of community can be compared to Rancière’s insistence that politics involves a “disidentification” (1999: 36), except here the construction of community is not “the opening up of a space where anyone can be counted” (Ibid.) but rather is “to be understood in terms of the possibilities of resistance conditioned by relations of power and the very purposeful and self-conscious effort to build community” (Hartman 1997: 59). Community does not emerge as a consequence of race, and nor do the identities of those engaged in the formation of community; community emerges in conditions of violence, and identity emerges through the actions of those attempting to redress this violence: “the yearning to be liberated from the condition of enslavement facilitates the networks of affiliation and identification” (Ibid.).

Community, even as it was severely limited in its scope and aims by the “extremity of domination, surveillance, terror, self-interest, distrust, conflict, lack of autonomy, tenuous and transient connections, and fear” (Ibid.), nevertheless was

significant in its collective refusal both of these brutal conditions and of the slave's existence as chattel. Again, for Hartman, these practices of community and collective acts of resistance were centrally concerned with redressing the pained body:

[t]his belonging together endeavors to redress and nurture the broken body; it is a becoming together dedicated to establishing other terms of sociality, however transient, that offer a small measure of relief from the debasements constitutive of one's condition (Ibid. 61).

Hartman's "absence of a proper locus" (Ibid. 62) of politics, or alternatively, as I want to suggest, the presence of an improper locus of politics, is motivated by her desire to "wrench the political from its proper referent" (Ibid. 65). Instead of the public sphere characterised by visibility, speech, action and reason, politics finds its improper locus in the "needs and desires" (Ibid.) of the enslaved, played out time and again in relation to the enslaved's body. These needs and desires, while intimately connected to the body, are not for this reason thematised around the figure of the isolated individual: instead for Hartman they possess a "social location" (Ibid.) and imply a sociality that is a consequence not just of the reaction to forms of domination that isolate slaves via their construction as chattel, but also of a sociality proper to the body, encompassing its phonality as well as its morphology. Just as Hartman is not valorising invisibility but calling into question the presumed importance of visibility, so too is she not valorising the body over mind (or *phone* over *logos*, or *zoe* over *bios*) but rather is undermining the privileging of reasoned speech through an emphasis on embodied phonality. This can also be seen in Cavarero's *For More than One Voice*, where Cavarero argues that

because speech is sonorous, to speak to one another is to communicate oneself to others in the plurality of voices. In other words, the act of speaking is relational: what it communicates first and foremost, beyond the specific content that the words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices" (2005: 13).

For Butler too, as I demonstrated in my last chapter, political acts of communication need to be understood beyond the *logos* of reasoned speech: the performative power of forms of public assembly and demonstration should be understood as "not only speech, but the demands of bodily action, gesture, movement, congregation, persistence, and exposure to possible violence" (2015a: 75); "when the body 'speaks' politically, it is not only in vocal or written language" (Ibid. 83). The body as well as the voice communicate with others, a point also made by Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: for Rancière, "[m]an communicates with man through the works of his

hands just as through the words of his speech” (1991: 65). What matters is that communication is an “[i]mprovisation” (Ibid. 64): “the exercise by which the human being knows himself and is confirmed in his nature as a reasonable man” (Ibid. 64-65). One communicates to others one’s thoughts through improvisations that are also translations, that in turn necessitate the counter-translations of others. The movement of “translation and counter-translation” (Ibid. 69) is the sole guarantee of the meaning of what is communicated. The violences of slavery do not inhibit communication, nor do they obliterate the possibility of politics: they necessitate an improvisation that at the same time demonstrates the poverty of the political subject of the western tradition who possesses reasoned speech that is manifest in the shining light of the public sphere.

Hartman not only challenges the assumptions of the proper locus of politics (grounded in the public sphere as distinct from the private, and reason as distinct from the body) and exposes its dependence on the violation of those who fall outside of its ideal of the political subject for its ongoing coherence,⁹⁸ but further gestures towards a politics that is improperly enacted via the necessarily social body. “Stealing Away” (Hartman 1997: 65), designating “a wide range of activities, from praise meetings, quilting parties, and dances to illicit visits with lovers and family on neighbouring plantations” (Ibid. 66), was for Hartman fundamentally concerned with the sociality of the body and its pain:

[s]tealing away was the vehicle for the redemptive figuration of dispossessed individual and community, reconstituting kin relations, contravening the object status of chattel, transforming pleasure, and investing in the body as a site of sensual activity, sociality, and possibility, and, last, redressing the pained body (Ibid.).

The body - its needs, desires and pleasures - becomes “the medium of politics” (Ibid. 70), or the improper locus of politics. The example of the juba, “a popular vernacular dance” (Ibid.) of the enslaved and characterised by the rhythmic striking of the body as well as the covert expression in its song of the desire for emancipation, demonstrates the “counterinvestment in the body as a site of pleasure and the articulation of need and desire” (Ibid.). These moments of stealing away, of counterinvestments in the pained body, were also crucial sites for the articulation of experiences of loss, wounding, violation and terror, where “the very consciousness of disconnectedness acts as a mode of testimony and memory” (Ibid. 74). Again, rather than figuring blackness as an *a priori* identity on which forms of sociality can be grounded, here

⁹⁸ In Fred Moten’s words, “the unspeakable violence that is done to what and whom the political excludes” (2013: 740).

blackness becomes the very breach enacted by the Middle Passage and its reiteration in the institution of the plantation:

[t]he recognition of loss is a crucial element in redressing the breach introduced by slavery. This recognition entails a remembering of the pained body, not by way of a simulated wholeness but precisely through the amputated body in its amputatedness, in the insistent recognition of the violated body as human flesh, in the cognition of its needs, and in the anticipation of its liberty. In other words, it is the ravished body that holds out the possibility of restitution, not the invocation of an illusory wholeness or the desired return to an originary plenitude (Ibid.).⁹⁹

For Hartman the body is figuratively “re-membered” (Ibid. 77) from its dismembered, segmented state as chattel. This form of redress, centred on the body as its improper locus, sees the body as a site of “pleasure, eros, and sociality” (Ibid.) in the face of its “violated condition” (Ibid.); relieves its pained state through “alternative configurations of the self” (Ibid.); insists on its “redemption” (Ibid.) as “human flesh, not beast of burden” (Ibid.); and identifies it as the site from which to “minimize the violence of historical dislocation and dissolution - the history that hurts” (Ibid.). Although limited in its means and “inevitably incomplete” (Ibid.), redress is nonetheless politically significant in that it is better understood as “an articulation of loss and a longing for remedy” (Ibid.): redress possesses “liminal characteristics” (Ibid.), the body being both witness (and object) of violation and witness (and object) of redress. Finally, it emerges in furtive moments of sociality: “mundane activities like exchanging stories, staying up all night talking with your lover, or singing across the Potomac to slaves on the other side” (Ibid. 77-78). The redress of slave resistance is an aesthetic practice as Rancière might understand it: it reconfigures the *partage du sensible*, diverting “bodies from their destinations” (2009: 17) and enacting a “counterstory of destiny” (Ibid.).

It is important to stress that for Hartman these forms of resistance and redress were severely limited, irremediably tied to the domination they were resisting, and offered little hope of any lasting social transformation. Hartman is not romanticising the experience of slavery and its furtive resistances: her point is to demonstrate the violences associated with politics proper; its capacity to render insensitive forms of politics that proceed from radically different premises (not the transcendental, reasoning, autonomous, rectitudinous political subject but the violated, dominated, fugitive slave); and its dependence on a hypervisibility of the black body for the political

⁹⁹ In Moten’s words, “[p]resent and unmade in presence, blackness is an instrument in the making” (Ibid. 2013: 743).

subject's racialisation as presumptively white. In sum, Hartman negotiates the tension between giving expression to the atrocities of slavery without reproducing the spectacularity of the wounded black body by focusing on the quotidian moments of domination and the resistances which are irremediably tied up with this domination. In doing so Hartman exposes the limits of the political proper, its complicity in the domination of the enslaved and its dependence on this domination for its own coherence, while also thematising a politics without a proper locus; or, as I suggest, a politics with an improper locus situated around the needs, desires and pleasures of the social body in the face of its violation (in the name of whiteness). Hartman traces a genealogy which situates these critiques in the racialisation of blackness (as that which must expose its suffering) and the racialisation of whiteness (as that which violently demands the exposure of blackness' suffering).

What Hartman makes clear is the need for an account of politics that can be thought beyond the valorisation of visibility, a politics that avoids reproducing the scopic regime that Hartman delineates, with its concomitant demands for transparency and hypervisibility, and its policing of politics proper. The insistence on the value of a certain form of visibility - found in Rancière's *Disagreement* as well as in Arendt's *The Human Condition* - is in this way questioned in Hartman's work. Indeed, in Hartman a politics emerges as the obverse of the limits that violence places on the storying of the lives of the enslaved, one that does not require Arendt's immortalisation of great words or deeds via the sheer physicality of the *polis*, nor Rancière's demonstration of ways of doing, being and saying that were previously insensitive. Hartman's politics is a fugitive politics, marked by precarious moments of sociality that emerge despite extant conditions of violence and subjection. This sociality is not pre-political and so destined to the *polis*: it is an improper activity - a politics without a proper locus (or *with* an *improper* locus) - that emerges from the poetics of those who translate and counter-translate thought; an improvisation that is indifferent to the *polis* despite, following Arendt, the *polis*' dependence on this improvisation for its political quality; an apprehension of the uniqueness of others that is more properly a comprehension. For Anita Rupprecht, drawing inspiration from Hartman's work, the resistance of enslaved and racially indentured Africans

lies in their everyday errancy, their insistence on leading 'irregular' kinds of life. In other words, their victories were fugitive ones, flying from mastery not so much toward future expertise as toward scandalous negligence and impudent outrages (2016: 7).

If this politics is fugitive, then those who enact it not only evade something of the

dominion of the institution of plantation slavery, but also, paraphrasing Rupprecht, they so often evade the archive itself. For Rupprecht,

[i]t bothers me and on the other hand I am pleased that my traditional scholarly desires are stymied by [the racially indentured's] disappearance because it may well be that in this instance, the silences of the archive speak not of the melancholic power of dispossession but momentarily of the power of the dispossessed (Ibid. 8).

What Rupprecht gestures towards is the fugitive politics of the enslaved and racially indentured, but further, the necessary relationship this politics has to the ethics and politics of storying the lives of the violated and subjugated. It is from these two overlapping (but not congruent) concerns that Hartman's fugitive politics emerges. As I have argued, Hartman's concern with issues of visibility is not limited to the demands placed on the suffering black body, or to the valorisation of visibility in an account of politics; further, Hartman poses a challenge to those (herself included) who desire to make visible narratives of violence and domination, whether this be in exemplifying certain forms of activity as political, or in negotiating an impossible restitution of violated lives that appear fleetingly in the ledgers of slavers. Nonetheless, Hartman insists that this work is important, not least in tracing the afterlives of slavery in the contemporary conjuncture.¹⁰⁰

Venus and the Writing of the Enslaved

At the beginning of her 'Venus in Two Acts' (2008) Hartman notes the ubiquity of the figure of the Black Venus in the annals of Atlantic slavery:

[v]ariously named Harriot, Phibba, Sara, Joanna, Rachel, Linda, and Sally, she is found everywhere in the Atlantic world. The barracoon, the hollow of the slave ship, the pest-house, the brothel, the cage, the surgeon's laboratory, the prison, the cane-field, the kitchen, the master's bedroom - turn out to be exactly the same place and in all of them she is called Venus (Ibid. 1).

For Hartman the degradation and objectification of these girls and women, fleetingly mentioned in documents complicit in this degradation and objectification, leaves one with the merest glimpse of their already violated lives. They become interchangeable,

¹⁰⁰ For Hartman, "the distinction between the past and the present founders on the interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath" (2002: 758).

substitutable, the various sites of their lives being “exactly the same place” (Ibid.), the various names of these girls and women all capitulating to the overdetermination of the name Venus. Any vibrancy of a life lived is denied to the reader:

[h]ers is the same fate as every other Black Venus: no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said, or observed that she refused to say anything at all. Hers is an untimely story told by a failed witness. It would be centuries before she would be allowed to ‘try her tongue.’ [...] An act of chance or disaster produced a divergence or an aberration from the expected and usual course of invisibility and catapulted her from the underground to the surface of discourse. We stumble upon her in exorbitant circumstances that yield no picture of the everyday life, no pathway to her thoughts, no glimpse of the vulnerability of her face or of what looking at such a face might demand. We only know what can be extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from the world of her captors and masters and applied to her. Yet the exorbitant must be rendered exemplary or typical in order that her life provides a window onto the lives of the enslaved in general.

One cannot ask, ‘Who is Venus?’ because it would be impossible to answer such a question (Ibid. 2).

It could therefore be argued that Hartman poses a challenge to the project of Cavarero. Cavarero’s oeuvre is centred on the importance of the reciprocal manifestation of uniqueness, a central element of which is the relating of the narratives of others. As I made clear in my fifth chapter, this is especially pressing in situations where the other person is not present to engage in a reciprocal manifestation of uniqueness, such as those killed in the Nazi death camps. For Cavarero, narrating the lives of those killed is a way to make manifest a uniqueness that was imperilled: “it consists above all in giving sense to an embodied uniqueness, precisely that which the Nazi laboratories have sought to erase from the earth” (2015: 8). In this way narration makes visible uniqueness, sustaining something of the Arendtian *daimōn* “which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters” (Arendt 1998: 179-180). By contrast, for Hartman the mode via which the lives of the enslaved appear to us is irremediably violent, seemingly denying any possibility of asking the question “Who is Venus?” (2008: 2), any “glimpse of the vulnerability of her face” (Ibid.), any apprehension of another’s *daimōn*; a refusal not only of Cavarero’s Arendtian heritage but also her (and Butler’s) dependance on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas.

Not only does this violence interrupt apprehending the uniqueness of another, but further any attempt at narrative restitution is in danger of reproducing the violences of the archive. In Hartman's words, the archive of the enslaved is

a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history (2008: 2).

However, Hartman is not content to settle with the violences of the archive. Instead, she wants to "tell a story" (Ibid.) that is "capable of retrieving what remains dormant - the purchase or claim of [the enslaved girls'] lives on the present - without committing further violence in my act of narration" (Ibid.). The story that Hartman wants to tell is "predicated upon impossibility" (Ibid.). It involves "listening for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives" (Ibid. 2-3) with the aim of "achieving an impossible goal: redressing the violence that produced numbers, ciphers, and fragments of discourse, which is as close as we come to a biography of the captive and the enslaved" (Ibid. 3). If, as I argued in my fifth chapter, there is an aporia in Cavarero's account of uniqueness whereby uniqueness both can and cannot be finally annihilated, then with her intention of "achieving an impossible goal" (Ibid.) Hartman faces this aporia head-on. If this impossible goal were to be realised, then for Hartman it might result in the production of "a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom" (Ibid.). But while the story that demands to be told is of "lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death" (Ibid.) then the realisation of this impossible goal will always be fitful.

Hartman's 'Venus in Two Acts' is in part a commentary on a chapter of her book *Lose Your Mother* titled 'The Dead Book' (2008a: 136-153). In that chapter Hartman pieces together a narrative of the killing of a slave girl whose name we do not know, murdered by Captain John Kimber on board the slave ship *Recovery*. Hartman's narrative shifts from the perspective of the Captain, to the ship's surgeon, to the cabin boy, to the abolitionist William Wilberforce. Like Cavarero's reading of Sebald, Hartman's narration is "fundamentally choral and multiperspectival, consisting in the interweaving of singular lives pulled out of the complicity between destruction and oblivion" (Cavarero 2015: 11). Unlike her reading of Frederick Douglass' narrative of Aunt Hester's beating, Hartman does reproduce the spectacle of the violence wrought on the slave girl. However, by shifting narrative perspective Hartman attempts to undermine the authority that exhausts the life of the slave girl in the words of the ledgers of slavers. Hartman leaves the final narrative perspective to the girl herself, broken after the violence of her hanging, whipping and starvation; delirious, dreaming

of the sea, “soaring and on her way home” (2008a: 152) to meet her friends. However for Hartman, this fanciful narrative will fail:

[i]f the story ended there, I could feel a small measure of comfort. I could hold on to this instant of possibility. I could find a salutary lesson in the girl’s suffering and pretend a story was enough to save her from oblivion. I could sigh with relief and say, ‘It all happened so long ago.’ Then I could wade into the Atlantic and not think of the *dead book* (Ibid. 153).

But we know that the story does not end there, that the girl dies, is thrown overboard, as millions of other slaves were. Hartman finishes the chapter caught in the ambivalence of a need (perhaps even a desire) to restage a voice forgotten for two-hundred years, and the knowledge that this restaging not only cannot offer the dead girl restitution, but is in danger of reproducing the violences of the archive and of satisfying a melancholic desire for closure.

In ‘Venus in Two Acts’, however, Hartman stays longer with this ambivalence. Hartman does not resolve this ambivalence into either the futility of the violent archive or the redemption of re-narration. Instead, through a critical analysis of the limits she was confronted with in *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman suggests that the painting of “as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible” (2008: 11) might help “topple the hierarchy of discourse, and [...] engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices” (Ibid. 12). Hartman notes that in the archives researched for her chapter ‘The Dead Book’ another slave girl was mentioned, given the name Venus. Hartman passes over this girl in her original telling: she appears fleetingly in a courtroom transcript, a side-character in Hartman’s restaging of the life of the girl murdered by John Kimber. Hartman did not write of Venus in ‘The Dead Book’ because “I feared what I might invent, and it would have been a romance” (Ibid. 8). However, in ‘Venus in Two Acts’ Hartman suggests that

[i]f I could have conjured up more than a name in an indictment, if I could have imagined Venus speaking in her own voice, if I could have detailed the small memories banished from the ledger, then it might have been possible for me to represent the friendship that could have blossomed between two frightened and lonely girls. Shipmates. Then Venus could have beheld her dying friend, whispered comfort in her ear, rocked her with promises, soothed her with ‘soon, soon’ and wished for her a good return.

Picture them: The relics of two girls, one cradling the other, plundered innocents; a sailor caught sight of them and later said they were friends.

Two world-less girls found a country in each other's arms. Beside the defeat and the terror, there would be this too: the glimpse of beauty, the instant of possibility (Ibid.).

Hartman knows that this narrative is fanciful, that "a slave ship made no allowance for grief and when detected the instruments of torture were employed to eradicate it" (Ibid.). To have told the story would be to have "trespassed the boundaries of the archive" (Ibid. 9), but in not telling, Hartman asks, "was I simply upholding the rules of the historical guild and the 'manufactured certainties' of their killers, and by doing so, hadn't I sealed their fate? Hadn't I too consigned them to oblivion?" (Ibid. 10). And yet, Hartman *has* told their story, via her self-questioning of the ethics and politics of telling the story. Hartman's practice thus negotiates these issues by staging an exorbitant narrative through her own critical self-interrogation. For Hartman,

[t]he intent of this practice is not to *give voice* to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two realms of death - social and corporeal death - and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance. It is an impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said (since dead girls are unable to speak) (Ibid.).¹⁰¹

This imagining of "what cannot be verified" (Ibid.) that is an "impossible writing" (Ibid.) can be thought as an improper writing: Hartman violates a proper engagement with the archive through her interrogation of what it would be to violate the propriety of the archive. This does not mean imagining an absence of violence: only an imagining that extends beyond the limits posed by the violence of the archive.

The challenge posed by Hartman to Cavarero's insistence on the apprehension of the uniqueness of the violated could in this way be tempered. Cavarero notes that the life that is narrated is not a life gifted a wholeness through its narration: it is a life narrated whose violation necessitates the narration, and thus places violation central to its narration. For Cavarero, in the narration of the violated, their wounds, "rather than disappearing, are exposed in the foreground" (2015: 11). Cavarero continues: "[t]he humanity that is recovered is a lacerated humanity, immersed in an inextinguishable grief, witness to a profound and incomprehensible catastrophe" (Ibid.). Cavarero's reading of Sebald's narration of the lives of the violated also captures much of what

¹⁰¹ Hartman's practice of "imagin[ing] what cannot be verified" (2008: 12) can be compared to what Cavarero identifies as Sebald's storying of those killed in the Holocaust (Cavarero 2015: 9-10).

motivates Hartman: “there is no redemption of history in Sebald’s narrative, rather only of the stories, redeemed from history, that take upon themselves the interminable task of reconfiguring a sense of the human after its radical catastrophe” (Ibid.). So too for Hartman, the “interminable task of reconfiguring a sense of the human” (Ibid.) becomes the question that motivates her project: Hartman asks, “how does one re-write the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?” (2008: 3). What matters for both authors is that any restitution does not ameliorate violence, but stages this violence as the beginning of both a “sense of the human” (Cavarero 2015: 11) and a “counter-history of the human” (Hartman 2008: 3). Both Hartman and Cavarero negotiate the complicated and ambivalent process of apprehension in the context of violent histories.

This practice can also be seen in Katherine McKittrick’s ‘Mathematics Black Life’ (2014), where McKittrick, drawing on Hartman’s work, restages a voice that emerges in a slave ship’s ledger, interrupting the mathematical declarations of ownership and violation to declare “Says she was born free” (Ibid. 17). McKittrick restages this utterance over and over, almost a mantra, enabling its emergence to interrupt her own article throughout:

Says she was born free. Says she was born free. She is not free. She says she was born free. The unfree nonperson is embedded in - at work within - the verb ‘says’ and the noun ‘she’. The unfree nonperson says she was born free. She says she was born free. She says she was born free at Newtown, Long Island: she is not free. She says she is free (Ibid. 20).

The materiality of these words, expressed in ledgers that “cast black as impossibly human and provide the conditions through which black history is currently told and studied” (Ibid. 17), emerge despite their positioning as the underside of the public sphere, and for McKittrick are the conditions of possibility for “iterations of black life that cannot be contained by black death” (Ibid. 20). In her (and Hartman’s, and Cavarero’s) apprehension of these violated lives - an apprehension that continually negotiates its capacity for capture - McKittrick also poses the question of the human:

access to new world blackness dwells on the archival display of the violated body, the corpse, the death sentences, the economic inventories of cargo, the whip as the tool that writes blackness into existence. How might we take this evidence and venture toward another mode of human being - so that when we encounter the lists, the ledgers, the commodities of slavery, we

notice that our collective unbearable past, which is unrepresentable except for the archival mechanics that usher in blackness vis-à-vis violence, is about something else altogether (Ibid. 22).

For McKittrick the violences of the archive “inspire our insurgency as they demonstrate the ways in which our present genre of the human is flawed” (Ibid. 23); an example of what I have described as an insurrectionary humanism that is necessitated by violent conditions and that enacts its insurgency around the locus of humanness. The humanness that McKittrick stages emerges from this violence but also demonstrates the limits of this violence: the violent archives of slavery are “indicators of the ways in which the brutalities of racial encounter demand a form of human being and being human that newly iterates blackness as uncomfortably enumerating the unanticipated contours of black life” (Ibid. 25). This practice of venturing toward “another mode of being human” (Ibid. 22) can be enacted by reading archives “not as a measure of what happened, but as indicators of what else happened” (Ibid.). When Hartman imagines the relationship formed between the two slave girls on board the *Recovery* - “[t]he *furtive communication* that might have passed between two girls, but which no one among the crew observed or reported” (Hartman 2008: 10, emphasis original) - it is this ‘What else?’ she is working with (the equivalent of Rancière’s “as if” (1999: 58; 2009: 16)). For McKittrick, these strategies

rest on encountering, thinking about and articulating black absented presences: the unspeakable, the unwritten, the unbearable and unutterable, the unseeable and the invisible, the uncountable and unindexed, outside the scourge, that which cannot be seen or heard or read but is always there (2014: 22).

This is a negotiation of visibility: the impossible, necessary task of encountering, thinking and articulating that which is rendered invisible and unthinkable through the violences of slavery and its archive. McKittrick’s practice of restaging the voice of a slave girl throughout her text - “says she was born free” (Ibid. 20) - performs this ‘What else?’; a staging that apprehends “that which [...] is always there” (Ibid. 22), and further, interrupts the authority of McKittrick’s text through the literal interruption of the text’s narrative by the voice of the girl. This voice bears no positive relation to the immortality of the *polis*; on the contrary, the *polis* encompasses the archives of slavery, shoring up a political subject in possession of *logos* that gains its coherence through the subjection and violation of black life. Despite the *polis*, this voice endures, emerging via McKittrick’s apprehension. If McKittrick negotiates the visibility of this voice this is not to

bathe it in the “shining brightness” (Arendt 1998: 180) of the *polis* but precisely to assert an existence saturated in meaning that cannot be apprehended by the *polis*. As Cavarero notes, the order of the *polis* “clearly excludes a corporeality judged to be mere material support for the human capacity for language and thought, at the same time excluding women, insofar as they are ‘naturally’ rooted in matters of the body” (2002: 16). Likewise, what is manifest in McKittrick (and Hartman’s) restaging is a world that does not first seek to demonstrate equality to those who would deny it, but to maintain a sense of “black life lived in *political* death” (Moten 2013: 739). This is a heterogeneous world that is manifest to those others who *are not* but nonetheless *exist*: not a “subjectification” (Rancière 1999: 35) thought as “*nos sumus, nos existimus*” (Ibid. 36, ‘we are, we exist’), but rather a *non sumus, nos existimus* (‘we are not, we exist’). In McKittrick’s words, this is to insist that “what is not there is *living*” (2014: 23. emphasis original).

Black Noise

In attempting to “engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices” (Hartman 2008: 12) and to “say that which resists being said” (Ibid.) Hartman is noting the limits of the written word as *logos*. The written word fails to capture (or perhaps, captures too well) “the groans and cries, the undecipherable songs, the crackle of fire in the cane fields, the laments for the dead, and the shouts of victory” (Ibid.). If in *Disagreement* Rancière is concerned with those who verify their equality via the demonstration of their possession of speech (*logos*) as opposed to the animality or infancy of noise (*phone*), then Hartman tarries with noise, wary of its metabolisation into reasoned speech. Writing with Stephen Best, Hartman calls this “[b]lack noise” (Best and Hartman 2005: 9), which “represents the kinds of political aspirations that are inaudible and illegible within the prevailing formulas of political rationality” (Ibid.). In writing narratives of the enslaved, there is an imperative to

respect black noise - the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man (Hartman 2008: 12).

Hartman takes seriously black noise, reading it as a lived critique of capitalism and slavery, and further, as a utopian desire for “the poetics of a free state” (Ibid. 10) that, similarly to Cavarero, also undermines the purity of *logos* as distinct from *phone*.

This is a central concern for Fred Moten, who opens his *In the Break* (2003)

with a direct engagement with Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*. Moten approaches *Scenes of Subjection* via aurality, or perhaps more accurately via the aurality of visuality: that is, via the "irreducible sound of the necessarily visual performance at the scene of objection" (2003: 1). For Moten, Hartman's refusal of the restaging of Aunt Hester's beating (and therefore Aunt Hester's scream) is "in some sense, illusory" (Ibid. 4), in that the scene is implicitly restaged in Hartman's explicit refusal of its restaging:

there is an intense dialogue with Douglass that structures *Scenes of Subjection*. The dialogue is opened by a refusal of recitation that reproduces what it refuses. Hartman swerves away from Douglass and thereby runs right back into him [...] [T]his turn away from Douglass that is also a turn to and through Douglass is a disturbance that is neither unfamiliar nor unfamiliar (Ibid. 5).

Moten then proceeds to trace the disturbance that is Douglass' recitation of Aunt Hester's scream, at the same time disturbing the distinction between the visual and the aural, as well as the distinction between speech and noise, or *logos* and *phone*. Moten does this via the "counterfactual" (Ibid. 13) of Marx's commodity who speaks (Moten 2003: 8-9; Marx 1990: 176-177): in Marx's ventriloquising of this commodity as a demonstration of its impossibility - for Marx the commodity cannot speak - he inadvertently anticipates such speech, and opens an analysis which would figure the slave as, precisely, the commodity that speaks. The speech of the commodity that cannot speak is a "disproprative event" (Moten 2003: 12):

we can think how the commodity who speaks, in speaking, in the sound - the inspirited materiality - of that speech, constitutes a kind of temporal warp that disrupts and augments not only Marx but the mode of subjectivity that the ultimate object of his critique, capital, both allows and disallows [...] The commodity whose speech sounds embodies the critique of value, of private property, of the sign. Such embodiment is also bound to the (critique of) reading and writing, oft conceived by clowns and intellectuals as the natural attributes of whoever would hope to be known as human (Ibid. 11-12).

We can ask then what it is to *embody critique*, an embodiment which properly encompasses the vocal and, similarly to Cavarero, refuses the refusal of the *phone* that is irremediably tied to *logos* (Cavarero 2005: 33). This is an "inspirited" materiality in both its aliveness but also its spirit, or, in Moten's words, "the improvisation through the opposition of spirit and matter that is instantiated when the object, the commodity,

sounds” (Ibid. 13).¹⁰² For Moten, embodying critique enacts a revaluation of value: neither a value derived from the inside (use-value) or from the outside (exchange value) but rather an “interruption” (Ibid. 14) which “breaks down the distinction” (Ibid.). Moten asks,

[w]hat does it mean to consider that black speech is the sound of natal alienation, the sound of being without a heritage, without a patrimony? It means, first of all, that all these terms must be revalued, precisely from the already exhausted perspective of the ones who are both (de)valued and invaluable (2013: 770).

However, black speech - the speech of the commodity that cannot speak - is itself first cut by the “commodity’s scream” (2003: 12): by Aunt Hester’s scream, she who could not speak and yet spoke, and whose scream could not signify and yet signified. It is this signification - a signification not derived from the outside as Saussure would have it, but neither from the inside (Ibid. 13; Saussure 1959: 118-119) - that Moten traces as black performance:

[t]here occurs in such performances a revaluation or reconstruction of value, one disruptive of the oppositions of speech and writing, and spirit and matter. It moves by way of the (phono-photo-porno)graphic disruption the shriek carries out (2003: 14).

For Moten “the object resists, the commodity shrieks, the audience participates” (Ibid. 12): the resistance of the object - Aunt Hester’s scream - maintains the “revolutionary force of the sensuality that emerges from the sonic event” (Moten 2003: 12); the audience is drawn in, co-participants in an improvisatory ensemble concerned with a disruptive revaluation of value. Thus for Moten, in contrast to Hartman, the spectacular, primal scene of bodily wounding is “more than another violent scene of subjection too terrible to pass on” (Ibid.14): it continues as an improvisation, an improvisation both generative and disruptive; it is “the reproduction of blackness in and as (the) reproduction of black performance(s)” (Ibid.). Moten situates this improvisatory performance in “life’s fugitivity” (2008: 216, n. 6), arguing that “[w]hat the biopolitical

¹⁰² This “inspirited materiality” (2003: 11) could be thought of as the obverse of what Veena Das thinks of as voicelessness in the face of “fragile and intimate moments” (2007: 8) of “horror” (Ibid.). For Das this is a voicelessness “not in the sense that one does not have words - but that these words become frozen, numb, without life. Thus there were men and women who spoke, and if asked, they told stories about the violence they had seen or endured on their bodies. My thought was that perhaps they had speech but not voice. Sometimes these were words imbued with a spectral quality, or they might have been uttered by a person with whom I was in a face-to-face encounter, and yet I felt they were animated by some other voice” (Ibid.).

continuum (the trajectory of sovereignty's illegitimate, speculative dissemination) attempts to regulate, suppress, and consume is the social poetics, the aesthetic sociality of this generativity" (2013: 775). He continues:

[w]hether you call those resources tremendous life or social life in social death or fatal life or raw life, it remains to consider precisely what it is that the ones who have nothing have. What is this nothing that they have or to which they have access? What comes from it? And how does having it operate in relation to poverty (Ibid. 776)?

Moten thematises "the social poetics, the aesthetic sociality of this generativity" (Ibid. 775); the labour of those who "have nothing" (Ibid. 776) that is an improvisation in ensemble. Engaging with this social poetics - or black noise as Hartman understands it - necessitates a particular type of reading:

gentle, militant reading, a reading that is governed by a particular poetics and by commitment to the rich content of a lyricism of the surplus, of the dangerous, salvific, (im)pure sonority of unaccounted for things or of the unaccounted in things, of the ruptural accompaniment, of murmur and mummery, of the folding or invaginative residue moving at the excessive interchange (the moving bridge-like object) of a set, which is to say a history, of loss(es). It demands a reading that is possessed and, above all, dispossessive, one that moves in a cut romance with the criminal burn of the very idea (Moten 2007: 318).

It is this reading that might apprehend black noise without, necessarily, capturing it; or perhaps, is always at the same time a negotiation with its own possibility of capture (despite itself).

Arendt's doubled desire for the visibility granted by the *polis* - its manifestation of a public sphere where one's uniqueness can be properly expressed, and its physicality that guarantees the endurance of one's uniqueness in the annals of history - is pushed to the limit in Hartman's analysis. In particular, and following Anita Rupprecht's reading (2016), even if speech and action (or black noise and necessity) are not to endure - if they leave no trace in the annals of history - we may wonder whether this is really so bad, and if it must be one of the limiting factors in our thinking of politics. Indeed, if one's forms of resistance are premised upon a certain fugitivity, as was made clear in

Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, then politics begins in the absence of its "proper locus" (Ibid. 51) (or in the presence of its improper locus). What if these lives remain unspoken, the words and deeds forgotten; why not? Why not escape from the archive (as if this were always a choice) and who are we to story these forms of escape? To be sure, there are good reasons for recording and restaging the lives of the violated: as McKittrick says,

I can't let go of the incomplete stories and brutal violence, in part, because letting go might involve not seeing how these violent acts are reproduced now [...] The numbers set the stage for our stories of survival - what is not there is *living* (2014 23).

In this way storying these lives can be crucial, a position shared by Hartman, as well as Cavarero, Butler and, further, Rancière (in, for example, *Proletarian Nights* (2012)). The point is, rather, that if politics becomes synonymous with the immortality of words and deeds, or the demonstration of equality to those who would deny it, or simply the sheer visibility that enables one to write more-or-less emancipatory narratives of its occurrence, then those forms of sociality that escape our gaze are understood as necessarily non-political (or, further, non-existent). Politics occurs despite the well-intentioned storying by authors who make it their topic of analysis. For Arendt:

men's life together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most futile of human activities, action and speech, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made 'products,' the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable (1998: 197-198).

Those who escaped the archive are without immortality (indeed *do not need* immortality), but does this mean they were without a story and thus, as Arendt understands it, without a "*daimōn*" (Ibid. 179)? Or rather, can one apprehend (without arresting) the stories, narratives, needs and desires comprehended by - shared in-between - those for whom the public sphere is at best off-limits and at worst a scene of torture? For Arendt, the uniqueness of one's *daimōn* requires "the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm" (Ibid. 180). But surely also, the parochial forms of sociality that emerge below and beneath the *polis* (the *polis*' "undercommons" (Harney and Moten 2013), which both is and is not (only) the slaves, women, immigrants and barbarians) also maintain something of this *daimōn*; this would mean, in Moten's words, that "what lies before being-fabricated needs neither to be remembered nor romanticized when it is being lived" (2013a: 242).

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that the theme of visibility is central to the works of Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero. Each author places a value on visibility: for Rancière, this is the making visible of forms of existence previously insensitive; for Butler, this is making violences visible that otherwise are not seen (or are seen as righteous); for Cavarero, this is making visible the uniqueness of another, often through forms of narration. There are many occasions where each of these instances of visibility are ethically and politically important. However, I have used Saidiya Hartman's work on the Middle Passage and its afterlives to demonstrate the limits of a focus on visibility: forms of existence that are political despite evading visibility; violences that should not be rearticulated; the sense of a uniqueness of another that does not depend on the shining light of the public sphere. For those who do not simply exist 'under the radar' but are constituted in fugitivity, an emphasis on visibility is not only depoliticising but may be violent.

If visibility is often violent, fugitivity does not of necessity offer relief from violence. Indeed, for Samira Kawash fugitivity is inevitably, ineradicably violent; fugitivity entails "the immanent threat of violence" (1997: 51):

beyond the violence that makes the slave a slave, there is another violence specific to the condition of fugitivity. Fugitivity is not an end, either for the slave narrative or for the subject. The fugitive will be captured and returned to slavery, will become a free subject, or will perish. The fugitive never remains fugitive; fugitivity is unsustainable [...] The fugitive body does not escape the violence of order; what it does do is expose on its surface the violence necessary to preserve order, hierarchy, boundedness, propriety, and property (Ibid. 81-82).

In addition to this violence, for Kawash "the price of occupying this (non)place between master and slave is silence, invisibility, and placelessness" (Ibid. 47). However, as can be seen in Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, one can exist apart from speech, visibility and place without therefore being silent, invisible or placeless. As Kawash notes elsewhere, "[t]he space of the fugitive is, from the perspective of the state, no place. Thus, the fugitive remains withdrawn, invisible, unrepresentable *from the perspective of proper subjects and objects of property*" (Ibid. 80, my emphasis). One is rendered silent, invisible and placeless *in relation to* the dominant order. In this way the notion of

visibility that I critique throughout my thesis does not presuppose a corollary invisibility that should be valorised: as Brighenti notes (and already highlighted in my introduction), visibility is “a phenomenon that is inherently ambiguous, highly dependent on context and complex social, technical and political arrangements which could be termed ‘regimes’ of visibility” (2010: 3). Kawash’s insistence on the violence attendant to fugitivity is important as it avoids separating the lived experience of fugitivity - one profoundly embodied due to its exposure to pain and violence - from the figuration of the fugitive as a possible expression of politics. As Hartman makes clear, this politics is mobilised as a response to violent conditions. Although Kawash notes that fugitivity is not an end, on my reading what this demonstrates is the need to think politics apart from a *telos*, and to hold out that politics can occur despite violent domination that cuts short any lasting utopia. In this way “it is in fugitivity that we may find the glimmerings of another thought of freedom” (Kawash 1997: 56).

At the beginning of this thesis I argued that fundamental to Rancière’s account of politics is the refusal to properly determine what constitutes politics. Politics is not determined or conditioned by particular activities, or by particular identities, or by particular locations. We cannot determine if politics has happened by first analysing what someone is doing, or what they are, or where they are. Politics is the refusal of this very determination (it is the disruption of this analysis), which means that it never finds its home in theory, as both Rancière and Cavarero have noted. This also means that despite politics not being dependent on particular actions, identities or locations, it nonetheless always requires a particular form in its actualisation. Over the course of my thesis I have tried to give a sense of one instance of this form: the fugitive sociality of those existing together, apart from schemas of visibility, in indifference to an extant order, despite violent domination.

In these moments, people *comprehend* one another. This is a social type of non-cognitive knowing; the manifesting of a sense (or a flavour, *un sapore*) of *who* one another is (of who each of us are). This necessarily excessive uniqueness emerges between people in the reciprocal convocation of precarious lives. This can happen in a variety of ways: the survivors of Auschwitz, comprehending the sonic utterances of Hurbinek; Penelope and her handmaids, weaving and laughing together; or the sociality of the enslaved, restituting the pained body through song, dance and fleeting moments of affection. These fugitive forms of sociality that exist “beyond and beneath - before and before - enclosure” (Harney and Moten 2013: 17) are redolent of a politics that evades any reduction to the order of the *polis* or the order of the theoretician.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ ‘Redolent’ receives its meaning from the Latin, where the *re(d)* signifies ‘back’ or ‘again’, and

They do not determine politics; they are an instance of politics' actualisation, one that is in danger of being refused if politics is equated with the making visible of forms of existence otherwise rendered insensitive.

If comprehension is a way of naming this reciprocal convocation of precarious lives, then 'apprehension' names the non-reciprocal manifesting of a sense of another. Both comprehend and apprehend share a 'seizing' or a 'laying hold of' in the Latin *prehendō*. However, the prefix 'ap' of 'apprehend' signifies the seizing outwards towards someone, whereas the 'com' of 'comprehend' signifies the bringing together of things. When Levi recounts the existence of the young woman in Auschwitz via the words of Nyiszli, he apprehends her; when Cavarero sees Penelope, laughing with her handmaids, she apprehends her; when Hartman tells the possible life of Venus, she apprehends her. In each instance the ambivalence of the *prehendō* is not far away: the violent arrest of one captured, crystallized, stultified; an object manipulated, made use of; the reiteration of violent words that are our only access to the fragments of a precarious life. Nevertheless, this non-reciprocal knowing of another is negotiated, an action that is the occasion for a sense of another to be made manifest, but is not finally reducible to this action.

If the reaching out of *prehendō* recalls the violence of arrest, it also recalls the inclined maternal posture (Cavarero 2016). In her 'The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors' (2016) Hartman offers a "restatement with a difference" (Ibid. 173, n. 15) of a quote of Moten's. Moten says that "[a]ll that we have (and are) is what we hold in our outstretched hands" (Moten 2013a: 238, quoted in Hartman 2016: 173, n. 15). Instead, for Hartman, "[a]ll we have is what she holds in her outstretched hands" (2016: 171, emphasis original). Hartman situates the mother as central to the imaginary of black radicalism, caught in reproductive duties for both her own children and the white children she nannies in the intimate violence of domestic work; central to the reproduction of black social life but reviled because "[s]he is the best nanny and the worst mother" (Hartman 2016: 171). If Moten situates blackness as "the ongoing conferral of historical being - the gift of historicity as claimed, performed dispossession" (2013: 238) that is not "the property of black people" (Ibid.) but found "in our outstretched hands" (Ibid.), and if Cavarero insists on the non-reciprocal relationality of the maternal scene as a crucial resource for a "new relational ontology of the vulnerable" (2016: 129), then Hartman brings each insight together, noting a non-reciprocal relationality that leaves the mother radically vulnerable at the moment that

the *olere* signifies 'smell'. In this way it recalls Cavarero's use of *sapore* (a 'flavour' or 'taste') as a form of sensing another's uniqueness; in this instance 'redolent' signifies olfactory qualities rather than *sapore*'s gustative inflection.

she provides care. For Hartman, “[t]his care, which is coerced and freely given, is the black heart of our social poesis, of making and relation” (2016: 171); it is a form of labour that “nourish[es] the latent text of the fugitive” (Ibid.). This “latent text of the fugitive” is made manifest by the forms of apprehension enacted by Hartman, Moten, Cavarero, Butler and Rancière; but it is also made manifest by the forms of comprehension of those who exist together, in sociality and in indifference, despite our more or less emancipatory narrating of these lives.

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