THEORIA-PERFORMANCE AND EPISTEMOLOGY

by

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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Needless to say, any errors and infelicities which remain are all my own work.
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Introduction: Theoria

I am speaking of theater not only as an instrument of thought, but as thought .... —Herbert Blau

This thesis attempts to take Blau's assertion seriously. What might it mean to attempt to figure theatre as thought? More specifically, what possible relations hold between theatre and epistemology—that area of philosophy concerned with theories of knowledge? Owing much to the impact of Plato's Republic on intellectual pursuits, theatre has long been considered to stand at several moves from reality; it has been thought to be an imitation of an imitation. For Plato, only philosophy could give humanity access to the Real. During the seventeenth century, philosophy was flanked by natural science, and both have shared relatively uncontested epistemological privileges well into the twentieth century. Writing at odds to this trajectory of thought, this work attempts to examine scientific and philosophical thought and practice in the west to determine their connections, however repressed and mutated, to logics of theatre and performance.

In terms of etymology, theatre and thought have always been related: both "theatre" and "theory" have their common origin in the Greek word theoria. Further, the terms "thought" and "thinking" have their common etymological root in the Old English term thyncan, a factitive formation derived from the Gothic term thagkan, which meant, "to cause to appear to oneself." The formulation of thought as that which arises through a distanciation in

1 Herbert Blau, Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 9.
consciousness—the phenomenon of "appearance to oneself"—is also perhaps the constitutive factor of performance. Performance anthropologist Richard Schechner's notion of "restored behaviour" argues precisely this. Both Blau and Schechner agree that performance is about "appearances." Schechner's notion of appearance is figured in terms of a distanciation in consciousness that accords to a distinction between "actor" and "role."\(^2\)

This study is a series of cross-disciplinary engagements that seek to articulate some of the relations between theatre, performance, and epistemology, to investigate performance as a "deployed logic" in relation to those disciplines concerned with discovering and generating knowledge. In part, the analyses are prompted by the relatively recent "discovery" of performance by philosophy and critical theory, one that has prompted widely divergent and sometimes ill considered appropriations of its lexicon.

Philosophers in the Anglo-American and continental traditions have become enamoured with "performative utterances," and "speech acts," and yet meaningful dialogue between the two has been absent. Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the "performative" has little in common with the descriptor presented in the philosophy of language of John Searle, and Searle's notion bears little relation to Jacques Derrida's formulation, which Searle considers scarcely warrants a response. It would appear that these complications could be endlessly multiplied and with very little effort. This thesis, in part,

attempts to find some points of articulation between these divergent conceptions, without wishing to gloss over their disjunctions.

For some thinkers in the continental tradition, the very thought of writing about the relations between performance and epistemology would seem anachronistic; hasn't the idea of "performance" undermined most of the central tenets of the discourse concerned with knowledge and the Real, with truth and falsity? This, of course, remains an open question, one which will be pursued in the following six chapters. And yet, even if one ascribes to a "relativist" or "constructivist" view of knowledge, epistemological questions remain. Although constructivism as a theory radically questions notions of absolute truth, its analyses invariably bypass the mechanisms through which belief in the True operates. As Michael Taussig argues in *Mimesis and Alterity*:

> With good reason postmodernism has relentlessly instructed us that reality is artifice yet, so it seems to me, not enough surprise has been expressed as to how we nevertheless get on with living, pretending ... that we live facts, not fictions.3

Performance has a profound ability to upset the boundaries within which traditional oppositions such as "actual" (the Real) versus "act" (artifice) are maintained. There is an ambiguity shared by the key terms of performance: theatre is a location for the discovery and application of knowledge ("operating theatre") and also the place where fictions are deliberately played out ("musical theatre"); to *perform* is to "actually" do (corporate "performance indicators") and also to be engaged in act of artifice; to "act" means to carry

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something out, and also to only "pretend"; to "play" is to engage in the non-serious ("child's play"), and yet play at its highest levels becomes serious "work" (such as is the case with professional sportspeople or people's whose occupations are the result of a "hobby").

The study conceives performance as the means by which thought is not only "articulated" but "formulated." As will be seen in the first chapter, the ubiquity of performative codes in the history of experimental science problematises any strict division between "realism" and "constructivism." An epistemological shift took place in the seventeenth century that saw a valorisation of experimental demonstration: scientific experiments utilised newly developed technologies and were to be performed before an audience. This required that the Real, quite literally, be "constructed." Originally a doctrine which argued for God's knowledge of the universe on the basis of His having created it, Enlightenment science predicated its epistemology on a similar logic: man knows things because he creates them in the laboratory. Simply because an experiment is "fabricated" in a laboratory does not necessarily entail that its results are not "real."

And yet some might detect a sideways step in this refiguring of "construction" that entails nothing but a rhetorical displacement: this is, after all, simply another name for subjectivism. Once again, the critical force of performance allows one to circumvent such a deadlock (objectivism versus subjectivism). "Subjectivism" as an epistemological view is another variation of idealism in the way in which it construes the subject as "dreaming up" a world. Subjectivism has little explanatory force in relation to experimental science. It represents a kind of logic that admits only one trajectory: the mind
impacts on and creates its objects of analysis: the objects are merely phantasmatic projections produced by a certain conceptual grid. An epistemology that attempts to take into account performance cannot make this theoretical move. Objects can be taxonomised into existence, presented in a series, and then "explained" through a recourse to modes of inference; however, objects can also fall over, explode, fail to work, cost too much, or require calibration. The scientist not only construes and works on objects, they also work on her, they modify hypotheses, structure perception (in the case of observational apparatuses), alter patterns of bodily movement, and direct research possibilities.

This study locates the origins of this particular problematic in Enlightenment science. It attempts to engage with the "performance of reason" through a series of philosophical reflections on selected episodes in the history of empiricism in natural philosophy. After providing some historical context, it takes issue with a number of presuppositions in the philosophy of science, which figure epistemes or scientific "paradigms" as purely conceptual matrices from which a science finds its lexicon of intelligibility. It will argue that particular kinds of corporeal performance are as necessary to a particular scientific paradigm as are its discursive components.

The success of this line of argument is contingent on an ability to illustrate the centrality that performativity plays with regard to a discipline's modes of legitimation (of knowledge) as well as its modes of transmission, its pedagogical strategies. It will be argued that tacit understanding in experimental science functions through the modes of "ostension" and "exemplification." These terms—the differences between which can only be usefully taken up in the thesis itself—point to the pre-resonance of distinctive gestural codes which
serve to circumscribe the legitimate ways by which scientific inquiry can proceed, as well as providing the means by which a discipline delimits its objects of analysis. These gestural codes effect the epistemologisation of practice; they allow us to read performative conventions within an economy of truth and falsity. Finally, the first chapter deals with obstacles encountered in the replication of scientific experiments, obstacles probably precipitated by the absence of suitable actors ("calibrated bodies") able to reproduce certain performative conventions.

The first chapter argues that the delimitation of experimental science's objects of analysis requires an intersection between text and performance, between discursive taxonomies and the ostensive means by which these "words" are linked to "things." And yet epistemology and ontology co-define each other in a conceptual circuit. Any statement about "what is" (ontology) is ultimately a question about our ways of knowing (epistemology), and any question about how we "know" moves quickly towards assertions of "what is." Where Chapter One examined the apprenticeship of the scientific body in its passage towards its status as a "knowing subject," Chapter Two turns its attention to the ontological "zero point" of epistemology and works the other way around. In other words, it begins with an examination of the "Being" of the subject (as object) and moves on to considerations of how performance, deployed as strategy of "guerilla ontology" impacts on structures of knowledge.

The second chapter opens with a discussion of subject formation and entertains the possibility that "materialisation" can be re-thought as an ongoing process brought about through the repetition of mundane social behaviours. It then extends this discussion in order to analyse these processes of materialisation more
specifically in terms of performance. Through the work of Judith Butler, it hopes to question the supposed material facticity of the "biological" body. In other words, it argues that ontology is an effect that uses performative citation as its discursive mode.

The second chapter then attempts to engage with specific "scenographies of construction" derived from an analysis of dramatic texts and performance art. Like the first chapter, it looks at the ways in which the subject is produced through a particular corporeal style and playing out of possibilities. But unlike the first chapter, Chapter Two looks at the ways in which performance can render explicit and contest the ways in which the body "takes shape": performance reveals the subject to be not "incomplete," as psychoanalysis would have us believe, but uncompleted. Once again, the question of knowledge as performance is taken up, but the emphasis shifts from notions of gestural codes to issues of the body and cognition.

The choice of examples in Chapters Two and Three become increasingly lateral: they range from historical episodes and performance art, to dramatic texts and film. In this sense, they do not attempt to comprehensively map the defining epistemic features of any specific historical context, but examine kinds of logic, which continually tie notions of performativity and theatricality to systems of knowledge.

The third chapter takes up the question of cognition and then returns to the issue of thought and reason as "appearances to oneself." It looks at the way in which reason's Other—madness—is often figured as a condition in which the subject is unable to present itself to itself. Madness has been often construed as the state in which the division between "act" and "actor" has collapsed. Unable to appear
to itself, the mad "person" has lost their agency, and their "thought," no longer subject to the will, loses it very status as thought. The mad, in other words, have been construed as those who have lost their capacity to perform. In several cases of "psychiatry," which will be examined, the doctor is attributed the ability to perform (to be able to act in front of the patient) and the mad person, if truly mad, can only act "honestly," and yet not see the "truth" of their condition.

Through an analysis of a variety of literary and medical examples, this conception is critiqued. Chapter Three argues that madness may be as much teleological as it is pathological: it might, in other words, prove to be an epistemic strategy. Madness has been placed in opposition to performativity; the initial question raised by diagnosis in psychotherapy revolves around whether the patient is considered to be "actually" mad or simply "acting." Are they insane or just playing around? Notions of "playing" have strong resonances with agency. To be able to "play" implies volitional control and a distanciation in consciousness. In a peculiar way, the unreality of "play" has become a constitutive factor of the rational.

And yet, "play" can also evoke vivid images of entrapment and determinism: a person can "play with something" but also be played by something. Often people remark that "fate" or "circumstance" has "dealt them a bad hand." The poetics of language as a "game" and hence a kind of "play" has figured strongly in twentieth century philosophy and critical theory. The fourth and fifth chapters take up notions of play and performance in relation to the formation of philosophical concepts. "Play" has received sustained attention in Jacques Derrida's work on the structure of concepts. It has also been an organising trope—rightly or wrongly—for much Anglo-American commentary on Derrida's work.
Derrida delimits play as the movement of elements within a conceptual structure, movement regulated by the structure's "centre." And yet, by indicating how the centre of a structure is not properly of the structure, not wholly within it, Derrida argues that this centre is unable to regulate its own movement. All concepts work to delimit or survey contexts, but the concepts themselves are contained within an indeterminate number of other contexts, alien to that which they delimit. Derrida works to suggest that iterability (the capacity for a signifier—and hence a concept—to be "repeated" in an indeterminate number of contexts) is the basic function of the sign.

His critique of structuralism and the law of identity seems perverse insofar as it operates contrary to philosophical anxieties that attempt to construe play as the Other of conceptual activity. For Derrida, play is the only means by which the concept attains force. Though a detailed analysis of philosophy's relation to play, we confront again its anxieties towards the performance and theatricality.

Plato's "play" is the undoing of authentic subjectivity; the citizen of the republic knows only one identity and profession: in other words, s/he cannot "role-play." Derrida's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* argues that Plato's conception of the subject-as-singularity is predicated on a series of arbitrary exclusions that attempt to purify philosophy of its Other. The play of signification—equivocation—is capriciously arrested in order to maintain the theoretical enterprise: the illusory self-sufficiency of the concept. Derrida's study of Plato is not content with simply pointing to these plays in signification, but works to demonstrate equivocation through performing it in the course of analysis. This proclivity for theory as a kind of "performance" has provoked the ire of several critics.
Chapters Four and Five take up the way in which play can function, and does function, as an epistemological strategy. And yet the very notion of play-as-strategy seems to figure philosophy as a kind of "contest." The dramatic overtones contained in the etymology of "strategy" links the term to military combat: the Greek stratagein means "to be a general" or a "commander-in-chief." The association between philosophical argument and combat is one still contained in the language: one "interrogates" a concept, "takes up a position" and "defends it," and then one "attacks an opponent's position," and hopes that one does not get "shot down in flames." The Socratic dialogues themselves stage a form of intellectual combat against ignorance. And yet, it might be asked to what extent this "intellectual combat" remains "intellectual." Do philosophy's battles always take place on the page or is there a more "anthropological" aspect to the discipline? And if there is, is it a "properly" philosophical question?

The final chapter hopes to engage with this more anthropological aspect of philosophical activity. In contrast to readings of Plato which attribute his hostility towards mimesis in terms of the Theory of the Forms, the final chapter relates this fear of mimesis to violence and struggle. In other words, it relates mimetic activity to another central principle of the drama: agon. Between philosophy and its object (knowledge) appears the rival claimant. The triangulation established between the "true" philosopher, wisdom, and the rival claimant (of knowledge) establishes a movement which requires the exclusion of the third-party (the rival) in order that knowledge be secured. Philosophy is founded on

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4 f. stratos-army + ag-lead.
the polemical disidentification with a rival, an opposition that accords the rival a foundational place in the origin of the Concept.

Philosophy, at the moment that it sets itself in opposition to the drama, becomes dramatic: opposition itself is perhaps the most fundamental dramaturgical principle. In attempting to rid itself of the sacred, philosophy unconsciously replicates its founding gesture: purification through opposition. For Michèle Le Doeuff, philosophy is inherently concerned with its borders, with its supposed difference from everything else and works to achieve this through a self-projection (imaginary) which attempts to exclude that which threatens its self-sufficiency or self-identity.

There is a sacrificial logic inherent in philosophy that the final chapter attempts to discuss. It is perhaps in this light that the relationships between epistemology and performance can be most lucidly articulated. Philosophy presents concepts to be opposed and inadvertently reveals the truth of dramatic opposition itself.

The thesis draws on a diverse series of wide-ranging examples—from the films of Woody Allen to the works of Shakespeare and Foucault—in order to relate the inquiry to current work being done in philosophy and performance studies, but notes the theoretical incompleteness of studies relating theatre and performance to conceptions of knowledge. It attempts to fill a void in the literature by offering analyses that think the relations between dramatic and philosophical activity. In short, it hopes to re-open the dialogue between performance and epistemology by showing how philosophy regularly attempts to expunge its foundational elements from its imaginary. Without wanting to gloss over the distinctions between dramatic and philosophical activity, this thesis strives to elucidate the connections between these two activities and attempts to
think their relations outside of disciplinary boundaries that would have them as mutual exclusives.
I. Blooded Thought: The Performance of Reason

thought, from its inception and in its very density, is a certain mode of action ... Thought had already "left" itself in its own being as early as the nineteenth century; it is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; it cannot help but liberate and enslave. Even before prescribing, suggesting a future, saying what must be done, even before exhorting or merely sounding an alarm, thought, at the level of its existence, in its very dawning, is in itself an action—a perilous act. —Michel Foucault

This chapter is about mimesis and epistemology. Drawing on the history of modern experimental science, it will set out to examine how the production of knowledge is always contingent on specific repetitions (in time), imitations (in space) and reproductions (through technique). Contemporary meanings of the term "mimesis" seem to have been domesticated to the point where its function is delimited to either mimesis as solely suggestive of the operations of representation, and/or mimesis as the conservative force of social and cultural reproduction. In the first instance, mimesis has been figured as the process by which an already constituted object is reproduced or re-presented. In the second, mimesis has occasionally come to figure as representative of a utopian psychology or

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sociology; in the work of Gabriel Tarde, for instance, one sees the view that imitation secures social harmony and advancement.²

This chapter, indeed this thesis, argues for a somewhat more dramatic conception of mimetic operation; it relates mimesis to agonistic struggle and to its phenomenological concreteness, its existence in both time and space.

The etymology of the term drama is derived from the Latin drān, which suggests something done; drama is always an action. This chapter argues that both the drama and the episteme always require both enaction and enunciation. Any conception of epistemology which emphasises the primacy of enaction is obviously an affront to any form of idealism, either one which locates thought in an immaterial mind, or other "idealisms" which locate it entirely in linguistic or neurological structures. In other words, this chapter argues that mimesis, and hence systems of knowledge, possesses dramaturgical styles. The next section takes up a discussion of several episodes in the history of experimental science in order to illustrate how dramaturgy plays a significant role in the production of knowledge: knowledge is always already a mise en scène.

As a point of departure, we will examine a seminal struggle in the history of experimental science: the heated polemic which took place between Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes around the status of "action," "evidence," and "hypothesis" in the production of scientific knowledge. The majority of reflections about this episode will come after a certain amount of historical contextualisation of the debate.

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Thomas Hobbes, Robert Boyle, and the Theatre of Experiment

In 1661, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes published the first edition of his *Dialogus physicus de Natura Aeris*, a polemical dialogue intended as a decisive "correction" of Robert Boyle's *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical*. The protracted debate between Hobbes and Boyle, which manifested itself as both public spectacle and private exchange, centred on the new and contentious role of experiment in natural philosophy. It will be argued, however, that axis of the polemic was not a purely "scientific" concern; the emerging form of legitimation of scientific knowledge during the seventeenth century was heavily implicated in—and indebted to—discourses concerned with civility, violence, and social order.

Hobbes' opposition to Boyle's method of proceeding in matters scientific was both public and, in flagrant disregard to the prevailing mood of the times, often vitriolic. The Royal Society of London, of which Boyle was a member, had begun developing and advocating a style of inquiry that was moving from an ideal of apodeictics to that of doxastics; it had started to adopt a more "hypothetical" mode of inquiry, ostensibly opposed to any form of "dogmatic" scholasticism or rationalism. In contradistinction to Hobbes, Boyle saw the future of "natural philosophy" in the creation of scientific "events," staged in front of a select group of qualified witnesses. The epistemological emphasis of natural philosophy

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3 The only known English translation of this text is by Simon Schaffer, which is included as an appendix of Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) 345-91.

4 Boyle often kept lists of the names of his witnesses, along with their "patents of nobility." See Thomas Kuhn, "Mathematical versus Experimental Traditions in the Development of Physical Science," *The Essential Tension* (Chicago:
began shifting from deductive and axiomatic modes of reasoning towards the utilisation and public display of technological devices. These devices were scientific tributaries or epiphenomena of the industrial revolution that were highly suited to an inductive mode of knowledge production. One of the insinuations made by Hobbes in "Dialogus Physicus" was that Boyle and his cohorts had produced not a new form of science, but a new genre of theatre. Hobbes, of course, was not the only one to recognise the theatrical quality of experimental science. King Charles II called the experimentalists "court jesters" and often laid bets on the outcome of their experiments. Comparing them to a band of travelling showmen, Hobbes intuited that the Royal Society had unwittingly created parlour physics:

Those Fellows of Gresham who are most believed, and are as masters of the rest, dispute with me about physics. They display new machines, to show their vacuum and trifling wonders, in the way that they behave who deal in exotic animals, which are not to be seen without payment. All of them are my enemies.

Despite these protestations, The Royal Society of London—the primary institutional force behind the emerging science—held Boyle's experimental research into pneumatics and chemistry to be an

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University of Chicago Press, 1977) 45. Boyle himself admitted in the "Notice to the Reader" in the New Experiments that his trials were "try'd in the presence of Ingenious Men." New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, Touching the Air (Oxford: Miles Flesher, 1682) unpaginated.


6 Shapin and Schaffer, Leviathan and the Air-Pump 134.

exemplary mode of scientific inquiry. Boyle, who is now judged to have been a pioneering theorist, made extensive use of an air pump made by himself and Robert Hooke in their inquiries into the properties of gases, and related hypotheses about the "corpuscular" composition of matter. Indeed, Boyle's pump has subsequently served as an emblem of ideal experimental technology, and his New Experiments a heuristic model widely valorised in science pedagogy: it has assumed the mantle of "first born" in several of experimental science's origin myths, both in its own time and in the contemporary era. Needless to say, when the Royal Society first advertised itself throughout Europe, the air pump was presented as one of its greatest successes.

The basic function of Boyle's air pumps was to produce an operational vacuum in a glass chamber, known as a "receiver." Attached to the receiver was a piston (or "sucker") which, when drawn down—and calibrated with necessary adjustments of a valve and stopcock—was said to empty the receiver of air. The primary reason that the vacuum was dubbed "operational" was that Boyle's style of argumentation about scientific matters disinclined him to be involved in protracted debates—already well worn—about the possibility of a "true" or absolute vacuum. In doing so, he resisted being drawn into what he saw as metaphysical debates about

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8 Boyle was one of the first scientists to systematically attempt to separate chemistry from alchemy; his reliance on experiment also led him to dispute the ancient philosophical contention that the basic constituents of the physical universe were the Four Elements (earth, fire, air, and water), a view which held sway until the seventeenth century.

9 "Corpuscular" is an obsolete synonym for "atomistic," associated not only with the work of Boyle, but also Pierre Gassendi and John Locke.

10 See Shapin and Schaffer, Leviathan and the Air Pump 3-21.
ontology, primarily between the plenists and the vacuists. The "conclusions" to experiments were also remarkably "operational": it was posited by Boyle that a vacuum was "present" at the moment that the piston became too difficult to move.\textsuperscript{11}

Hobbes' epistemological objections to Boyle and his cohorts at Gresham College was predicated on the latter's de-privileging of notions of universal causation. He believed that Boyle's reticence to posit univocal causes as correlated to the "operations" or "matters of fact" produced by the experiments degraded scientific inquiry from natural philosophy into a kind of natural history.\textsuperscript{12} Hobbes argued that the operational heuristic adopted by the Royal Society could only ever hold valid for \textit{haecceities}, for events distinguished by their radical singularity and their entrapment in the recorded past. He held that natural philosophy, properly conceived, could only be viewed as a science of causation, causes which were both universal and atemporal. Circumventing this epistemic ideal, Boyle developed a method which drew from British law, the Earl of Clarendon's 1661 Treason Act, which required two witnesses to convict an accused subject in order to arrive at an altogether different kind of "operational truth."\textsuperscript{13} For Hobbes, the parajudicial method of attaining credible witnesses—"the worthless statements of others"—could never be the basis of a science capable of universal results or assent. Addressing this issue in the \textit{Dialogus Physicus}, Hobbes explained:

\begin{marginnote}
Whoever you are, who searches for physics, that is, the science of natural causes, not within yourself but in the books of the masters,
\end{marginnote}

\textsuperscript{11} See the first of Boyle's \textit{New Experiments Physico-Mechanical}.
\textsuperscript{12} Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air-Pump} 102.
\textsuperscript{13} Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air-Pump} 100.
you are to be warned lest you understand too little or you do not rightly reckon what you understand. Nature does all things by the conflict of bodies pressing each other mutually with their motions. So, in the conflict of two bodies, whether fluid or hard, if you understand how much motion performs in each body, that is by what path and quantity, as a not unsuitable reader you will come to physics and you will find the very probable causes of motion rightly calculated. If you are content with the worthless statements of others, you will seem to yourself to understand what cannot be understood, so that you will err the more, however rightly you reason.\footnote{Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air-Pump} 348-49.}

Having introduced these objections as epistemological in nature, it must also be stated that the objections that Hobbes raised in relation to the Royal Society's experimental program can only very problematically be divorced from his theories of social order and ideal government. One of the primary imperatives behind Hobbes' theorisation of the Sovereign in \textit{Leviathan} is its irresolute resistance to any form of political or theological transcendence. In this treatise, Hobbes criticises all forms of epistemological or civil Protestantism and instead favours an ideal of centralised control of political rule and legitimation of knowledge. The capacity for people to privately petition God for help with their own causes subverts the ultimate function of political authority and is a likely precursor to civil war.

It is the epistemological face of Hobbes' arguments concerning civil authority and universal assent which leads him to oppose the speculative philosophy produced by Boyle and the Royal Society. How could universal assent, which is essential both to effective civil rule and the proper acquisition of knowledge, be procured by a select group of gentlemen watching a series of events produced by a questionable mechanical device? The exclusivity of Gresham College
(or any site which requires a selection of witnesses) reintroduces the notion of "transcendence" by creating scientific inquiry as a largely private affair. For Hobbes, it wasn't so much the experimental sacrifice of animals that exemplified the violent mode of its method, but its inherent social divisiveness. As Bruno Latour explains in *We Have Never Been Modern*:

The lovely order that Hobbes was trying to recover is annihilated by the multiplication of private spaces where the transcendent origin of facts is proclaimed—facts that have been fabricated by man yet are no one's handiwork, facts that have no causality yet can be explained.\(^\text{15}\)

Previous to the rise of experimental science, the realm of "natural philosophy" consciously integrated elements of Christian theology and politics, mathematics, and Greek and Scholastic philosophy. It is suggested by Shapin and Schaffer that the debate, and the historical success of Boyle's program, *created* an empirical mode of natural philosophy, one which was henceforth hermetically sealed from considerations of ethics, politics, and theology. This is not to suggest that this new mode of inquiry did not contain sets of ethical and metaphysical presuppositions, but its self concept—its imaginary—suggested that these factors were always extrinsic to the business of scientific work.

A detailed investigation of this era of science is interesting because it identifies a series of historical locations where science attempted to purify itself of "unscientific elements" and in doing so,

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buried the very constituting factors that gave it its initial impetus.\textsuperscript{16} The result of this complicated historical episode is that these "extra-scientific" considerations have been largely denied critical scrutiny; philosophical, political, or historical problematisations have since been largely figured as "outside" the scientific enterprise. The Enlightenment is important because, as a time of transition, it evinces a profound crisis of legitimation, a time in which the separation of certain disciplines had not been fully effected. The result of this is that an examination of this era affords an opportunity for an examination of scientific knowledge less impacted upon by the sedimentation of its historical outcomes, the transformation of historical contingencies into an a-historical \textit{a priori}.

\textbf{Scientific Knowledge as an \textit{Adeo}: The Production of the Real}

As Latour points out, a re-examination of this period in scientific history and the divergences between Boyle and Hobbes allows an opportunity to add valuable angles to one of the most contested notions in the philosophy of science: "realism" versus "constructivism." Although the assertion that experimental "facts ... have been fabricated by man yet are no one's handiwork" doesn't seem entirely accurate—the philosophy of mechanistic science still allowed for a conception of a deity as creator and miracle-maker—an examination of the newly emerging experimental science seems to provide some interesting disruptions of the realism versus relativism deadlock. The fact that the new epistemological ideal entailed the

\textsuperscript{16} For instance, its reliance on a multiplication of private spheres, and the epistemological privileging of legal discourses.
physical construction of scientific apparatuses is highly suggestive of a science that was *quite literally becoming a "construction."* The complicities here between construction and knowledge, already implicit in Christian theology, are taken up—and quite possibly resolved—by "man" at the birth of humanism. Latour explains:

> the key question of the constructivists—are facts thoroughly constructed in the laboratory? ... is precisely the question that Boyle raised and resolved. Yes, the facts are indeed constructed in the new installation of the laboratory and through the artificial intermediary of the air pump ... 'Les faits sont faits': 'Facts are fabricated,' as Gaston Bachelard would say. But are facts that have been constructed by man artifactual for that reason? No: for Boyle ... extends God's 'constructivism' to man. God knows things because he creates them.\(^{17}\)

Experimental science points to a profound ambiguity in the relationship between notions of "construction" and the Real. In this light, the much discussed "clockwork universe" paradigm (invariably associated with the work of Royal Society) that the mechanist philosophers of this period worked with was not merely a perceptual structure which outlined a provisional ontology or mode of theoretical idealisation: it was an active heuristic model which suggested that the very means for securing knowledge might *itself* be mechanical. If we can come to "know" the movements of the devices that are created in the laboratory, then we can also "know" the natural "devices" that have life outside of the laboratory.\(^{18}\)

Through this conception of the world as giant predictable machine, the actors of the scientific revolution began to perceive the

\(^{17}\) Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 18.

\(^{18}\) I place the term "know" here in inverted commas, because the debate between Boyle and Hobbes centred, in some senses, on what exactly it meant to possess knowledge of the natural world.
laboratory as the double of nature itself. As Francis Bacon explains in *New Atlantis*:

We have ... furnaces of great diversities and that keep great diversity of heats: fierce and quick; strong and constant; soft and mild; blown, quiet; dry, moist; and the like. But above all, we have heats in imitation of the sun’s and heavenly bodies’ heats, that pass divers inequalities and (as it were) orbs, progresses, and returns, whereby we produce admirable effects ... We make artificial rainbows, haloes, and circles about light. We represent also all manner of reflexions, refractions, and multiplications of visual beams of objects.

The perceived predictability of the machine gives rise to an epistemological valorisation of prediction. The very meaning of the word "probable" in the mid-seventeenth century begins to change; from connotations which suggest the use of appropriate authority—most usually associated with Aristotle—it switches to a usage which seems more consonant with notions of the adequation of evidence, inductively or experimentally secured. It required a group of witnesses in order that "matters of fact" be validated. And although these witnesses were "authorised" (to witness) they could not be considered "authorities" in the usual sense of the word. The Clarendon Treason Act only required that witnesses be "reliable,” not authoritative.

The overturning of Aristotelianism appears as a condition of possibility for the acceptance of Boylean science. Aristotle’s distinction between nature and artifice had to be abandoned if the laboratory was to function as a mirror of the natural world. The other

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19 The term "returns" signifies the movement of the heavenly bodies.
seeming advantage of laboratory science was that it carried through certain aspects of Francis Bacon's conception of knowledge as a form of control; one no longer had to watch nature at a distance, as it could quite literally be "put on the rack"\textsuperscript{21} in the convenience of Gresham College. Needless to say, the experimental program succeeded and Hobbes has been subsequently perceived as solely a "political" thinker.

Although the polemic between Hobbes and Boyle is admittedly only one isolated instance in a very diffuse period in intellectual history, the heuristic and pedagogic status bestowed on Boyle's work by subsequent historians and scientists suggests that it is paradigmatic in its successes at attaining legitimate scientific knowledge. This, in some senses, relegates Hobbes to the status of scientific "failure." And yet, as Bruno Latour indicates, the "success" of certain aspects of Hobbes' program is still evident, even if in a slightly different visage. Although his desire to expose the new science as an undesirable form of politicking has not met with much success, Hobbes' project to create a scientific politics in which experimental science is forever banished has certainly seen the light of day.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} The undercurrent of violence inherent in the metaphors used to describe natural philosophy in the eighteenth century has been often remarked upon. For this, see Carolyn Merchant, \textit{The Death of Nature} (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). As well as "putting nature on the rack to torture her for her secrets," another of Bacon's favourite figures of speech was "twisting the lions tail." See Thomas Kuhn, "Mathematical versus Experimental Traditions in the Development of Physical Science" 44.

\textsuperscript{22} Here I am thinking primarily of the "scientific Marxism" of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.
Boyle is not simply creating a scientific discourse while Hobbes is doing the same thing for politics; Boyle is creating a political discourse from which politics is to be excluded, while Hobbes is imagining a scientific politics from which experimental science has to be excluded. In other words, they are inventing our modern world, a world in which the representation of things through the intermediary of the laboratory is forever dissociated from the representation of citizens through the intermediary of the social contract.  

As Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer indicate in *Leviathan and the Air Pump*, the "success" of Boyle's experimental program is invariably treated as self-explanatory. *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* presents arguments that relentlessly challenge this assumption. Shapin and Schaffer explore a number of extra-rational factors that permitted the research program of experimental science to be a success. The book is an exercise in comparative anthropology which attempts to investigate the intersections of epistemology and social order through treating the exchange between Boyle and Hobbes as an exemplary case. It also provides a provisional point of origin from which the disciplinary demarcations of science, theology, ethics, and civil order can be seen to take some of their initial energy.

Shapin and Schaffer's analysis is effective not only insofar as it refracts scientific and political questions through each other, but also because it attempts to trace the inauguration of these disciplinary matrices. The inventiveness of their study resides in the (seeming) perversity of reading Thomas Hobbes as both political theorist and scientist and Boyle as both scientist and unwitting political theorist. As such, it is an exemplary investigation of boundary speech.

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23 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 27.
Like much of the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, Shapin and Schaffer’s study seeks to problematise the absolute distinction of content and context; the latter see these as goals which an episteme attempts to reach, rather than something which precedes intellectual work. *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* moves to do this through an investigation of the radical disjunction between Boyle and Hobbes’ view of the role of experiment in scientific inquiry. Boyle’s success—and the success of the experimental program generally—coheres with what Michel de Certeau identifies in *The Practice of Everyday Life* as the modern demand that the Real be enacted and that this enactment is visible: “the modern age ... arose out of a methodic effort of observation and accuracy that struggled against credulity and based itself on a contract between the seen and the Real.”

Although the subject of de Certeau’s essay is not experimental science, his interrogation of the relations between the functions and modalities of belief and persuasion seems germane to this chapter. Drawing on the work of Jean Baudrillard, de Certeau makes some interesting links between the Real and the visible:

> The contemporary ‘simulacrum’ is in short the latest localisation of belief in vision, the identification of the seen with what is to be believed—once the hypothesis has been given up that claimed that the waters of an invisible ocean (the Real) came back to haunt the shores of the visible and to make them the results, decodable signs or deceptive reflections, of its presence. The simulacrum is what the relationship of the visible to the real becomes when the assumption crumbles that an invisible immensity of Being (or beings) lies behind appearances.


The shift which de Certeau detects in the contemporary fetishisation of the image works through a logic which literalises an ocularcentrism already inherent in the languages of truth. As Thomas Sprat suggests: "methinks the Experimental Philosophy ... is the surest guide, against such Notional wanderings: opens our eyes to perceive all the realities of things ...." 26 Let us not forget after all, that Boyle's vacuums were made of *glass*. 27

The epistemological trajectory of the Royal Society was one which attempted to escape from the solipsistic excesses of traditionally conceived philosophical modes of knowing. Thomas Sprat, in his *History of the Royal Society*—written when the society was only four years old—suggested that intellectual company gave men over to a more agreeable state to learn about the natural world: "In *Assemblies*, the *Wits* of most men are *sharper*, their *Apprehensions* *readier*, their *Thoughts* *fuller*, than in their *Closets*." 28 For Sprat, the figure of the sole investigator was fast becoming discredited; a method of "guilt by association" suggested that lone inquiry was the domain of the alchemist and the metaphysician. There seemed to be, in Sprat's conception, an implicit recognition of the interindividual nature of knowledge. "Proper" epistemology requires an *audience*; in other words, knowledge production always requires rituals of social communion: displays of

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27 Although, by itself, the glass chamber meant little, as *one cannot see a vacuum*. However, as Boyle quickly discovered, *one could* see a candle being put out or a small animal die through lack of oxygen.

sacrament and community. The seventeenth century's move from individualism only makes sense in the context of the scientific revolution; it can be viewed as an attack on traditional complicities between singular authority and knowledge. Indeed, the motto of the Royal Society was *Nullius in Verba*: "nothing by mere authority." The scientific "matter of fact" was very quickly becoming the province of the collective:

Radical individualism—the state in which each individual set himself up as the ultimate judge of knowledge—would destroy the conventional basis of proper knowledge, while the disciplined collective social structure of the experimental form of life would create and sustain that factual basis. Thus the experimentalists were on guard against 'dogmatists' and 'tyrants' in philosophy, just as they abominated 'secretists' who produced their knowledge—claims in a private and undisciplined space ... Legitimate knowledge was warranted as objective insofar as it was produced by the collective. The objectification of knowledge proceeded through displays of the communal basis of its generation and evaluation.

For the purposes of the current investigation, I will read Shapin and Schaffer's work in relation to notions of performance and epistemology, because its analytic mode seems tacitly concerned with a historically situated *scenography* of knowledge production. Shapin and Schaffer discuss the emergence of a tacit corporeal style caught up in discourses of "politeness" and "dogmatism," which provided

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29 As Paul Tillich points out in *My Search for Absolutes*, the Greek word *gnosis*, from which the English 'knowledge' is derived, conflates knowledge of essences with kinds of union. See Paul Tillich, *My Search for Absolutes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967) 67. In a more sociological sense, the Royal Society made explicit the notion that the legitimation of knowledge invariably proceeds through a union provided by an institutional framework.

30 Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* 78.
seventeenth century experimental science with much of its legitimating force. The following section is in some senses a critical re-reading of their work, required in order to articulate some strong resonances between the epistemic priorities of natural philosophy and notions of performance.

The Spectre of Dogmatism: A Primer in Epistemological Etiquette

An equation between "dogmatism" and "tyranny" is made by Thomas Sprat in his *History of the Royal Society of London*. In this account—contemporary with the Royal Society itself—thinkers like Hobbes are presented as metaphysicians, with their dogmatic views about matters political and epistemological, and the unpleasantness of their personal behaviour, equally tyrannical.31 In a section entitled "Modern Dogmatists," Sprat makes explicit his view that not only do the "Ancients ... still possess a Tyranny over our Judgements," but that this tyranny reveals itself in the connections between "Learning" and "Civil Government."32 The links that Sprat perceives between these two domains is soon made explicit:

But I will rather sincerely profess, that I had no satyrical Sence, but onely declared against *Dogmatists* in general. And I cannot repent my having done it, while I perceive, there are two very dangerous mischiefs, which are caus'd by that way of Philosophy. The one is, that it makes men give over, and believe that they are satisfi'd too soon... the other ill effect of which I shall take notice, is, that it commonly inclines such men, who think themselves already resolv'd, and

31 Although Hobbes is not named directly in the history, it seems reasonably safe to assume that Sprat's attacks on those who wished to advance a "better sort of *Metaphysicks*" were veiled attacks on the philosophy of Hobbes.

immoveable in their opinions, to be more imperious, and impatient of
contradiction, then becomes the calmness, and unpaspionate evenness
of the true Philosophical Spirit.33

The scope of Sprat's concept of "dogmatism"—a generic pejorative—
suggests a form of inquiry both epistemologically deficient and
socially aggressive. His conception of dogmatism stretches from
medieval scholasticism in philosophy to all forms of mathematical
idealisation. Sprat suggests, again in The History of the Royal Society,
that it is to the ancient mathematicians that we owe one of the first
"corruptions" of knowledge:

And ... to them we owe the Invention; so from them proceeded the first
Corruption of knowledge. It was the custom of their Wise men, to wrap
up their observations on Nature, and the Manners of Men, in the dark
Shadows of Hieroglyphicks; and to conceal them, as sacred Mysteries,
from the apprehensions of the vulgar ... Hence it came pass, that the
first Masters of knowledge amongst them, were as well Poets, as
Philosophers: For Orpheus, Linus, Museus, and Homer, first softened
men's natural rudeness, and by the charms of their Numbers, allur'd
them to be instructed by the severer Doctrines, of Solon, Thales, and
Pythagoras.34

34 Sprat, The History of the Royal Society 5-6. The championing of experiment
and the disdain of mathematics and deductive reason receives its first
decisive articulation in the works of Francis Bacon. The suspicion towards
mathematics is also exemplified by the work of Franklin, Black, and Nolle. See
Thomas Kuhn "Mathematical versus Experimental Traditions in the
Development of Physical Science" 48. Boyle, in the New Experiments, admits of
relative ignorance of geometry in his notice "To the Reader." See also Thomas
Kuhn The Essential Tension (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago
Press, 1977) 213-224, for an account of the slow development of notions of
quantitative measurement in Baconian science.
Following on from Francis Bacon's attempt to separate classical and experimental sciences, the Royal Society appeared to have taken on the task of the reformation of natural philosophy, broadly conceived as a purgation of dogmatism.\textsuperscript{35} Hobbes, needless to say, did not qualify. As Samuel Sorbière, a contemporary of Hobbes, recounted in an interview with King Charles II that it was "agreed with on all Hands, that if Mr Hobbs were not so very dogmatical, he would be very Useful and Necessary to the Royal-Society; for there are few People that can see farther into things than he, or have applied themselves so long to the Study of Natural Philosophy."\textsuperscript{36} And yet a problem arises, because as we will see, this "dogmatism" was not something extrinsic to the scientific process—something that surrounded it—but was rather infused into the logic of those very discourses that outlined methods of securing the Real.

"Dogmatism" was undoubtedly perceived as a threat to genuine knowledge; while "matters of fact" could be secured through a parajudicial mode utilising the collusion of witnesses, "knowledge" of causation was restricted to the purely "speculative" mode. Boyle himself, in the \textit{New Experiments}, divided all experimental "matters of

\textsuperscript{35} Thomas Kuhn seems mistaken in his belief that Boyle, "when announcing laws derived from measurement, began for the first time to record their quantitative data" ("The Function of Measurement in Modern Physical Science," in \textit{The Essential Tension} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 222-3). The fact is that Boyle never referred to his "law" (inversely relating air pressure to volume) as a "law," and neither did he ever attempt to give it any kind of mathematical formalisation.

\textsuperscript{36} Qtd. in Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air-Pump} 134. Boyle, in his "Examen Of the greatest Part of Mr. Hobbs's Dialogus Physicus De Natura Aeris," confesses that he has doubts that he can oppose him without angering him" (2).
fact" from reflections on the experiments, and suggested that readers may wish to read the sections separately:

I thought I might do the generality of my Readers no unacceptable piece of service, by so punctually relating what I carefully observ'd, that they may look upon these Narratives as standing Records in our new Pneumaticks, and need not reiterate themselves an Experiment to have as distinct an Idea of it, as may suffice them to ground their Reflexions and Speculations upon. And because sometimes 'tis the Discourse made upon the experiment that makes it appear prolix, I have commonly left a conspicuous interval betwixt such Discourses, and the Experiments whereunto they belong; they that desire only the Historical part of the account we give of our Engine, may reade the Narratives, without being put to the trouble of reading the Reflexions too ....37

The hypothetical mode of proceeding in natural philosophy and the Royal Society's exclusion of Hobbes as a "dogmatist" suggests that seventeenth-century epistemology in England had become performatively and rhetorically bound to a discourse of politeness. One possibility, which will be pursued shortly, is that the developing notions of evidence and the establishing of "matters of fact" were codified according to certain protocols as to what suggested a "gentlemanly" mode of behaviour.

This being the case, a key task for Boyle and the Royal Society was to establish how resolves should be reached with disputations of "matters of fact." As Shapin and Schaffer point out, it was necessary to manage dissensus by bounding it within certain parameters. The first stipulation was that hypotheses concerning causal explanations were initially "cooled" by according them only incidental importance to the experimentation. The veridicality of experimental matters of

37 unpaginated.
fact, on the other hand, was to be resolved through the consensus of reliable witnesses, and theoretically, the replication of experiment.

Boyle provides a (literally) dramatic example of conventions used for the management of disputes in The Sceptical Chymist.38 The dramatic dialogue prescribes resolution through a mode of exemplification; the resolve of disputes is not literally articulated by Boyle, but rather exemplified by the fictional characters in The Sceptical Chymist. The dialogues present Carneades (as spokesperson for Boyle), two varieties of Hermetics ("occultists"), and an Aristotelian. The Sceptical Chymist presents itself as a "theatre of persuasion," providing a textual ostension of natural philosophy, not as Socratic dialogue, but conference. Shapin and Schaffer make several points about the textual form of the book, and are worth quoting at length:

first, the symposiasts are imaginary, not real ... Even Carneades, although he is manifestly 'Boyle's man', is not Boyle himself: Carneades is made actually to quote 'our friend Mr Boyle' as a device for distancing opinions from individuals ... Second, truth is not inculcated from Carneades to his interlocutors; rather it is dramatized as emerging through the conversation. Everyone is seen to have a say in the consensus which is the dénouement. Third, the conversation is, without exception, civil: as Boyle said, 'I am not sorry to have this opportunity of giving an example, how to manage disputes with civility'. No symposiast abuses another; no ill temper is displayed; no one leaves the conversation in pique of frustration. Fourth, and most importantly, the currency of intellectual exchange, and the means by which agreement is reached, is the experimental matter of fact.39

38 The seventeenth century reading of "sceptical" makes it an antithesis of "dogmatical."
39 Shapin and Schaffer, Leviathan and the Air Pump 74-75.
There is a crucial question raised by Shapin and Schaffer's analysis that needs further exploration. In their examination of Boyle's "theatre of persuasion," what they seem to overlook are the epistemological connections between the overt theatricality of the text and the epistemological privileging of "matters of fact." Shapin and Schaffer acknowledge that Boyle's insistence that natural philosophy divorce itself from metaphysical speculations about causation and instead restrict itself to a description of physical events elides the fact that observation is itself theory laden. One central assumption made by the Royal Society of London was that observation always precedes theorisation; the correlated statements of witnesses "justified" the experimental program through the supposed uniformity of perceptual experience: "The True Philosophy must be first of all begun, on a scrupulous, and severe examination of particulars: from them, there may be some general Rules, with great caution drawn."40

The presumption made by Sprat and the Royal Society was that the natural philosopher invariably started with the event, to which theoretical constructs were tentatively added. However, as even a cursory glance at Boyle's New Experiments suggests, a quite detailed metaphysics is always implied. The ontology of corpuscularism, on which Boyle and many of his contemporaries relied, provides a solid metaphysical framework from which to work; additionally, various modes of relation are evoked in order to "describe" the events. Although causation is restricted to the "hypothetical mode," various other descriptors of relation are presupposed, such as constant conjunction and correlation. Without this ontology and prescription

of modes of relation, Boyle would have been utterly unable to delimit his field of observation (ontology enters at the point that one needs to describe precisely what it is that one is observing), disenabling him to discriminate experimental failure and success.

However, perhaps the most startling aspect of the dramatic format of The Sceptical Chemyst is the distanciation from Boyle and the character who "plays" Boyle in the dialogue, Carneades. This distanciation, being far from a mere rhetorical flourish, is central in tenor to the newly emerging form of scientific legitimation of which Boyle is an exemplar. Hypothesis requires performance.

Scientific Knowledge and Knowledge about Science: Performing Hypotheses

As Hobbes seemed to intuit, the shift in emphasis towards the enactment of the real—scientific theatre—gives rise to a new complicity between performance and epistemology. Boyle was, perhaps unwittingly, the creator of some of the first true "installations." Indeed, as Bruno Latour points out in We Have Never Been Modern, many of Boyle's histrionic "demonstrations" (such as suffocating small animals or putting out candles) with the vacuum were later taken up by eighteenth-century parlour physics.41 However, this demand that the Real be enacted was not restricted to Boyle's program, as we will see. Not only was the material instance of the experiment a space for demonstrations which were highly suggestive of a kind of performance, but also the emerging style of reasoning itself: the mode of the hypothesis. The hypothetical mode of argumentation, one closely connected to that of the proffering of

41 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern 17.
"opinion," underwent a rapid rise in the mid seventeenth century. Previous to this, the realms of opinion and knowledge were subject to a far more strict demarcation.42

In his essay "Restoration of Behaviour," performance anthropologist Richard Schechner offers a definition of performance as a cultural mode predicated on a principle of distanciation. As soon as a disjunction is made or perceived between an "actor" and a "role," the mode of performance is invoked. Schechner includes a whole spectrum of cultural activities in this notion of performance: shamanism, theatre, trance, exorcism, psychoanalysis, performance art, ritual. All of these activities share a relative awareness of distance between role and person:

restored behaviour is the main characteristic of performance. The practitioners of all these arts, rites, and healings assume that some behaviours—organised sequences of events, scripted actions, known texts, scored movements—exist separate from the performers who 'do' these behaviours.43

The links here to Boyle's The Sceptical Chemyst should become clear. Although the text is not strictly a "performance" (not a process occurring in space/time), the poetics of distanciation are introduced as a kind of heuristic ideal. The ideas of impartiality or even "indifference" are often invoked to present an ideal of objective investigation. Indeed, the term "objective" itself suggests a distanciation not only between investigator (subject) and

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investigated (object), but also between the subject and themselves. This process of introducing "self-distance" has invariably been read as a kind of "taming of the passions." In a strange way, the supposed "unreality" of performance has become a necessary adjunct to the proper pursuit of knowledge.

It is also helpful to read the privileging of a polite ("anti-dogmatic") etiquette of inquiry in terms of this poetics of distanciation. The mode of supposition connects very well with the framing of performance as an "as if." Under this scheme, not only is inquiry supposed to be depersonalised but the very mode of hypothesis suggests the ability to operate in "possible worlds" of explanation. In From Ritual to Theatre, Victor Turner provides a useful characterisation of ritual performance which he relates to notions of the "subjunctive." Drawing on the work of van Gennep, Turner posits that ritual performance necessarily invokes a register of communication concerned with possibility and hypothesis; the subjunctive operates with a logic of "if it were so, not 'it is so.'" Turner's notion of performance has resonances with protocols outlining the Royal Society's conception of experimental science: performance, as a mode engaged with the "the possible," finds analogues in a conception of science which values the free movement of hypothesis. A performative mode which eschews the "it is" for the "it might be" suggests correlations with an etiquette of inquiry disdainful of the convictions of the "dogmatist." As Barbara J.

44 Practitioners of Natural Philosophy in the seventeenth century were keen not to commit the "ad hominem" fallacy; literally, an argument directed at a person. In some senses, the desire to free inquiry of personal authority was related to the attempted overthrow of Aristotelian philosophy.

Shapiro suggests in *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature*, scientific practice and apologetics of this period were gradually led away from the "demonstrably certain" towards a form of empirical probabilism that initiated the erosion of the distinctions between scientific knowledge and mere "opinion." 46

The move to make the Real—quite literally—"perform," to get it to move in space and in time for an audience, along with the stipulation that inquiry proceed by hypothesis, unconsciously figured knowledge as a kind of performance: the new Natural Philosophy was scientific epistemology in its subjunctive mood.

In "Restoration of Behaviour," Richard Schechner suggests that it is precisely the separation of act and actor, via the mediation of tacit or explicit "scripting" that allows for the transmission of various forms of ritual, theatre, and gesture. The passing down of the texts introduces a split in consciousness that allows the performer to be separated from their performance. Scripts can also be passed down and memorised verbatim even when there is no discursive script, as is the case with enacted folk stories.

Schechner is apt to note that the function of rehearsal is to narrow choice or at least make somewhat explicit rules for improvisation; the rehearsal is a form of contract that lays down parameters for performance. The presence of "first-night jitters" amongst actors isn't attributable to the presence of an audience (already present in the form of other actors, each actor to

themselves, and the technical crew), but rather, unlike rehearsal, the performance of "mistakes" is no longer tolerated.

Schechner discusses the normative functions of restored behaviour, its capacity to function by presenting exemplary models for action. The pedagogical function of restored behaviour makes porous the boundaries between the ethical, the aesthetic, and the cognitive. He cites several examples of this: the bravery expected of a Gahaku boy in Papau New Guinea who is expected to shed no tears during his initiation rite which involves the slicing of his nostrils with jagged leaves; the coyness of the "blushing bride," despite having lived with her husband-to-be for two years; the ritual actions of the Ramlila, which provide an exemplary mode of how people in northern Hindi-speaking India should behave in their daily lives.47 Turner also notes this function of the performative by denoting it "paradigmatic"; performance can serve both as a model for and a model of.48

The function of restored behaviour as a form of exemplification can shed some light on how paradigms of knowledge operate in scientific communities. In The Essential Tension, Thomas Kuhn attempts to clarify some misconceptions about his idea of the scientific "paradigm" which he outlined in the seminal The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. To correct a common misunderstanding of his work, Kuhn admits in The Essential Tension that the main sense in which he used the term paradigm was as an exemplification, a "standard example." In this sense, he moves against the positivist tendency to see all scientific knowledge as solely the manipulation and re-manipulation of abstract symbolic generalisations:

47 Schechner, "Restoration of Behaviour" 36-7.
48 Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 82.
Acquiring an arsenal of exemplars ... is integral to the process by which a student gains access to the cognitive achievements of his disciplinary group. Without exemplars he would never learn much of what the group knows about such fundamental concepts as force and field, element and compound, or nucleus and cell ... It is, of course, the sense of 'paradigm' as standard example that led originally to my choice of that term. Unfortunately, most readers of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions have missed what was for me its central function....49

There are, however, aspects to this notion of exemplification-as-epistemological-transmission that seem to escape Kuhn's attention. Although he repudiates the idea that science pedagogy cannot be reduced to the learning of axioms, functions, and definitions, his notion of exemplification is still remarkably de-corporealised. There seems little room in Kuhn's work for a mode of exemplification that happens in real time and occupies space; Kuhn's model of exemplification is still figured in terms of "words" and "diagrams" rather than bodies, techniques, and technologies.

In distinction to this view, Mario Biagioli points out in Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism, that non-discursive or tacit nature of scientific discourse as practiced in Italian court society was crucial to its social effectiveness. Central to Biagioli's understanding of scientific legitimation is the notion of "courtliness"; courtliness was a "property" which the knowing subject was expected to display through both word and action if they were to have their hypotheses taken seriously. Although books such as Baldassare Castiglione's Book of the Courtier provided some rudimentary guidelines to would-be savants, "courtliness" could only

49 Thomas Kuhn, The Essential Tension 307.
be exemplified; it could be provided solely by concrete physical example:

the 'essence' of courtliness ... had to be presented as something ultimately defying verbal description. It had to remain an opaque notion because it epitomized the very 'mystery' of the prince's power and the courtiers' identity as shaped by it. In fact, the prince remained powerful insofar as he managed to avoid probes into the legitimacy of his power. His power was effective only insofar as its nature and legitimacy were not probed but only acted out in court behaviour and culture.\textsuperscript{50}

In a way analogous to Shapin and Schaffer's discussion of the "hypothetical" as opposed to the "dogmatic" means of proceeding in natural philosophy, the notion of "courtliness" is a locus at which epistemology and "etiquette" become inextricably connected. As Mario Biagioli continues:

The establishment of scientific academies in Italy, England, and France in the seventeenth century was paralleled by discussions about the polite protocols academicians should follow in presenting, assessing, or publishing claims about nature. Because these institutions produced knowledge through a sharing of evidence and a collective witnessing or evaluation of reports and experiments, impoliteness threatened the very conditions of possibility of that kind of knowledge.\textsuperscript{51}

This idea of an appropriate "etiquette of inquiry" makes the notion of performance as a form of exemplification explicit. The presence of a

\textsuperscript{50} Mario Biagioli, \textit{Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) 52.

gestural code functioning as a tacit form of "scripting"—in this case, the display of "politeness"—prescribes forms of improvisation or hypothesising appropriate to presentation in front of scientific academies.

Court Science and Courty Behaviour: Gestural Codes and Knowing Bodies

In *Galileo, Courtier*, Biagioli echoes Shapin and Schaffer's understanding of new forms of scientific inquiry as being contingent on appropriately "polite" presentations of evidence ("matters of fact") and non-dogmatic ("hypothetical") suppositions. As was the case with English science, Italian science in the sixteenth century depended very heavily on the patronage of the royal court, and many of its debates and conjectures were aired in front of other savants and of royalty. Indeed, during this period, before the full emergence of scientific academies, the death of a patron or a change in their loyalties could signify the end of a scientific career.⁵²

The Italian court society, of which Galileo eventually became an esteemed member, valued highly an attribute called *sprezzatura*, roughly equivalent to the English word "nonchalance." *Sprezzatura*, as a kind of distancing of the passions, appeared to run parallel to what the Royal Society of London valued in its non-dogmatic practitioners. And in a way analogous to the disparaging of "dogmatism" practiced by the Royal Society, the Italian court system showed displeasure at inquiry that was "pedantic." Like Boyle's *The

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⁵² Biagioli draws attention to a dice game entitled *The Courtier's Philosophy*, published in Madrid in 1587 which prescribed that if you landed on square 43 ("Your patron dies") the player had to return to the start. Biagioli, *Galileo,* *Courtier* 35.
Sceptical Chymist, Galileo's Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems utilised a character that "stood in" for Galileo in a hypothetical debate between adversaries; once again, we see evinced a poetics of distanciation. As Biagioli points out in Galileo, Courtier, Simplicio, who represented the peripatetic philosophy that Galileo was attempting to refute, enacted the kind of pedantry that court culture believed itself to be rejecting. At least in rhetorical format, Galileo's rejection of the peripatetics, like Boyle's rejection of Hobbes, entailed an etiquette of inquiry hostile to absolutism. Some of Galileo's supporters also resorted to similar tactics:

In his Contro i peripatetici (a poem he published in 1623 to celebrate Galileo's Assayer), Soldani attacked the 'bum from Stagira' and his 'herd of sheep' for practicing 'a philosophy that closes and ties down knowledge with ropes'. In supporting Galileo's cause, he tried to undermine the philosophers not by attacking them on scientific or methodological grounds but by playing the trope of the philosophers' stuffy, servile, and myopic knowledge—a form of culture that was unacceptable to the courtly audience he was addressing.

The accusation of "pedant" was used at other times by Galileo and also by other philosophers. For example, Galileo used the trope against Tycho and Grassi as well as the Jesuits, because although they pretended to have the necessary sprezzatura, they were in fact, closet pedants! Galileo's (mis)representations of Grassi as a pedant were further reiterated, even after Grassi's considerable defence of both himself and Tycho:

53 Biagioli, Galileo, Courtier 115-6.
54 Biagioli, Galileo, Courtier 116.
55 Biagioli, Galileo, Courtier 287.
A stung Grassi responded by trying to muster all possible arguments to defend himself and Tycho from what he perceived as Galileo's unfair attack on him. However, Grassi's defense of Tycho (and his attempt to get back at Galileo by pointing out his lingering Copernicanism ...) provoked Galileo's counterattack on Grassi as a pedant who could not argue without bringing in authorities ... Basically Galileo tried to portray the Jesuits as pedants in need of an authority figure while, at the same time exposing their bad judgement in picking their new source of authority.\footnote{Biagioli, Galileo, Courtier 287-8. It should be noted that many of Galileo's attacks on Grassi, such as the nature of heat, were as speculative and in fact, as "incorrect" (according to contemporary science) as those offered by the Aristotelians.}

In the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Judith Butler, one sees emphasised the ways in which subjects are interpellated and made to conform to various knowledge/power structures.\footnote{Cf. Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975); Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971); Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).} In contrast, the inferences given by the work of Biagioli, Latour, Schaffer, Shapin, and Kuhn suggest that it might be possible to examine the ways in which knowledges are produced by "knowing subjects." Through a kind of inversion of the logic that figures the subject as an epiphenomenon of discourse, the above theorists open the possibility for thinking about a subject who is not only subjected to epistemological regimes, but also believed to be capable of creating them.

The emergence of the new forms of scientific legitimation in the sixteenth century delimited, via the valorisation of the subjunctive mode of inquiry, the hypothesis, who rightly possessed...
"agency" and who did not. For someone to "hypothesise"—to play out through supposition a multitude of realities—implied a notion of freedom, an ability to perform where others could merely observe. The dogmatist, it seems, was quite literally unable to "play."

As previously stated, official accreditation in scientific matters became increasingly regulated by educational institutions and professional bodies. However, natural philosophers within court culture—both English and Italian—exemplified their legitimacy by means of a virtuous display of etiquette, an epistemic ritual pitched somewhere between virtuousness and virtuosity. As suggested, this was not just a matter of appropriate language; indeed, the uneasy disjunctions between language and action is no better exemplified than by the performative character of scientific activity of this period.

The Latin agere means to "do" or "perform," and its past participle actus is the origin of the English terms "act" and "actual." These words, which are usually set in distinction—"actuality" opposes the falseness of "acting"—are brought back to their common origin in a period where the actual quite literally, needs enaction. In both the cases of Galileo and Boyle, the exemplification of behavioural and gestural codes became codified into epistemological and heuristic ideals. In the episodes briefly covered, there seem good historical reasons to suggest that positivist and neo-positivist conceptions of scientific change are inadequate to the data. In perhaps the most sophisticated defence of neo-positivist philosophy of science, Karl Popper, in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery,* argues that the value of a scientific theory is relative to its capacity to be falsified.\(^{58}\)

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believes that not only can all observation statements be tied to actual experiments, but that also each of these can be assigned the value of confirmation or falsification. In accordance with this view, Popper holds that the confirmation of theories is invariably tentative and their falsification can always be decisive.

One problem with this view is that it replicates in the form of methodological rule the separation between theory and experiment that itself is a historical product of a certain era in natural philosophy. The assumption made by Popper is one that was shared by the Royal Society of London and also exemplified in Boyle's writing up of his experiments. All contend that observation is independent of theory. There is an implicit biologism inherent in these accounts that makes perception the result of retinal, rather than conceptual activity. However, perception invariably requires considerable amounts of conceptual training. The "obvious" connections made by the experimental scientist between "words" and "things" already presume an ontology and a system of relation between elements.

As an example of this "training of perception," Australian philosopher of science Alan Chalmers cites an illustration used by Michael Polanyi in his book Personal Knowledge, of medical students learning to use an X-ray machine:

Think of a medical student attending a course in the X-ray diagnosis of pulmonary diseases. He watches, in a darkened room, shadowy traces on a fluorescent screen placed against a patient's chest, and hears the radiologist commenting to his assistants, in technical language, on the significant features of these shadows. At first the student is completely puzzled. For he can see in the X-ray picture of a chest only the shadows of the heart and ribs, with a few spidery blotches between them. The experts seem to be romancing about figments of their imagination; he can see nothing that they are talking about. Then, as he
goes on listening for a few weeks...a rich panorama of significant
details will be revealed to him: of physiological variations and
pathological changes, of scars, of chronic infections and signs of acute
disease. He has entered a new world.59

The important thing to note about this example is that perception not
only uses specific technologies, but also that, following Kuhn,
observation is directed through concrete examples or exemplars. This
suggests that the way scientists append language to observation can
never be wholly formalised. This point recalls Biagioli's point about
the nature of the sprezzatura. The behaviour exemplified by the
sprezzatura could not be captured through recourse to discursive
prescriptions; it was a corporeal imitation that had to be learned
tacitly. Both Polanyi's and Biagioli's formulations suggest that
neither scientific pedagogy nor research seem amenable to apriori
formalisation; in some cases it seems to come much closer to
"improvisation." Paradigmatic exemplification invariably designates
problems under certain headings or classes; it is a practical (and in
the case of the above cited case of the medical students, a corporeal)
training in seeing identities or "family resemblances" in both
"theoretical" and "experimental" problems and solutions. It is because
of this tacit element of modelling and exemplification that Kuhn
replaced Popper's notion of "scientific theory" with "paradigm."

Vanishing Acts: Knowledge and the Amazing Disappearing Body

However, as mentioned, Kuhn's work retains a notion of
exemplification that is assuredly textual: observation may require a

59 Michael Polanyi, qtd. in Alan F. Chalmers, What is this Thing Called
body or an apparatus to see, but it is also, literally, nowhere to be seen. The effacement of corporeality in conceptions of epistemology has a very long history. The idea of the body as a perceptual ground which perpetually recedes from perception was perhaps first introduced by the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In several sections of this study, he details the experience of the spatiality of one's own body and conceptions of the body as detailed by classical psychology. As the ground of our perceptual experience, the body habitually recedes from its experience of itself. Merleau-Ponty uses an image from the theatre to illustrate this tendency for corporeal absence:

Bodily space can be distinguished from external space and envelop its parts instead of spreading them out, because it is the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out, the zone of not being in front of which precise beings, figures and points can come to light ... As far as spatiality is concerned ... one's own body is the third term, always tacitly understood, in the figure-background structure and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space.\(^6^0\)

The "darkness" of corporeal recession which somehow facilitates perception has been most significantly developed by Drew Leder in his book *The Absent Body*. Leder, following Merleau-Ponty, sees corporeal absence as one of the essential modes of embodiment: the "body is rarely the thematic object of experience."\(^6^1\) Although, as has been discussed, scientific paradigms require exemplification, and

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exemplification often requires bodies in spaces—choreographed and calibrated in order for their epistemes to function—the actual notion of modelling and exemplification found in much philosophy of science seems radically de-corporealised. It would seem that not only is the perceptual disappearance of embodiment a key movement in the structures of perceptual experience, but also that the conceptual absence of embodiment is a central predicate of philosophy of science. Existing neither as the object of investigation, nor the "inquiring mind" that investigates phenomena, the body has been abjected by traditional philosophy of science. When Leder suggests that "absence is not simply a deficit but a constitutive principle of the real," he is referring to the fact that what distinguishes both perceptual experience and objects perceived is disappearance; and yet he could just as easily have been referring to an historical development in the history of thought which continually sought to constitute reality through the systematic exclusion of the body in processes of knowing.

In the case of Biagioli's Galileo, the gestural codes—or as Richard Schechner terms them, "strips of behaviour"—which correlate to sprezzatura serve to create the subject of knowledge. In Lacanian terms, the sprezzatura is the sujet supposé savoir: one who functions as a living exemplification of the knowing being. As was

63 The phrase sujet supposé savoir is one utilised by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to designate the view that knowledge resides in a particular subject, rather than being an intersubjective phenomenon, hence the designation of the "subject supposed to know" or the "supposed subject of knowledge." Lacan utilises the concept to illustrate the basic workings of the psychoanalytic notion of transference. See Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977) 230-43.
discussed, this knowledge is not strictly amenable to discursive representation, and yet serves (following Schechner and Turner) as a mode of transmission. It would seem then, that tacit corporeal knowledge, essential to seventeenth century experimental and "courty" science, relied on forms of corporeal mimesis for its transmission.

Mimesis and the Scientist's Body: Modes of Replication and Experimenter's Regress

Under the experimental program of the Royal Society, the notion of replication became the methodological ideal which could secure a matter-of-fact beyond its existence as a pure "event" or haecceity. As Shapin and Schaffer note, replication "is the set of technologies which transforms what counts as belief into what counts as knowledge."\(^{64}\) The disjunction between replication as implied by literary technologies—the explicit descriptions and instructions for experiment—\(^{65}\) and their "actualisation" in space and time is what this section hopes to address. Although replication was the means by which knowledge was to be validated, Boyle himself saw some problems with this ideal; the expense and trouble required to make the pump seemed prohibitive:

That foreseeing that such a trouble as I met with in making those trials carefully, and the great expense of time that they necessarily require (not to mention the charges of making the Engine, and employing a man to manage it) will probably keep most Men from trying again these Experiments.\(^{66}\)

\(^{64}\) Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* 225.

\(^{65}\) Shapin and Schaffer refer to this literary technology as a mode of "virtual witnessing."

\(^{66}\) Boyle, *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical* unpaginated.
In retrospect, Boyle's doubts seem justifiable. Shapin and Schaffer point out that although several "replications" of Boyle's pump were made in the decades after the construction of the first (in London, Holland, and France), there was "no moment at which any pump was considered to be genuinely secure"; the replication of the pump was found to be extremely problematic.\textsuperscript{67} The mechanical problems with the pumps, which invariably included leakages of air, lead to the continual redesigning of the pumps which precipitated theoretical concerns associated with the necessary standardisation of experimental apparatus. In fact, despite the emphasis Boyle and the Royal Society placed on the accurate and meticulous documentation of the construction of the pump and the conducting of the experiments, not one pump was built without the actual witnessing of the original experiments in England.

No one built a version of Boyle's machine without such experience. No one relied on Boyle's textual description alone. Transmission of craft skill was sustained by Huygens, who was present at the air-pump trials in London in spring 1661, and who then built his own pump in autumn 1661. Huygens' presence was essential for the construction of the Montmor pump in 1663. Neither Otto von Guericke in Germany, nor the members of the Accademia del Cimento in Florence, built such a machine, even though they both possessed full textual accounts of Boyle's pumps.\textsuperscript{68}

The one single and sustained effort to build a replica of Boyle's pump came from Christiaan Huygens, who also attempted to correct some of the pump's deficiencies, such as the aforementioned propensity to

\textsuperscript{67} Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air Pump} 229.

\textsuperscript{68} Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air Pump} 229.
leak. However, when Huygens claimed that his pump worked better than that of Mr Boyle's, Boyle responded—in light of the modifications—by denying Huygens' pump the capacity to produce matters of fact.

This problem in experimentation, which has been dubbed "experimenter's regress" by Harry M. Collins, centres around notions of the calibration of apparatus.69 The problem can be put quite simply. If the replication of an experiment is to be adjudged a "success" then it should ideally confirm the results of the original experiment. "Matters of fact" are themselves contingent on successful replications, not only of results but also equipment. In the case of Boyle's pump, it was the "original" pump at Gresham college which stood as the standard against which other pumps could be judged or calibrated.

However, a central aporia of experimental science is raised by this historical episode: if a particular experiment failed it would have to be decided whether or not the failure was due to a failure of theory or a failure of technical competence. In the case of Boyle's pumps, the rhetorical reticence to posit explicit theory suggested that the failures of other pumps were due to technical ineptitude; the pumps were just not being made correctly. The phenomenon of "experimenter's regress" reverses the normal conception of an experiment as a test of a particular theory; it shows, rather, an experiment to be a test of the experimenter's competence. In this sense, an experiment has to be legitimated before it can be replicated, not the other way around.

It might be claimed that Boyle's pumps are an easy target for the theory of experimenter's regress, as they document a very primitive stage in the development of experimental science. However firstly, as has been stated, Boyle's research into pneumatics using the air-pump has itself been accorded paradigmatic status in many histories of experimental science as exemplifying proper experimental method, and secondly, several examples of experimenter's regress have been documented in contemporary (twentieth century) science.  

Harry Collins documents the construction of a laser originally developed by a Canadian defence research laboratory in the late 1960s. The "TEA-laser" was supposedly the first gas laser to be able to operate at pressures above half an atmosphere. In 1971 and 1972, Collins decided to spend time talking to scientists from six laboratories in England who were attempting to replicate the TEA-laser. What became immediately apparent to Collins was that the transmission of knowledge of how to replicate the laser was by no means straightforward, and certainly not solely discursive. Although he chose an example of apparatus replication which was expected to

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be unproblematic,\textsuperscript{72} the problems encountered by the English scientists echoed directly the difficulties involved with the replication of Boyle's air-pump; no successful construction of the laser was completed without direct contact with a member of the original Canadian laboratory:

no scientist succeeded in building a laser by using only information found in published or other written sources. Thus every scientist who managed to copy the laser obtained a crucial component of the requisite knowledge from personal contact and discussion ... In sum, the flow of knowledge was such that, first, it travelled only where there was personal contact with an accomplished practitioner; second, its passage was invisible so that scientists did not know whether they has the relevant experience to build a laser until they tried it; and, third, it was so capricious that similar relationships between teacher and learner might or might not result in the transfer of knowledge.\textsuperscript{73}

Collins' point seems to be that knowledge, even scientific knowledge, involves elements of tacit enculturation; building a laser is more like riding a bicycle than doing an algorithm. The building of Boyle's pumps and the TEA laser required demonstrations of fabrication; in other words, scientists teaching others how to replicate the equipment had to "perform" successful constructions. Collins seems to have unwittingly come across what Thomas Kuhn describes as the "fourth law of thermodynamics": the "first three laws of thermodynamics are well known outside the trade. The 'fourth law' states that no piece of experimental apparatus works the first time it

\textsuperscript{72} The purported simplicity of the construction of the gas vessel of the laser was reflected in the heralding of the TEA-laser in \textit{New Scientist} magazine as the "plywood laser."

\textsuperscript{73} Harry M. Collins, \textit{Changing Order} 55-56.
is set up."\(^{74}\) Kuhn, in fact, states a variation of Collins' formulation of "experimenter's regress": "no theory is recognised to be testable by any quantitative tests that it has not already passed."\(^{75}\) Kuhn perceives an implicit *agreement* between theory and experiment that sees that although experimental success often confirms theory, experimental failure rarely *informs* it.\(^{76}\)

The notion of "calibration," which is a term often used to describe the correct "tuning" of instruments, seems to apply equally to bodies in spaces. The capacity for Italian court society to produce the "natural" savant through intricate processes of tacit corporeal imitation—the attainment of *sprezzatura*—finds an analogue in operations required to build the TEA-laser: the bodies of the scientists constructing the laser required *physical calibration* from members of the original laboratory if the experiments were going to "work."

In this notion of "calibration" we see reiterated Schechner and Turner's idea of performance as "paradigmatic": properly calibrated performances by the "subjects of knowledge" are used as corporeal exemplars to which other bodies need to be "tuned." As Shapin and Schaffer note in the case of Boyle's pump, what the *New Experiments* hoped to do was not necessarily produce a series of procedural maxims for how to proceed in natural philosophy, but rather, to *exemplify* how to conduct scientific inquiry.

The *New Experiments* contained no self-reflexive critique, explicit epistemology, methods for linking hypothesis to "events," or other "theoretical" material. They were, rather, a model, a scenography (necessarily reified) of good science "in action":

\(^{74}\) Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* 184.
\(^{75}\) Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* 186.
\(^{76}\) Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* 192.
In a concrete experimental setting it showed the new natural philosopher how he was to proceed in dealing with practical matters of induction, hypothesizing, causal theorizing, and the relating of matters of fact to their explanations. Boyle sought here to create a picture to accompany the experimental language-game and the experimental form of life. He did this largely by ostension: by showing others through his own example what it was like to work and to talk as an experimental philosopher.\textsuperscript{77}

Shapin and Schaffer's view of experimental science as proceeding via a process of "ostension" accords well with the Kuhnian idea of the paradigm as an enacted form of exemplification which trains the neophyte to perceive natural resemblances between problems. In neither case is reason limited to discursive symbolic form. Kuhn explains:

Scientists model one problem solution on another, often with only a minimal recourse to symbolic generalisation ... That ability to recognize group-licensed resemblances is, I think, the main thing students acquire by doing problems, whether with pencil and paper or in a well-designed laboratory.\textsuperscript{78}

The function of "ostension" in experimental science designates a certain performative style which troubles the distinctions between theory and theatre. It is, in other words, \textit{theoria}. We have seen that the performative styles of experimental science, communicated via performative iterations, have supplied models of exemplification which cannot not be easily narrated in terms of a series of axioms or

\textsuperscript{77} Shapin and Schaffer, \textit{Leviathan and the Air-Pump} 49.

\textsuperscript{78} Kuhn, \textit{The Essential Tension} 305-306.
procedural rules. The performative style is correlative both to the procedures of legitimation of knowledge and the "stagings" of pedagogy practised by a discipline. Performance appears to destabilise ontology because it points to inherent indeterminacy in the relation between "words" and "things"; that a science student should require a demonstration of perception—a training achieved proceeding by means of ostension—points to a pedagogical style contingent on certain performative repetitions or "strips of behaviour."

_Theoria: Some Further Observations_

The work of scholars such as Steven Shapin, Mario Biagioli and Thomas Kuhn—or perhaps a strategic misprision of these theorists—opens a theoretical space where the processes of legitimation in experimental science may be investigated in terms of dramaturgical style. Likewise, we have seen how the construction of ontologies (that is, the summoning into existence of their objects of analysis) is a material process of ostension, involving bodies in space which enact specifiable gestural codes. Although Michel Foucault often analyses the material manifestations of knowledge systems, his emphases have not so much been on the training of perception and the creation of the sujet supposé savoir, but rather the way in which fields of knowledge turn the human subject into an object of investigation: "the object of discourse may equally well be a subject,

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79 The term "iteration" denotes both imitation and alteration. The notion of iteration and its disruptive effects on identity will be taken up in the next chapter.
without the figures of objectivity being in any way altered." When the training of "natural resemblances" is turned back towards the human subject as object, the act of reifying identities along certain epistemological and axiological lines becomes what is termed *interpellation*. By turning the knowing investigator's gaze upon itself, Foucault's analyses destabilise epistemology at its source: the knowledge of the Real's predication on the identity of a "knowing subject." The constitution of the knowing subject is the ontological "zero point" of epistemology; if knowledge is predicated on a being-who-knows, then an investigation which turns its attention to the status of this being engages with epistemological questions originating in an ontology of the subject. This philosophical shuttle, whose movement continually works to co-define epistemology and ontology in terms of each other, is the concern of the next chapter.

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II. Staging the Body: Performance as Guerilla Ontology

The Historical existence that interests the philosopher insofar as it is ontology is of interest to human beings and literature because it is dramatic .... Art is then not a blissful wandering of man, who sets out to make something beautiful. Culture and artistic creation are part of the ontological order itself. They are ontological par excellence, they make the understanding of being possible. —Emmanuel Levinas

In the previous chapter, the work of theorists such as Biagioli, Daston, Shapin, and Schaffer were examined and the point was made that the creation of the "natural subject" of knowledge requires tacit forms of knowing and corporeal imitation as one of its necessary conditions. The properly "calibrated" subject of science—the sujet supposé savoir—needs to exhibit specific forms of performance. With Kuhn, Polanyi, and Collins, we have seen how the training of "natural resemblances" requires modes of ostension and exemplification and hence, gestural codes expressed by bodies in spaces.

This chapter attempts to deepen the discussion around these points, but in some senses, also presents an inversion of them. The material processes of naming, the act of creating taxonomies (and thus ontologies), can always be (re)directed, as Michel Foucault suggests, towards the human subject as object. That is, the subject can be objectified by a disciplinary structure, and in this way, also created by it. Rather than being perceived as the originator of

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scientific revolutions, the subject is the material product of them: it is something of an epiphenomenon of the disciplines.

Background becomes Foreground: Interpellation and the "Problem of the Subject"

What could be called a focus on the "problematics of human subjectivity" has characterised much contemporary philosophical discourse, especially in continental Europe. With its origins in the nineteenth century writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, a decisive challenge has been voiced opposing the idea of the human subject as a disembodied rational consciousness, wholly present to itself. Paul Ricoeur has called Nietzsche and Freud—along with Marx—"philosophers of suspicion."

For Ricoeur, the critical force of these thinkers resides in their portrayal of consciousness as essentially a false consciousness. Although the term "false consciousness" originates in Marx's work, Ricoeur sees it as an organising trope of the structures in the arguments of all three.

The critique of consciousness attaches itself to a more general project of exegesis, a hermeneutics of demystification that radically changes the trajectory of the meaning "to doubt" in philosophy. The term "false consciousness" cannot be read in terms of consciousness involved in an epistemological error of a Cartesian kind, but rather in terms of illusion as a "cultural structure, a dimension of our social discourse." With Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, doubt changes its line of flight. It rebounds off the objects which were put into question.


48 Ricoeur, "The Critique of Religion" 214.
and comes back to the questioner itself, indeed, even perhaps the possibility of the questioner itself. Cartesian doubt is narrowly "epistemological" because it fervently hopes to secure the external world through a series of faithful representations. In this way, doubt is projected outwards onto the world and as a result, preserves the integrity of the doubter. As Ricoeur explains, a radical doubt of objects solidifies the identity of the subject who does the doubting:

Descartes doubts things but leans on the fortress of consciousness. Consciousness is what it is, it is what it says, it says what it is. Consciousness is, therefore, equal to itself. Only things are doubtable, only things can have appearance dissociated from their reality. It is the very heart of Cartesian doubt that the more I doubt things, the more I attest to the coincidence in being itself which constitutes the very act of cogito.49

For Ricoeur, Marx's enduring contribution to thought is not his theory of class struggle, but rather the analysis which links ideology—false consciousness—to forms of domination. Although thinkers such as Foucault and Althusser have been cautious of the reductive tendencies in the Marxian base/superstructure model of cultural reproduction—that culture is the determined effect of purely economic arrangements—they have often retained the idea that ideology, which includes epistemic configurations, functions to discipline the individual subject. Indeed, as Foucault has repeatedly argued, the ideology of the "autonomous subject" can itself become a form of domination. This autonomous subject provides a site for an external science to speak the truth about it, to explain the causal mechanisms of its behaviour, and to locate in it the unspoken or unthought which continually requires articulation; all these

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expressions of power wait to find their deployment in a particular epistemic framework.\textsuperscript{50}

This problematisation of subjectivity has continued strongly late into this century. A trenchant critique of the subject as the transparent centre of thought has been one of the primary motifs of philosophies attempting to place into question the structure and the value of conceptions of the subject which emanate from theorists such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. The problematisation converges around the questionability of conceiving of the subject as an \textit{ego cogito}—a wholly internal mind—which, via representation, collects information about the world and is fully present and in control of the contents of its consciousness. Jean-Luc Nancy elaborates:

The question ... bears upon the critique or deconstruction of interiority, of self-presence, of consciousness, of mastery, of the individual or collective property of an essence. Critique or deconstruction of the firmness of a seat (\textit{hypokeimenon}, \textit{substantia}, \textit{subjectum}) and the certitude of an authority and a value (the individual, a people, the state, history, work).\textsuperscript{51}

As Foucault indicates in \textit{The Order of Things}, the human sciences evolved predicated on a logic which construed the human subject as both the unproblematic subject \textit{and} object of inquiry. These sciences invariably treat the subject as something given—a "human nature" waiting to be uncovered by an appropriate analysis—either by


themselves or through the assistance of a subject-who-knows. However, the discursive function of "human nature," which has served as recurrent feature of the normative proclamations of disciplines such as sociobiology, genetics, and cognitive linguistics, seems less stable and certainly far less heuristically or ontologically solid than it might first appear.

In a debate held in the early 1970s, between Foucault and American linguist and political theorist Noam Chomsky, Foucault expresses his suspicion of the idea of human nature by constructing an analytic parallel with the concept of "life" and situating its discursive role in the biological sciences of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Foucault suggests that, in biology, there have traditionally been concepts with the function of differentiating matter (such as "tissue"), concepts which classify non-material functions (such as "hereditary feature"), concepts which specify relations (such as "reflex"), and also concepts which regulate internal rules of reasoning and validation. In addition to these, however, there are also peripheral notions, those by which scientific practice delimits its own activity, differentiates itself from other disciplines, and also helps to supply possible agendas for future research. These, Foucault suggests, are "epistemological indicators," and are not properly "scientific" concepts. That is, they serve no heuristic function within a discipline, but rather confer status on it by setting it in opposition to rival disciplines such as psychoanalysis or sociology. In concordance with this, Foucault suggests that the findings of the sciences cannot be attributed to a research program making investigations into "human nature," but rather that "human nature" serves as a quasi-ontology, and a political rallying point.
which claims the epistemological supremacy of the discipline to which it is privy:

It was not by studying human nature that linguists discovered the laws of constant mutation, or Freud the principles of the analysis of dreams, or cultural anthropologists the structure of myths. In the history of knowledge, the notion of human nature seems to me mainly to have played the role of an epistemological indicator to designate certain kinds of discourse in relation to or in opposition to theology or biology or history.52

Foucault's relentless problematisation of the subject and its modes of formation becomes even more pronounced in his later works on the history of sexuality.53 Rather than treating subjects as given, internalised (the view that the person resides in the soul, mind, brain), and autonomous agents, Foucault's epistemic histories ask how certain subjects are produced by historically situated knowledge/power structures. The subject is not "out there" (or even "in there") waiting to be discovered, but rather is an effect produced by certain social and discursive relations. For example, in Madness and Civilisation, Foucault's focus on the formation of the subject took place through what he terms "dividing practices." In this book, a history of madness and its institutionalisation in the Classical era, Foucault details the way in which European conceptualisations of the

mad person alter radically after the Middle Ages. After the Middle Ages, the "mad" person slowly became the principal object of knowledge for the emerging discipline of psychotherapy. This object needed to be "divided" in several ways: it required that it be subsumed within a class which was conceptually differentiated from other pathologies; it needed to undergo a physical separation from "normal people" in order to be relocated to institutions; and it needed undergo a division within itself, processes of epistemic-medico "correction" which sought to re-subjectify the object in order for it to accept the truth about itself. The ways in which mental patients were subsequently divided inside themselves and from others through certain disciplinary actions produced a newly objectified subject. What might have been experienced by the Classical era as an outbreak of madness, Foucault reframes as an outbreak of psychotherapy.

Foucault's work, although examining various forms of scientific and political rationalities, has as its target not so much a particular class, institution or social practice, but rather forms of reason which circulate and function, necessarily, through subjection: it carries to an extreme the ambiguous linguistic resonances of epistemic terms such as "discipline" and "subject." Foucault conceives of "discipline" as delimiting both a domain of knowledge and a field of power: "subject," suggests both an individual identity and a form of subservience. In other words, disciplines create subjects by disciplining them through epistemic forms of subjection. There is no domain of knowledge without power, and this power works both externally and internally on the individual so that the truth can be known about it:
This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.\(^{54}\)

In contradistinction to the subject created by Descartes' *cogito*, Foucault's subject is fully corporeal and embedded in linguistic and cultural practices; it is historically situated, always already interpreted in certain ways, and subject to disciplinary regimes. In this sense, the subject is not only interpreted by culture, but produced and regulated by it; it is, in an Althusserian sense, *interpellated* by it. To be interpellated is to be "hailed" or named as a subject before the law, to have one's body inscribed with medical, juridical, and scientific rituals of truth.\(^{55}\)

**Knowledges and Bodies**

Interpellation and subjection are, once again, a type of training of perception; they are instances of ostension which combine with symbolic forms to train one in a discernment of "natural resemblances." However, in the case of interpellation and

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subjection, the training of perception is directed back at the subject itself, rather than out into the external world. Just as the external Real requires relentless linguistic dissection, so does the individual body. Michel de Certeau argues in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that historical and epistemic shifts invariably situate subjects by placing social and individual bodies under the law of writing. This "immemorial effort" to write the body, de Certeau suggests, precedes our modern conception of writing, and will most certainly outlive it. What concerns de Certeau is the relation between the language (of the law) and its incessant corporeal inscription and enaction:

what is at stake is the relation between the law and the body—a body itself defined, delimited, and articulated by what writes it. There is no law that is not inscribed on bodies. Every law has a hold on the body.  

Louis Althusser suggests that interpellation functions by locating subjects in systems which perpetuate existing class relations. However, rather than just focussing on the ways in which ideology is discursively learnt and internalised by the subject, Althusser acknowledges that mundane performances of social ritual are one possible mechanism by which the subject is produced. Banal and "taken-for-granted" actions such as shaking hands and saluting not only *indicate* certain ideological preoccupations of a culture (the subjugation to particular kinds of military authority, for example) but are in and of themselves wholly ideological.  

Although some actions seem to have "reference" as their primary task (such as

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57 Althusser, "Ideology and and Ideological State Apparatuses" 159.
pointing), others tacitly reproduce social relations. For example, the aesthetics of "proper" feminine comportment—the crossing of legs whilst seated, the batting of eyelids, etc.—may be partly the result of direct injunctions by unsympathetic cultural guardians ("Don't shout in public, it's unlady-like"). And yet, these practices are usually learnt non-discursively through corporeal imitation. As Elaine Scarry, in The Body in Pain elaborates, the body:

is not only a text of culture. It is also ... a practical, direct locus of social control. Banally, through table manners and toilet habits, through seemingly trivial routines, rules, and practices, culture is 'made body' ...."58

The previous chapter described the centrality of the scientists' body and the place of reiterated performative gestures in its "calibration."

This chapter seeks to expand on this idea of performance as a key component of subject formation and will open questions about how such performances are executed, under what conditions they might succeed or fail, and by what possible means they may be subverted. It also opens the way for an interrogation of a possible hermeneutics of epistemic ritual. If both epistemology and the subject on which systems of knowledge are produced and reproduced by certain performances, then how might one read such performances or perhaps even contest them?

Judith Butler's work in feminist/queer theory seeks to engage with the exigencies of gendered identity by interrogating the processes through which the sexed body becomes naturalised by

Combining Foucaultian and Althusserian notions of subject formation with the conceptual possibilities offered by Joan Riviere's 1929 essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade," Butler uses the idea of performance as the discursive means by which the biological sex of the body is attributed. As such, her work serves as a useful theoretical juncture for this thesis, as she develops a notion of subjectivity around repeated stylisations of the body; a scenography of construction whereby "woman" is construed as both a rehearsal and a performance that has forgotten itself as such.

**Judith Butler: the Performance of Sex**

In her challenge to the ontological necessity of the category of "sex," Judith Butler has made explicit recourse to a terminology of performance. Butler asserts that the instantiation and reproduction of stable gender categories relies on a process of perpetual dramatisation; not only is the body wholly material, it is also materialised or enacted through processes of hegemonic cultural reproduction. For Butler, the materialisation of the body involves the installation of ontological "effects" through processes of repetitive performance. This historical sedimentation of matter is orchestrated within Foucaultian grids of power/knowledge, matrices that always work to conceal their own genesis.

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59 The historical relation between the sexed body and knowledge is outside the scope of this study, although two useful references which address this area are Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984) and Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Butler asks whether an appeal to a notion of pre-discursive and pre-performative "matter" obscures the possibility that matter itself is produced and constrained by discourses surrounding sexuality. The designation of materiality as "irreducible" ignores the question of how scientific thought itself has always worked to configure and reconfigure matter and "if the constituted effect of that matrix is taken to be the indisputable ground of bodily life, then it seems that a genealogy of that matrix is foreclosed from critical inquiry."  

Butler seems, at least in part, to have extrapolated Merleau-Ponty's idea of the body as an historical contingency that is produced through continual restagings. In the *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty refuses a conception of the body that is exhaustively explicaded through empirical investigation. The body, as ahistorically "seen" by objective thought—as an already given material object open to causal explanation—evinces a profound self-forgetting. The subject is a psychosomatic unity whose very structures of perception reside in its corporeal nature and its actions in the world.  

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62 For Merleau-Ponty's critique of what he refers to as "empiricism" and "intellectualism" (the latter refers to a kind of transcendental rationalism), see the Preface and the Introduction to *The Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1962).
objective examination because it is the phenomenological and cultural ground which allows the surfacing of meaning. Existence, for Merleau-Ponty,

has no fortuitous attribute, no content which does not contribute towards giving it its form; it does not give admittance to any pure fact because it is the process by which facts are drawn up .... Man is a historical idea and not a natural species .... there is in human existence no unconditional possession and yet no fortuitous attribute.\(^{63}\)

The theoretical convergence of enaction, reproduction and dramatisation in both Merleau-Ponty's and Butler's work allows for a certain hermeneutics of knowledge production. Like the work of Shapin, Schaffer, and Biagioli (discussed in the previous chapter), Merleau-Ponty and Butler offer a heuristic model which opens the possibility for interrogating the ways in which the epistemic subject is produced through a particular corporeal style and dramatic playing out of possibilities.\(^{64}\) Butler's and Foucault's work invite us to conceive of systems of knowledge in terms of "events," to move towards a kind of theory that strives to articulate the interdependence of thought and theatre (\textit{theoria}). According to Butler, the gendered subjects' "playing out of possibilities" is inherently dramatic:

the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts .... The body is not a self-

\(^{63}\) Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} 169-70.

\(^{64}\) Although Merleau-Ponty does not organise his discourse around notions of performance as explicitly as Butler does, it is worth noting that he nonetheless continually refers to existential and sexual "dramas of living" as being performed during the construction of a subject's perception.
identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materialising of possibilities.65

Caryl Churchill's play Cloud Nine is highly suggestive of the kinds of ontological mutability that Butler's theorisations point to. The play, originally emerging from a series of workshops that Churchill participated in with the Joint-Stock Theatre Group in the late 1970s, is preoccupied with issues of gender politics. It is set in nineteenth-century Africa and provides a comic/tragic exploration of the variegated relations between colonial and sexual repression. The play opens with a series of song-like monologues from several of the characters. This one is from Betty, the wife of Clive, a colonial administrator:

I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life Is to be what he looks for in a wife. I am a man's creation as you see, And what men want is what I want to be.66

One of the most interesting things about the character Betty—in terms of Butler's thinking—is that Churchill instructs that she be played by a man. In this way, Betty quite literally signifies Churchill's (and Joint Stock's) notion of "woman" as an aspect of the male imaginary. The colonial world that Churchill depicts admits of only two identities: the white male and whatever is "other" to this.

Not only is Betty played by a male to figure her as a phantasmatic projection of male desire, but we find out through this opening scene that she has wholly interiorised this projection. Much the same can be said for Joshua, Clive's black man-servant (played by a white):

My skin is black but oh my soul is white.
I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
I only live for him. As you can see,
What white men want is what I want to be.67

In The Strange, Familiar and Forgotten: An Anatomy of Consciousness, Israel Rosenfield re-relates an interesting patient history, recorded in the early years of the twentieth century. Rosenfield tells the story of a twenty-eight year old Parisian woman, Madame I, who was admitted to mental hospital and soon after developed what the patient herself described as "general insensibility." The aetiology of this illness consisted of a complete loss of awareness of her physicality, of her body's position, of the existence of her limbs, and her body's responses to pain and cold. She describes a feeling of corporeal transmogrification which was somehow indistinguishable from its "absence":

I have the feeling that my entire body is changed, even at times that it no longer exists. I touch an object, but it is not I who am touching it ... I cannot find myself. I cannot imagine myself .... when I speak I no longer hear the sound of my own voice. I don't feel that I am doing things.68

In other words, the woman was unable to represent herself to herself, to appear to herself. And yet, although her original doctors and Rosenfield accept her self-description of the illness, neither pay any attention to the woman's explanation of its origin. Rosenfield discloses, in the space of two sentences, that the woman attributed her illness to the violent character of her husband, and that her internment at the Salpêtrière Hospital followed immediately from a dispute with him. The "loss of identity" of the woman perhaps suggests that her relation to herself had become completely "objectified": "she" was the object of experience, not the subject who experiences. Many of Luce Irigaray's analyses of western philosophy are concerned with patriarchal structures in thought by which women are denied full subjectivity. Irigaray argues that philosophy's sujet supposé savoir has always constituted itself as masculine: while men are knowing subjects, women are rendered as objects of the knowing gaze.69

Perhaps Madame I's protests that her corporeality and identity were not her own, coupled to her explanation of the origins of the illness, indicate a theft of her subjectivity; like Betty, perhaps Madame I had internalised the masculine construal of her as an object. This is further brought out when Rosenfield relates how Madame I's illness began with a "period of mental confusion," followed by wandering about, and finally an episode which saw her undressing in the middle of the street.70 The performative ritual which begins with "wandering" and finishes with "undressing"

70 Rosenfield, The Strange, Familiar, and Forgotten 39.
might signify a passage of increasing internalisation of the masculine imaginary concluding with a shocking theatrical literalisation of "woman" as object.

While in hospital, in an effort to counter her loss of identity, Madame I continually touched herself and pulled at her hair to reinvigorate her status as a subject. Compare the case of Madame I to a monologue from Betty, delivered at the end of *Cloud Nine*:

one night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. I thought my hand might go through space. I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there.\(^{71}\)

In both of the above mentioned cases, the strategy for rescuing subjectivity resides in a series of corporeal actions of self-manipulation. They are conscious efforts that find their motivation in attempts to re-make oneself as an object for oneself, an essential criterion for the status of subjecthood. These actions are a series of performative sequences which have as their aim rematerialisation.

For Churchill, like Butler, matter is a direct result of dramatising power/knowledge structures. The "objective" status of each character in the play is determined by their relation to the hegemony. As Frantz Fanon observes, "For the colonized person, objectivity is always directed against him."\(^{72}\) Indeed, the gaze of the

\(^{71}\) Churchill, *Cloud Nine* 316.

\(^{72}\) Frantz Fanon, qtd. in Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock, 1972) xxiii. Although on-stage techniques of "sex-exchange" have been common in drama, at least in the twentieth century (one thinks immediately of examples like Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*, Jean Genet's *The Maids*, and Christopher Durang's *Baby with the Bathwater*), the way that it has often been employed serves to further reify ontology rather than to problematise it. For instance, in
"objectifier" is what, in some senses, actually creates the objects of its attention. Betty explains it in this fashion: "I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there."73

However, this theatrical reading of Butler which suggests a conception of performance as radically constitutive, does not necessarily dissolve the materiality or material specificity of the gendered subject. Instead, the body as a "brute" materiality can be re-conceived as separate from the processes whereby it comes to bear.

Durang's play, the increasing maladjustment of a child comes through a misreading of the baby's sex; the parents name the child "Daisy," despite him being a boy. When Daisy grows up, he eventually must confront the source of his malaise:

VOICE: I wish I had gotten your case earlier. Why are you wearing a dress?
DAISY: Oh, I'm sorry, am I? (Looks, is embarrassed.) I didn't realise. I know I'm a boy... young man. It's just I was so used to wearing dresses for so long that some mornings I wake up and I just forget. (Thoughtfully, somewhat to himself.) I should really just clear all the dresses out of my closet.
VOICE: Why did you used to wear dresses?
DAISY: Well that's how my parents dressed me. They said they didn't know what sex I was, but it had to be one of the two, so they made a guess, and they just guessed wrong.
VOICE: Are your genitals in any way misleading?
DAISY: No, I don't believe so. I don't think my parents ever really looked. They didn't want to intrude. It was a kind of politeness on their part... (Christopher Durang, Baby with the Bathwater (New York: Dramatist's Play Service, 1984) 36.

The plays redemptive ending sees Daisy wearing real "men's" clothing and marrying a "pretty and soft and sympathetic" young woman named Susan. They have their own child, determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

73 Churchill, Cloud Nine 316.
cultural meaning. And yet this reconception of the material specificity of the body can never be wholly secured. There are both Kantian and Lacanian resonances here which suggest that the Real in some sense exists, but is forever unthinkable in its "isness." The Real, in other words, functions as a kind of heuristic idealisation that both propels and ultimately frustrates inquiry.

For Lacan, the Real is a state of absolute undifferentiation, "without fissure." The process of dividing the Real—the creation of ontology through taxonomy—requires language, and since in Lacan's view there is no "before language," the Real assumes the mantle of the impossible. As Lacan argues in his essay "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis": "

For it is still not enough to say that the concept is the thing itself. It is the world of words that creates the world of things—the things originally confused in the hic et nunc of the all in the process of coming-into-being."

Butler offers a supplement to this Lacanian formulation and suggests that interpellation, although it uses language, is essentially an

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74 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts" 520.
action.\textsuperscript{78} It is precisely at the intersection between language and action that the subject assumes an identity. Indeed, discourse itself inhabits the realm of the event. As Paul Ricoeur suggests: "discourse has an act as its mode of presence—the instance of discourse ... which, as such, is of the nature of an event. To speak is an actual event, a transitory, vanishing act."\textsuperscript{79}

And yet the reader might wish to object to the paucity of the above analyses owing to a sense of which s/he feels that the author has failed to distinguish different senses of the term "performance." To refer to the "performance" of the play Cloud Nine appears reasonable, and yet to refer to Madame I’s pathological behaviour as "performance" signifies a rhetorical displacement that has not been explicitly acknowledged before or during this analysis. It should be acknowledged that an uncritical conflation of the senses of the term renders an analysis vague, and yet I would argue that a rigid distinction between the identity of the two senses is not as stable as might first appear.

The "two senses" referred to are presumably performance undertaken self-consciously by "actors," as opposed to performance as a series of bodily actions which are subject to some degree of "witnessing." Both are actions predicated on a distanciation of

\textsuperscript{78} A discussion of the relations between "naming" and "action" was undertaken in the previous chapter in relation to notions of scientific ostension and exemplification.

consciousness that allows for the separation of "actor" and "action." Both senses of the term admit that a performance resides neither in its discursive nor tacit script/text or its enaction.

And yet the two senses of performance might be distinguished in terms of the relative agency of the "performers" themselves. A staging in the sense of which a performance of *Cloud Nine* is a performance suggests that the actors undertake their roles voluntarily; performance is a "strip of behaviour" that is self-consciously reproduced. And, in any case, scripts or "strips of behaviour" are always subject to acts of volition: they can always be modified or dropped. Whereas, performance in the second sense entails a somewhat more ambiguous relationship to agency. Performance, in this sense, is well captured by the linguistic oscillations which provide Foucault's *oeuvre* with its energy: the incessant shuttle between a poetics of enslavement and a poetics of emancipation. Performance in the second sense problematises the distinction between "acting" (the subject as locus of agency) and "being acted" (the subject as an epiphenomenon of epistemic discourses and gestural codes).

Finally, performance in the first sense entails that actors have a heightened sense of their convoluted identity, that performance in this register necessarily entails an awareness of them "not being themselves." And yet, here a complication arises. Would it not also be true to say that Madame I could be described in the same terms? Madame I's "madness" does not collapse her awareness of "herself not being herself." Indeed, perhaps it even heightens this distanciation. Madame I's condition requires an acuity in every way commensurate with the actor's sense of divided identity.
The notion of "identity" is itself a grammatical peculiarity because it postulates a relation and yet has only one term: itself. In this sense, any "confusion of identity" can be designated as the loss of a relation between something and itself. A confusion of identity is essentially an ontological disruption: the postulation of any "entity" logically requires its "identity." It might appear strange that the conceptual validity of identity—a concept which is figured as pure self-sufficiency—is predicated on a relation. And yet, fundamental laws of formal logic require this symmetrical relation of something to itself. Logic necessitates the construal of "x=x," because the alternative, the postulation of identity as a single term and without relation, could only be represented as "x." Logic, of course, cannot figure identity as an algebraic indeterminate.

In this sense, any conception of the body as immutable "given" overlooks the ways in which both senses of the term "performance" disrupt any idea of the body as a self-same identity. "The body" is a historical product, a child of contingency, a force deployed against the symbolic order. The "body" is both the site of performance and its "accomplishment." Performances and bodies continually redefine themselves though each other: the body creates performance at the same moment that performance creates the body.

And yet, the figure of the subject-as-performer does not imply the radical freedom of the individual actor; identities can not be simply adopted or abandoned at will. This is as true of the theatrical actor as it is of the cultural actor. In some instances, the very ability of theatrical actors to "transform themselves" at will actually serves to stabilise, rather than destabilise, their identity. Such can be seen in the case of "great" actors, whose proficiency at performance
serves to reify their identity; perhaps through notoriety, the great actor becomes the savant beneath the flux of transformations.

The non-theatrical performance occurs only in the presence of cultural scripting. It is with through this that a performance attains intelligibility. Judith Butler's theory attempts to work against any discourse which presents an absolute bifurcation of the personal and the political/social. Extrapolating from the feminist claim that the "personal is the political," Butler asserts that not only is the subject's act of perception structured by a particular cultural grid, language game, or life-world, but also that the subject itself is a material force on those very grids constructing its perception. With the sedimented act as the means by which gender is produced, the subject is situated neither as a wholly autonomous locus of agency nor is it dissolved into closed social, linguistic, or life-world structures.

The act ... that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced as reality once again.

Performance, once again, seems to be intimately tied to questions of agency. The cultural text is continually contaminated and potentially subverted by its performers, and yet the lexicon which allows the performance's significative power predates the performance itself. Herbert Blau points to an Artaudian intuition of

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82 Recall, in Chapter One, how the "subject of knowledge" implies a certain freedom bestowed by their ability to enter the "hypothetical mode."
the actor-subject as haunted by an alien double, operating at least in part, as a kind of Lacanian Symbolic: a semiotic field in which we are not only situated, but also situated by:

That we are inhabited by our language as we speak, words \textit{and} body, would not be particularly disturbing, even a cause for pride—since it has given evidence of being a beautiful language—were it not that in being spoken we feel, perhaps not with the outrage of Artaud, an invisible presence in our speech whose voice is not, so to speak, speaking on our behalf.\footnote{Herbert Blau, "Ideology and Performance," \textit{Theatre Journal} 35/4 (1983): 459.}

This double which resides in the subject, stealing its agency, supplies the very ammunition for its own derangement. The perpetual rehearsals and restagings of thought can be sabotaged from within through subversive recitation. Butler's refusal to place the epistemic subject\footnote{The "epistemic subject" refers here to both "subject supposed to know" as well as the subject figured as a disciplinary object.} as wholly phenomenal (the subject as nothing but itself) or wholly significative (the subject as always elsewhere) allows for a deepening of a discussion of how epistemes are performed and how these performances, although not reducible to semantic propositions, \textit{remain} epistemic. And yet perhaps this call finds an earlier and equally heterodox voice, one from within theatre itself: "we must first break theatre's subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a unique kind of language somewhere in between gesture and thought."\footnote{Antonin Artaud, \textit{The Theatre and its Double}, trans. Victor Corti (Montreuil, London, and New York: Calder, 1993) 68.}
The liminal positioning of systems of knowledge—situated somewhere between a text and its enunciation—entails that a structural condition of the episteme is performativity, its resistance to subsumption within its discursive texts, "strips of behaviour," or its actors. Butler's designation of performativity as a discursive mode avoids invoking a subject whose very status she wishes to problematise. However, the capacity for discourse to produce the subject does not suggest that it is necessarily subsumed within that discourse. Simone de Beauvoir's "woman," who is "achieved" rather than born, accomplishes her gender through performative (re)citation. And yet this incessant rehearsal requires a point of articulation that is not wholly of the cultural world; the very notion of "incessant rehearsal" points to the iterative "origin" at which the hegemonic reproduction of culture can be subverted or sabotaged.

In Burning Acts—Injurious Speech, Butler discusses Nietzsche's assertion that the subject is installed as a consequence of moral accountability. Nietzsche contends that the subject (actor) is appended to a particular deed (scene) in order to ascribe blame for its possible hurtful consequences. He believes that the subject is an effect produced by a historically situated morality which has become "naturalised." The conception of the subject as the epiphenomenal ghost produced by discourse finds certain sympathies in recent

86 The use of the term "enunciation" here is somewhat inadequate as it unfortunately implies a temporal relation between text and enunciation that figures the former as prior to the latter.
theorisations of subjectivity. However, as Butler notes, this account of subject formation ultimately proves self-defeating:

For if the "subject" is first animated through accusation, conjured as the origin of an injurious action, then it would appear that the accusation has to come from a ... figure of the law who performatively sentences the subject into being.89

Butler does not, however, re-introduce the subject as a wholly autonomous agent. The subject's identity—a relation with itself that allows it to posit itself as an "I"—is instantiated through repetitive performance. Agency, thus re-thought, is the possibility of the contestation of knowledge through subversive repetition.90 In conceptualising agency as such, Butler problematises a number of feminist "standpoint" epistemologies by showing how they retain a possible complicity with masculinist discourse. By construing only gender as a social category, standpoint epistemologies naturalise "sex" and so ignore the question of how masculinist discourse comes to recognise only male and female bodies. The idea of "woman" as an immutable epistemic and political category remains within a phallocentric signifying economy. Butler sees the thesis of the "substantiality" of "sex," on which standpoint epistemologies rely, as a false origin: "substance" is a process which has forgotten itself as such, it is a history of dialogue between actions and discourse misread as a disclosure of "entities." The body, as the locus of action in a cultural or epistemic drama, is attributed its Being through the


90 Butler, *Gender Trouble* 145.
actions it performs; and the force of these actions are contingent on their relation to discursive matrices of intelligibility.

The subject is not exclusively its own author; as previously stated, identities cannot be simply constructed or deconstructed at will. Nor is subversion contingent on intentionality. The subject is always subverting their interpellation because subjectification never comes to an end. This is true not only because all performative repetitions are also alterations, but also because the subject's identity is a phantasmatic ideal, impossible to embody; the project of a "complete" subjectification is a one doomed to failure. Indeed, power itself is without agency or self-identity, without stable face or name: it is not an entity.

if power orchestrates the formation and sustenance of subjects, then it cannot be accounted for in terms of the "subject" which is its effect .... And [yet] it would be no more right to claim that the term "construction" belongs at the grammatical site of subject, for construction is neither a subject nor its acts .... There is no power that acts, but only a reitered acting that is power in its persistence and instability.

Rather than employing the essentialist notion of "subject as entity," Butler utilises the idea of the subject engaged in a project of continual materialisation. The subject is the site for social and psychic forces which urge them towards ontological completion, a project which is never quite realised, as bodies themselves never come to fully occupy the norms by which their materialisation is

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92 Butler, Bodies that Matter 9.
impelled. Cloud Nine's Betty, and perhaps Madame I, are caught in the double bind which entails that "woman" is both what she is, as well as something that she could be.

Butler argues that materialisation begins with the medical proclamation of sex:

"It's a girl' ... begins that long string of interpellations by which the girl is transitively girdled; gender is ritualistically repeated, whereby the repetition occasions both the risk of failure and the concealed act of sedimentation." 93

Butler asserts in Gender Trouble that gender identity is an accomplishment that utilises performativity as the discursive mode through which ontological effects are established; it is through repeated performances that bodies are made and potentially remade. The extensive utilisation of tropes of performance allows Butler to avoid invoking or presuming a subject whose very status she wishes to problematise. The subject is as much performed by their gender as their gender is performed by them. Performativity, then, contests the view of a "pre-made" biological or epistemic subject by uncovering the mechanisms through which reification takes place. With this critical move, one is able to problematise theorisations of subjectivity that accord ontological priority either to symbolic and material forms (subject as effect) or the autonomy of the subject to create and modify cultural and epistemic forms (subject as origin).

Butler elaborates upon the thesis of the inherent instability of sexual identity by conjoining a Freudian theorisation of repetition-paranoia with a Derridean argument about the impossibility of absolute repetition. Her conclusion is that an absolutely faithful

representation of any sexual position is untenable. The always-fragile aesthetics of sexual identity promise that the means of its own collapse are never far away. Performance inevitably fails.

The Freudian conception of sexual maturation entails a progressive, and eventually absolute, bifurcation of desire along the axis of gender. Maturity, in this purview, is attained through the progressive move from the undifferentiated state of "polymorphous perversity"94 to the eventual resolution of the Oedipal drama in adult sexuality—preferably heterosexual. This goal, however, is never quite reached; a "pure" heterosexuality (or homosexuality) always establishes itself as an impossible ideal, owing to the heterogeneous and subterranean nature of an unconscious that is not always already hetero(or homo)sexual. The structures of psychic homosexuality in heterosexual behaviour suggest a norm that is strictly impossible to perform. Sexual identity seems founded with a comic propensity for performative failure:

A psychoanalytic elaboration might contend that this impossibility is exposed in virtue of the complexity and resistance of a sexuality that is not always already heterosexual. In this sense, heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy.95

94 It should be noted that Butler has reservations concerning Freudian accounts of "polymorphousness" and bisexuality: "The problem I have with Freud's articulation of bisexuality is that it is actually heterosexuality. There's the feminine part that wants a masculine object, and the masculine part that wants a feminine one. Swell, we have two heterosexual desires and we're going to call that bisexuality. So I reject that." "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," Radical Philosophy 67 (1994): 34.

95 Butler, Gender Trouble 122.
Thus, Butler's epistemology of the performative also suggests a politics of performance: if it is through repeated performances that identities are constituted, then a space for corporeal re-signification through "subversive bodily acts" is opened. Performances in the "first sense" (in this instance the distinction seems important) harbour a potential to render explicit the performative mechanisms through which "true" genders undergo internalisation. Performance has the ability to contest the status of the epistemic subject and subvert the normal categories that are regularly imposed on it.

Pina Bausch and her Tanztheater Wuppertal have often given performances characterised by obsessively repetitive, stylised movements of the body languages of men and women. The movements are generally quite "banal"—sitting, standing, walking, and dancing—and yet Bausch usually manages to build on, complicate, and cycle these performative iterations in order to place them in proximity to each other, in dialogue with each other, and in opposition to each other. In Kontakthof (1978), a dance hall was used as the setting for a performance in which sets of gestures were performed and then cycled in a variety of configurations. The gestures were "ordinary" ones, constructed loosely on gender difference: "straighten tie/straighten bra strap, pull down jacket/check petticoat, touch eyebrow/adjust lock of hair, and so on."\(^{96}\)

Performances such as Bausch's Kontakthof work to de-naturalise the gestures on which the materiality of gender is predicated. It reveals the "actual" to be an "act." Indeed, some studies

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of acting work on the premise that the act of appearing "actual" is something infused with ideology.

the most interesting figures on the screen often look "natural," as if they were merely lending themselves to the manipulations of script, camera, and editing; the work they do is variable and vague, and critics usually discuss them as personalities rather than as craftspeople. This ... attitude is significant, suggesting that the very technique of film acting has ideological importance. After all, one purpose of ideology ... is to seem the most natural thing in the world.97

Drawing on the work of anthropologist Esther Newton, Butler asserts that certain types of performance have the potential to disrupt the axis along which gender normally achieves representation. Newton's example of such disruptive performance is drag:

At its most complex, [drag] is a double inversion that says, "appearance is an illusion." Drag says ... "my 'outside' appearance is feminine, but my essence 'inside' [the body] is masculine." At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; "my appearance 'outside' [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence 'inside' [myself] is feminine."98

In this instance, the political and epistemic potential of performance (in the first sense) is twofold. Firstly, performance holds the potential to reveal the iterative, material way in which the subject is fabricated and then impelled to internalise these corporeal ostensions. And secondly, through subversive repetition, performance has the capacity to problematise epistemic structures

98 Esther Newton, qtd. in Butler, Gender Trouble 137. For Butler's discussion of drag and its possible relations to misogyny, see Bodies that Matter, 124-37.
without necessarily being wholly outside their matrices of intelligibility.

Newton's example of drag asserts two contradictory claims and so displaces the entire enactment of gender signification from the "discourse of truth and falsity": in the word's of Shakespeare's Iago, "I am not what I am." Performance—both in its lexicon, and the actual occasions of the more "self-conscious" performance normally associated with the theatre—shows itself to be a powerful critical force in its capacity to problematise concepts. If the origin of gesture is conceived of as residing within the subject, then the material and discursive conditions which work to produce it are obscured from view: the epistemic conditions of possibility are effaced and the subject is figured as their "origin." And yet, if performance is conceded to be a necessary constituent of knowledges, then it also has to be conceded that it possesses an equal capacity to trouble them. Theatrical performance has the seeming potential to oppose the laws which attempt to write the body.

And yet, this is no easy task. Michel de Certeau suggests that "from birth to mourning after death, law 'takes hold of' bodies in order to make them its text"; through the processes of social and cultural initiation, law transforms the body into its material other, "into living tableaux of rules and customs, into actors in the drama organized by a social order." The individual body dramatically attests to the sovereignty of the juridical corpus, the letter of the law. There are in de Certeau's characterisation of the law's insistence, resonances with Martin Heidegger's depictions of the onto-theological spirit of logos: the Gospel of John proclaiming that "in

99 Butler, Gender Trouble 137.
100 de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life 139.
the beginning was the word" (logos) and that the "word was made flesh." Reason achieves its incarnation through the body. Once again, de Certeau is in no way circumspect in describing the theatrical overtones of a conception of the episteme which figures the body as the original point of the law's inscription:

A whole tradition tells the story: the skin of the servant is the parchment on which the master's hand writes. Thus Dromio the slave says to his master Antipholus of Ephesus in The Comedy of Errors: "If the skin were parchment and the blows you gave were ink ...." Shakespeare indicated in this way the first place of writing and the relationship of mastery that the law entertains with its subject through the gesture of "working him over".101

Although Butler is somewhat cautious about describing the epistemic potential of a theatre of "subversive bodily acts,"102 her work makes available to the theatrical tradition a rich conception of ontology, an ontology at once both mutable and performatively constructed.

Butler's radical ontology of the body shifts the question of gendering from the question "How is the biological body interpreted by culture?" to "How do disciplinary grids work to create the natural body as a biological fact?"103 Once again, Butler's reorientation

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101 de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life 140.
102 See Gender Trouble, 142-49.
cannot be read as an annihilation of the material specificities of bodies. It points to the more interesting notion that the process of "eliciting" these corporeal specificities can only be problematically divorced from the conceptual structures and performative iterations which work to name, order in series, and postulate modes of relation between "objects." The disciplinary or cultural attribution of significances to corporeal specificities both respond to and work to produce bodies that such attributions purport to describe. Once again, perception is as much conceptual as it "retinal." Butler reconceptualises matter as the materialisation of regulatory norms, norms which are not initiated by an "I," nor followed by an "I," but emerge at the same moment; matter is not a site or a surface, but a process of materialisation that "stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary fixity, and surface." Materialisation is not located in time, but is itself inherently temporal and enacted; sex is a regulatory ideal that is not only a norm imposed on bodies, but also a force that produces the bodies it regulates.

There is an important problematisation of Cartesian epistemology in this reformulation of ontology. The accomplishment of Cartesian philosophy was not so much the instigation of the mind/body split, which was anticipated much earlier in Platonism, and served as the "alpha and omega of Christian anthropology," but rather the separation of the soul from nature, and a correlative conception of knowledge as in no way involving the body. The mind

Grosz has asked, "are sexually different bodies the causes or the results of power relations?" (Elizabeth Grosz, Artlink 8/1 (1986): 37.

104 Butler, Bodies that Matter 9.

(res cogitans) is established as that which knows, the body (res extensa) as that which is known. The body, in this sense, could never be said to "produce," "contain," or "enact" knowledges: it is a passive, brute, material given which only serves to house the soul and obstruct reason with the ill temperance of its passions.

**Minds, Bodies, and Machines: Performance as Hypothetical Ontology**

While Judith Butler writes about performativity as the discursive mode through which ontological effects are installed, parallel investigations of the "uncompleted" body, and the de-localised nature of agency have also taken place in both traditional and very non-traditional performance spaces. Since the early 1970s, the Australian performance artist Stelarc has been engaged in a series of performance events or "actions" which he has claimed serve as a means by which certain theorisations about the body can take place. A central preoccupation of Stelarc's work has been with the body as an evolutionary structure, a structure which has become increasingly "hollowed" by technological invasion, exemplified by medical technologies of prosthesis. This hollowing involves the erosion of ontological essentialism which, superficially at least, echoes some queer theorisations of the body. Stelarc suggests that "There is a general concern in my work about what it means to be a human, what it means to exist beyond being this person, this sex."

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107 Stelarc, "STELARC-Interviewed" 381.
While it is Stelarc's most recent work that has implicated his name most fully in discussions of technology, culture and human identity, his initial notoriety was built around twenty-five suspensions executed between 1976 and 1988, all of which involved raising the artist skyward by means of cables and hooks skewered through the skin. Mark Dery in *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century*, observes a radical *coupure épistemologique* between Stelarc's earlier, more ascetic works and the later technological explorations of the "artist-as-evolutionary-guide and sculptor." However, Dery's misprision is to read the ascesis of the suspension as melancholic, as the unresolved mournings over a lost object or evolutionary stage, long before the commodification and the technological equivalence of body parts. Stelarc's work has tempted Dery to find evocations of Shamanistic primitivism or regression, of "evocations of prenatal weightlessness, the primal urge to fly."\(^{108}\) This of course could be symptomatic of the lamentable, and more general tendency to read *all* performance as implicating a primal urge, owing to the presence of the embodied subject. Dery's delineation of Stelarc's work overlooks the fact that the suspensions nonetheless remain explorations of the relation between technology, evolution and the human body. The suspensions are plainly not an invocation of the Sundance. Rather, Stelarc explains his desire for suspending the human body as an investigation-through-performance of evolutionary containment:

> the electromagnetic and gravitational fields are fundamental in fashioning our evolutionary form. A lot of our functions from digestion to capillary blood flow to bipedal locomotion have been molded by

gravitational force, by the 1–G gravitational field we're plugged into. So the idea of suspending the body was an act and an image of escaping both the planetary pull and by implication, our genetic containment as well.109

Concerning itself with the idea of the present as a stage in which evolution has become radically self-aware, Stelarc's work evinces its own evolution of preoccupations, ironically paralleling his vision of the evolution of the human form itself. Moving from the initial effects of gravity in the formation of the species, recent work investigates the potential of information technologies, which, Stelarc suggests, allow us to supplement and eventually usurp the supposed material facticity of the human body:

The most significant planetary pressure is no longer the gravitational pull but rather the information thrust. Gravity has molded the evolved body in shape and structure and contained it on the planet. Information propels the body beyond itself and its biosphere. Information fashions the form and function of the postevolutionary body.110

This latter work has sought an increasing problematisation of human/machine and interior/exterior dualisms. Attaching to his body an ever increasing collection of high-technology components, Stelarc displaces himself as autonomous agent and is instead reinscribed as the fleshy hub of a whirring cybernetic system. The Third Hand, a custom-made robotic appendage worn by Stelarc during performances, is conceived of as an additional rather than a replacement limb; in a Deleuzian fashion, the Third Hand's presence

109 Stelarc, "STELARC-Interviewed" 382-3.
attests to desire's productivity, rather than its predication on lack.\textsuperscript{111} Replete with the ability to grasp, release, rotate, and possess tactile response, it responds to EMG (electromyogram) signals from the muscle tissue in Stelarc's thighs and abdomen. In \textit{Ping Body} (1996), Stelarc wears the Third Hand and Amplified Body equipment which has characterised his more recent performances, and as per usual, during this performance, some of Stelarc's bodily noises, like radial artery blood flow are captured or "amplified" by Doppler flow meters.

However, one essential difference about \textit{Ping Body} is that the electrodes and other sensors which are used for amplifying body signals, stimulating muscle contraction, and the EMG controls in the vastus medialis and flexor muscles, have been partially given over to incoming instructions from willing participants on the Internet, all claiming a piece of agency in the performance experiment. Just like Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski, who saw performance as an artistic mode suited to potentiality, who attempted to remake the body through forced defamiliarisations and re-articulations, Stelarc seems to intuit performance as the art of prospect in which the performer must be open to the continual corporeal decentrings that modified bodily existence requires. Both actor training and Stelarc's actions involve methods of inducing psychophysical malleability, the reduction of the performer to "bits."\textsuperscript{112}

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Performing Matter: Ontology and Epistemology

Stelarc’s investigations-through-performance, concerned as they are with “corporeal decentrings,” seem anathema to philosophical investigations which attempt to reduce the body to silence. In opposition to these models’ tendencies to allow epistemological schemes to figure corporeality, some phenomenologists argue for the possibility that corporeal structures themselves have significant impact on the formation of concepts.\footnote{Drew Leder, \textit{The Absent Body} (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962); Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, \textit{The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991).} And yet, for philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, these “structures of perception,” cannot simply be "the outcome or meeting-point of numerous causal agencies." The abandonment of transcendental realism does not necessarily entail a switch to scientific realism; both of these positions have in common the view of an objective world: a universe of determinate objects with specified properties. And yet Merleau-Ponty argues that this positing of ontological identities overlooks the highly indeterminate nature of perception in lived experience itself. In other words, Cartesianism might be seen in some ways, as axiomised reaction to structures of perception.

In \textit{The Absent Body}, Drew Leder develops a phenomenological model of the self based on an ecstatic/recessive structure. He discusses the body’s propensity to gradually fall from attention unless brought to consciousness through dysfunction or discomfort. Leder makes the suggestion that it is the corporeal recessions
involved in the practices of conceptualisation and concentration that provide the intuitive appeal of Descartes' disavowal of the body.\textsuperscript{114}

In contrast to Descartes' epistemology, Stelarc's work is preoccupied with the possibilities of the body at the same time that it makes its boundaries, and hence its identity, ambiguous. His performances subject the logic of \textit{res cogitans} and \textit{res extensa} to subversion without inversion. To electro-chemically connect one's "body" to a host of "external" devices that both \textit{impinge upon} and \textit{react to} bodily and perceptual change suggests a logic outside that of either/or; perhaps thinking \textit{is} extension.

Descartes wanted to exclude extension from the domain of the Real. As the "owned" object of the thinking self, the body does not think; it is both epistemologically hazardous and ontologically distinct:

I have never seen or perceived that human bodies think; all I have seen is that there are human beings, who possess both thought and a body. This happens as a result of a thinking thing being combined with a corporeal thing: I perceived this from the fact that when I examined a thinking thing on its own, I discovered nothing in it which belonged to a body, and similarly when I considered corporeal nature on its own I discovered no thought in it.\textsuperscript{115}

Stelarc's work resists the notion of thought as either interior \textit{or} localised. A world away from the flat images and endless text found on-line that passes for "knowledge" amongst some commentators, Stelarc's performances radicalise the idea of "interactivity"; he is not

\textsuperscript{114} Leder, \textit{The Absent Body} 103-48.

merely "appended" to devices, but ingests and implants them as components. Strangely, both Descartes and Stelarc have been at some point accused by critics of "somatophobia": fear of the body. Where Descartes apparently wanted to forget about it, Stelarc desires to move "beyond" it. And yet it would be hard to argue than Descartes could have overly irrational fears about something which he believed could not violate his identity, could not prevent his thinking, and could in no way effect his immortality. And again, could "phobia" be consistently applied to a performance artist whose theoretical preoccupations and experimentation with his body could only be characterised as relentless?

Perhaps Descartes' progressive elimination of the sensual apparatus to achieve epistemological apodictic reveals not so much a somatophobia, as a kind of self-forgetting which ignores the materiality of both discourse and existence. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's essay "The Cogito" in The Phenomenology of Perception, Leder argues that the material conspicuousness of the signifier tends to recede from thought to be replaced by a "conceptual" signified. Through this recession, discourse is ignored as a structuring factor of that very thought. In an intuition that parallels Whorfian linguistics, Merleau-Ponty suggests that discourse not only structures thought, but disappears in that very act of structuration:

The wonderful thing about language is that it promotes its own oblivion: my eyes follow the lines on the paper, and from that moment I am caught up in their meaning, I lose sight of them .... Expression fades out before what is expressed, and this is why its mediating role

may pass unnoticed, and why Descartes nowhere mentions it. Descartes, and a fortiori his reader, begin their meditation in what is already a universe of discourse.\textsuperscript{117} Descartes' denial of the material status of thought has not only impacted upon metaphysics. The mind/body distinction was, by the seventeenth century, both an ontological division which asserted two primary kinds of "things" of which the world was supposedly constituted, and the heuristic paradigm for the production of knowledges.\textsuperscript{118} The mind/body split has not only supplied analytic epistemology with its orientation (that of representation), but with its seeming intractability—the problem of solipsism. How does one faithfully recover a world from which the immaterial knower is forever conceptually and ontologically estranged? How could mind and extension ever converse or interact? The Cartesian ego is radically devoid of an alter ego with which it might make contact.

While his work does not entertain a transcendent conception of cognition, a concern with "mind" is not totally absent from Stelarc's work. His performances unsettle the "object" status of mind by performatively refiguring it as a process; mind is an action, not a thing. Trying to explain the world of the sub-atomic particle, theoretical physicist David Bohm describes the habits of thought brought about by the predominance of subject-verb-object sentence structure, even when such a structure is manifestly inappropriate. He asks us to "consider the sentence 'It is raining.' Where is the 'It'?

\textsuperscript{117} Merleau-Ponty, qtd. in Léder, The Absent Body 103.

\textsuperscript{118} It is worth noting that Benedict de Spinoza stands as the notable exception to this rule. His conception of the body as outlined in the Ethics resists both Cartesian dualist models (including current "incarnations") and materialist/mechanistic ones.
that would, according to the sentence, be 'the rainer doing the raining'?" Perhaps Stelarc's performances ask us to consider whether the assertion "the mind is thinking" might be better rephrased as "thought is happening."

And yet, while Stelarc's work utilises highly advanced technologies, it may not ultimately valorise science any more than Cartesianism. As Erwin Strauss points out in his paper "Aesthesiology and Hallucinations," the pay off for imbuing the senses and materiality in general with a protracted stigma of incompetence was the theological acceptability of a science predicated on mathematical physics. The soul's extradition from nature allowed natural science a theoretical autonomy that was previously unimagined. With the Cartesian ego now occupying a place of immateriality, the body could be freely investigated as an object, using the techniques of newly emerging scientific disciplines. Like the development of Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, the birth of modern epistemology required a transition from naive objectivism to transcendental subjectivism. For both thinkers—Descartes and the "early" Husserl—awareness of the ego was prior to awareness of any "outside" world and wholly unmediated by materiality.\(^\text{120}\)

Epistemological dualism asserts that reality is arrived at by processes of judgement aimed at achieving correspondence between the internal processes of mind and the physical processes of the outside world; it is the epistemic symmetry, noted earlier, that allows


\(^{120}\) On Husserl's commentary on the transition from naive objectivism to transcendental subjectivism and on evidence as being pre-discursive ("pre-predicative") see his *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977) 3-15.
one to posit "identity" as a relation. "Knowledge," configured within this matrix, seeks to link propositions to the objective world in a relation of identity. When cognition is conceived of as information taken in by the senses and processed by the soul, the role of perception is strictly delimited:

Seeing is no longer understood as the relation of an experiencing being to the world; it is rather an occurrence of sensory data in a worldless consciousness. In everyday life we see this wall as green, that table as brown. Descartes wants us to believe that originally such qualities of visible things are data in our mind. They will be related to an outside world by inference .... It is the manner of the reception of ideas which first makes known to us the existence of other things. From the effect we deduce its cause.121

Physiological psychology subsequently took up this thesis that consciousness is alone with itself, and rephrased it in terms, of "stimulus and excitation, of excitation and conscious sign."122 Although, as their name implied, the physicalists attempted to explain mental processes solely in terms of physical-chemical process—a direct challenge to Descartes' mechanical-hydraulic theory—their theoretical modelling remained wholly within Cartesian co-ordinates. Even when attempting to rid psychology of mentalism, the seventeenth-century physicalists such as Johannes Müller, Julien de La Mettrie, Du Bois Reymond, and Hermann Helmholtz all articulated their theorisations of perception in terms of aggregates of sensory data received by an "inner" person.

Müller, who was perhaps the most influential of the above-named group, is credited with arguing for the specificity of the

121 Strauss, "Aesthesiology and Hallucinations" 143.
122 Strauss, "Aesthesiology and Hallucinations" 144.
sensory nerve systems via a precise taxonomy of "specific energies." Müller's theory, however "materialist" or "scientific," couches perception in terms of stimulus and mentation:

The immediate objects of the perception of our senses are merely particular states induced in the nerves and felt as sensations either by the nerves themselves or by parts of the brain concerned with sensation. The nerves make known to the brain, by virtue of the changes produced in them by external causes, the changes of condition of external bodies.123

The theoretical problems created by a simultaneous commitment to ontological materialism and epistemological Cartesianism seems, on reflection, a science always on the verge of self-refutation. The deterministic universe of classical physics and chemistry placed thought in a strange predicament: it was both immanent in the world and transcendent in analysis. How could mind, as itself an epiphenomenon of physical process, exert a will to choose the most rational explanation of the physical processes themselves? Hans Jonas asserts that all theory, even incorrect theory, is predicated upon the capacity for thought to "rise above the power of extramental determinations .... Indeed, even the extreme materialist must exempt himself qua thinker, so that extreme materialism as a doctrine be possible."124

123 Johannes Müller, qtd. in Benjamin Rand, ed., The Classical Psychologists: Selections Illustrating Psychology from Anaxagoras to Wundt (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1966) 543.
Epistemic Aporias: Idealist and Materialist

This epistemological dilemma seems tacitly realised even by some of the most strident advocates of materialism. In _Chance and Necessity_, the seminal _tour de force_ of modern materialistic biology, Jacques Monod suggests that the peculiar position of the subject and its attempts at self-objectification rest on an epistemological contradiction. It is a contradiction, however, that Monod argues is heuristically necessary, as otherwise the ideal of objectivity in science would have to be sacrificed. Nonetheless, Monod sometimes gives the impression that he is more preoccupied by this problem than by biological inquiry "proper." For Monod, the "central problem" of biology lies with this _aporia_:

> the real problem lies at another, deeper level than that of physical laws; it lies in our understanding, in our intuition of the phenomenon. This is really no paradox or miracle, but a flagrant _epistemological contradiction_. ... In fact, the central problem of biology lies with this contradiction, which if it is only apparent, must be resolved, or else proved to be radically insoluble, if that should turn out indeed to be the case.\(^{125}\)

Monod's argument already had precedent in the biological sciences. In 1932, the biologist J.B.S. Haldane argued that "if materialism is true, it seems to me that we cannot know that it is true. If my opinions are the result of chemical processes going on in the brain, they are determined by chemistry, not the laws of logic."\(^{126}\) The encroachment of ontology onto epistemology, and vice versa,

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although not expressed in the terms of philosophy of mind, is one of the central theses of Foucault's *The Order of Things*. His arguments about the epistemological "doublet" seem to apply to both idealist and "realist" permutations of dualism.

Under the heading of "The Empirical and the Transcendental," Foucault makes the (often overlooked) point that what characterises the modern period is not the supposition of "man," but a man torn in two directions, a man at once both imminent and transcendent. In an effort to know itself, the subject is occupied with an empirical investigation of itself. However, before long, the same subject discovers that its modes of knowing are themselves materially constructed by the supposedly external objects of its investigation. Man, then, is a peculiar creature to which Foucault ascribes the term "empirico-transcendental doublet":

For the threshold of our modernity is situated not by the attempt to apply objective methods to the study of man, but rather by the constitution of an empirico-transcendental doublet which was called *man*. Two kinds of analysis then came into being. There are those that operate within the space of the body, and—by studying perception, sensorial mechanisms, neuro-motor diagrams, and the articulation common to things and to the organism ... these led to the discovery that knowledge has anatomo-physiological conditions, that it is formed within the structures of the body....

This inquiry into the ontological order begins to be an inquiry into epistemology, and places both in a very precarious position. Although Immanuel Kant has been utilised by a number of contemporary philosophers of mind in order to bolster certain

materialistic conceptions, Kant himself saw the contradiction that the physical sciences might be bringing to philosophy. It is for these reasons that Kant, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, distanced himself from forms of materialism; for him it was a doctrine which refuted itself at its point of enunciation.  

Foucault sees at the crux of this problem an epistemological tension between positivism and eschatology. Although such positions are seen as mutually exclusive, the tension between positivism and eschatology owes itself to a conceptual morphology. For Foucault, positivism can be characterised by an epistemological circuit travelling from the empirical to the conceptual/linguistic in terms of priority: "the truth of the object determines the truth of the discourse that describes its formation." Opposed to this is eschatology, which promises to catch truth by anticipating it. Eschatology promises to catch the real in its conceptual grids: it lays "in advance and foments it from a distance." However, Foucault makes the point that the two forms are "archaeologically" indissociable (to which one might also add, as products of seventeenth century thought historically, and conceptually indissociable). The epistemological doublet suggests a subject both empirical and critical, and thus both positivist (imminent) and eschatological.


129 Foucault, *The Order of Things* 320.
(transcendental). This bind has provided a conceptual script for the staging of the historical struggle between monism and dualism. Strangely enough, or perhaps predicable, this agon always seems to wind its way back to a very common view: that of knowledge as representation.

If Strauss is correct in asserting that the "history of modern philosophy is a chronicle of the ever-renewed and always abortive attempts to define the relationship of these two worlds,"\textsuperscript{130} then perhaps the challenge of thought is not to "abandon epistemology"—if that were possible, as Richard Rorty suggests—but to examine the logic on which such aporias are reliant.\textsuperscript{131} The advantage that Stelarc's work has in this regard is its capacity to theorise about the body, evolution, and intelligence whilst also attempting to enact these possibilities. It would be an error, however, to conflate the performances themselves with Stelarc's own pronouncements concerning the "post-human." One should take very seriously the proposition that the performances stand independent of the rhetorical licence contained in his theoretical papers. It is not that the discursive presentations of his work are immaterial to the actions themselves. They are not. But if one is to attempt to take the exploratory potential of performance seriously, then one should be wary of the possible traps involved in reading performance primarily through discursive reflections on it.

\textsuperscript{130} Strauss, "Aesthesiology and Hallucinations" 148.

Performing Mind: Cognition as Enaction

Divested of its technofetishism, Stelarc's vision of nonlocalised intelligence, of agency extruded by interlocking systems of requisite complexity, comes very close to the systems theory approximation of mind suggested by anthropologist/evolutionary theorist Gregory Bateson in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*: "Mind is a necessary, an inevitable function of the appropriate complexity, wherever that complexity occurs. But that complexity occurs in a great many other places besides the inside of my head and yours."\(^{132}\) One of the interesting results of such a conception of mind is not that it theorises *about* artificial intelligence, but rather that it reframes the question as to whether intelligence can ever be said to be truly "artificial." Suggesting that a computer does not "think" merely asserts, in this instance, that mind resists theorisation as substance, but not as a system of relations. Bateson puts the matter this way:

Now let us consider for a moment the question of whether a computer thinks. I would state that it does not. What "thinks" and engages in "trial and error" is the man *plus* the computer *plus* the environment. And the lines between man, computer and environment are purely artificial, fictitious lines. They are lines *across* the pathways along which information or difference is transmitted. They are not boundaries of the thinking system. What thinks is the total system which engages in trial and error ....\(^{133}\)

Bateson's notion of "mind," and systems theory in general, were highly critical of the subject-object distinctions which characterised a great deal of analytic philosophies of mind. Although Artificial Intelligence was soon to develop heuristic models which


\(^{133}\) Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* 491.
reintroduced strong dualisms via a conception of mental process as symbol manipulation (involving the representation of an "environment" to a "subject" or machinic "organism"), much of the earlier and more radical work eschewed such distinctions. For Erwin Laszlo, like Bateson, dualisms of this sort were highly arbitrary:

We must do away with the subject-object distinction in analyzing experience. This does not mean that we reject the concepts of organism and environment, as handed down do us by natural science. It only means that we conceive of experience as linking organism and environment in a continuous chain of events, from which we cannot, without arbitrariness, abstract an entity called organism and another called environment.\textsuperscript{134}

Bateson's theorisations are most profitably seen against the intellectual backdrop of the development of cybernetics, information theory, and general systems theory, all of which he was heavily influenced by, and in turn, made significant contributions to. Central to the Bateson's concept of mind is the privileging of immanence over transcendence: mental characteristics can be seen in any aggregate or "ensemble of events" which possess sufficient complexity to respond to "difference": to receive and transform "information." For Bateson, information is defined as "a difference which makes a difference."\textsuperscript{135}

Etymologically, "mind" has its origins in the notion of "memory," and Bateson's model allows for this aspect of the mental to be illustrated. One example that he gives in both \textit{Steps to an Ecology of Mind}, and \textit{Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity}, is the "governor"

\textsuperscript{135} Bateson, \textit{Steps to an Ecology of Mind} 315.
of the steam engine. The governor is a device that normally moderates the speed of an engine through regulating the supply of fuel. A preferred speed for the train is set, and in a way analogous to the operation of a thermostat, continually monitors "actu als" with "ideals," supplying less fuel when the train is running too quickly, and more when it is running too slowly. The governor works on the principal of over-compensated correction for the prescribed deviation from course.

However, Bateson points out that the term "governor" is a misnomer if it is understood to imply that it "controls" the speed of the train in any unilateral way. Instead, he compares the governor to a "sense organ," which transforms significant differences (information) into other significant differences. In this sense, the actual behaviour of the governor doesn't "dictate," but rather, is wholly determined by other parts of the system, and also its own behaviour at a previous time. Hence, the governor exhibits mental characteristics, which include that of memory. Bateson's portrait of the governor is one of non-localised control:

in no system which shows mental characteristics can any part have unilateral control over the whole. In other words, the mental characteristics of the system are immanent, not in some part, but in the system as a whole.

136 The governor is also an example chosen by cyberneticist Norbert Wiener when discussing feedback from a mathematical perspective. The mathematisation of the governor comes via specifying equations reflective of the types of effect which each phase of the governor's system--from fuel to cylinder to flywheel to governor--has on the other. See Norbert Wiener, Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1948) 115.

137 Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind 316

138 Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind 316.
In this sense, some of Stelarc's performances might not be best seen as Stelarc's performances. Although these events converge around the spectacle of the performer's body, the very act of incorporating or becoming linked to pieces of "machinery" suggests that the performance is that of a system. Stelarc's body does not serve to "ground" these performances because their nature is to problematise the distinction between action and reaction: perhaps all one is left with is enaction.

Central to Bateson's notion of memory and non-localised control is the cybernetic idea of non-linear feedback loops. The feedback loop was one of the central ideas of cybernetics. It describes a circular connection of causal components in which the information of a hypothetical or actual beginning is carried around each link on the loop until it eventually "feeds back" to the point at which it started and then begins again. At this point, the information which has been fed back into the cycle has been altered, owing to the effects of the other links on the chain. The "origin" then adds its own piece of information and the cycle continues.

In Stelarc's Ping Body, the electrodes which are used to stimulate muscle contraction and the EMG controls in the vastus medialis and flexor muscles shouldn't be conceived as being "controlled" by Stelarc or even "controlling" Stelarc in any straightforward way. In Ping Body, causality is wholly circular: the

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139 In Mind and Nature, Bateson specifies six criteria which any conception of mind must satisfy. The idea of feedback loops roughly corresponds to the fourth criterion: that mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination. For a list and discussion of Bateson's criteria, see Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity (London: Wildwood House, 1979) 91-117.
performance is an elaborate feedback loop in which the dramatic focus is on the performer's body, but the "action" of which is derived from a number of sources. Any number of bodily organs/functions, non-organic machines, and participants on the Internet are continually offering "bits" of information which hope to assess "deviation from course," and attempt "correction."\(^{140}\) In Bateson's language, each link on the causal chain is an "arc of a larger circuit":

we may say that "mind" is immanent in those circuits of the brain which are complete within the brain. Or that mind is immanent in circuits which are complete within the system, brain plus body. Or, finally, that mind is immanent in the larger system—man plus environment. In principle, if we desire to explain or understand the mental aspect of any biological event, we must take into account the system—that is, the network of closed circuits, we seek to explain the behaviour of a man or any other organism, this "system" will usually *not* have the same limits as the "self"—as this term is commonly (and variously) understood.\(^{141}\)

For Bateson, "mind" must be wrenched away from its dogged attachment to the personal pronoun. Stelarc radicalises the notion of prosthesis through performance, and by doing so, problematises the

\(^{140}\) Although an example of machinic assessment of "deviations from course" and "correction" has been offered—the governor—we also attribute human beings with this capacity through "mentalistic" conceptions such as "judgement," organic tissue and processes are also amenable to sophisticated analogies to feedback-loops. In *Cybernetics*, Norbert Wiener briefly discusses the medical condition known as *ataxia* as a form of organic feedback which has gone into "runaway" or pathological over-compensation (113). Additionally, the concept of *homeostasis*, introduced by Walter Cannon in his book *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York: Norton, 1939) is predicated on the description of metabolic processes as self-regulatory through dynamic oscillations.

\(^{141}\) Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* 317.
notion of the strictly localised self. Prosthesis is not something added to the self or even used by the self, it is quite literally incorporated into it. Attempts to read through Stelarc a desire for a phallus-through-prosthesis seem tenuous. The phallus, whether equated to the penis or metaphorised away from anatomical particularities, remains predicated on an originary lack or symbolic castration. Whereas a notion of the phallus requires the postulation of an originary lack, Stelarc’s work attests to an originary possibility. Nothing is missing, but almost anything is possible.

Bateson’s own example of “prosthesis” (if it can be called that) is the blind man’s walking stick. He asks: If the blind man owns and uses such a stick, where does his "self" begin? At the tip of the stick which feels along the ground? At the end of the stick which is in the blind man’s hand? Halfway? For Bateson, such questions are nonsensical, as the stick is simply a link in a chain along which information is transformed and transmitted; "to draw a delimiting line across this pathway is to cut off a part of the systemic circuit which determines the blind man’s locomotion." The stick is nothing more than a very simple "machine."

Central to Bateson’s arguments about mind is that epistemology—the way in which a system exchanges information and creates meaning through operating in its world—is wholly dependent on its material structure. Similar contentions have been made by the biologist Humberto Maturana and several of his colleagues at the University of Chile. All minds exhibit a specific ontology which gives

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143 Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind 318.
rise to individual mental characteristics. Again, in a way analogous to both, Stelarc's performative explorations of the "post-human" imply degrees of epistemological modification achieved through structurally modified ontology:

my focus is the body as a structure rather than as a psyche, or a site for inscription ... The body not as an object of desire but an object for designing. The body seen as an architectural structure where if you alter the architecture of the body, you adjust its awareness to the world ... So taking that a step further, if we alter our physiology, we alter our philosophy.144

For Maturana, ontological structure is read in purely biological terms: cognition is a "biological phenomenon and can only be understood as such; any epistemological insight into the domain of knowledge requires this understanding."145 Although Maturana adopts a sort of biological essentialism with regard to the organisation of cognitive architecture, he allows for degrees of structural plasticity as to how the material elements of mind can be configured. Like Stelarc, Maturana argues that evolution evinces potentially—and actually—profound degrees of this plasticity of cognitive arrangement, although what the two may conceive of as legitimate instances of evolution may be widely divergent.146

The Santiago theory of Cognition (as Maturana's theory has subsequently come to be known) is primarily based around an idea of

146 Maturana and Varela, Autopoiesis and Cognition 11-12.
cognition as enactment. Understood in this way, the "physical calibration" required to discipline the scientist's body (discussed in the previous chapter), comes to genuinely appear as a mode of "thought." The scientist does not think and then act: their way of thinking is already an ado. To understand how this "performative epistemology" resonates with Maturana's theory of cognition as enactment, one must first contrast the latter with the early notion in cognitive science which held that cognition was essentially the manipulation of symbols ("cognitivism"). The very early years of cybernetics attempted to establish a science of mind predicated on the idea of it as a logical device that was amenable to analysis in terms of digital configuration. Simply put, this view entails the identification of the mind with the brain, the brain with the neurological/biological notion of the "firing of synapses," and the endowment of the firing of synapses with purely digital characteristics (that is, they either fire or don't fire: a binary option implying either 1 or 0). These premises supplied a research program that was to provide some very fruitful—instrumental—findings. Arguably, the digital computer was the direct result of this era of cybernetic/systems research.

In the mid 1950s, cognition was increasingly seen as the rule-based (and largely algorithmic) manipulation of symbolic representations of an "outside world." Thus "thought" could, hypothetically, function through any device able to handle such rules and such symbols. From these few hypotheses came what was to be known as the "Strong AI program": the fervent search not for an answer as to whether this conception of cognition was ostensibly correct, but rather for the elusive "device" which would be able to carry out the presuppositions at a high level of cognitive efficiency.
Needless to say, as a research paradigm that attempted to emulate the functional mental features of a human being, the strong AI program has all but failed.\textsuperscript{147}

Subsequently, Humberto Maturana and his colleague, Francisco Varela, came up with an alternate conception of cognition which Varela calls "enaction." For many years, the only seeming alternative to a conception of cognition based on representation or "realism" (that is, cognition conceived as the ability to retrieve and manipulate symbols which derive from the "outside world") was a form of cognitive constructivism or idealism (cognition conceived as the internal result of the brain's architecture, unaffected by any external world). Maturana and Varela's notion of enaction questions the conceptual validity of both of these options and charts a way between realism and solipsism.

\textsuperscript{147} Apart from "cognition as enaction," the only other significant alternative to the doctrine of cognitivism has been that of "connectionism," a theory which objects to cognitivism on the grounds that symbolic computation is a wholly inadequate model for carrying representation. Connectionists suggest that symbolic computation requires, firstly, linear or sequential (rather than parallel) series of instructions that are rarely evinced by "natural" neural networks. And secondly, cognitivism posit localised (rather than distributed) operations which produce the problem of the single "bug" which can corrupt an entire cognitive operation. Put, simply, connectionism's objections to cognitivism outline the discrepancies between perceived biological architecture and (our current) computer design. The reason that I am not considering connectionism at length as a viable alternative to cognitivism—apart from space, and despite its advantages over the latter—is that connectionism, like cognitivism, still maintains that the function of cognition is to represent an external world. For an edifying discussion of connectionism, see chapters five and six in Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, \textit{The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience} (Cambridge and London: MIT press, 1991) 85-130.
In *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Varela and his colleagues discuss a model of cognition that favours neither of the aforementioned options. A discussion of the human organism's capacity to register colours provides a lucid model of cognition as enaction. Colour is generally assumed to be an inherent property of the wavelength of the reflected light received by the retina of the human eye. Instead, colour has been found to be significantly independent of any designation of "wavelength"; what arrives to the human being as the colour "red" is the result of a complex state of neurological assemblages, a global neural state which is arrived at through processes of evolutionary modification. Having said this, there are still a number of constraints on this structural configuration: for instance, an object possesses a certain capacity to reflect light in comparison to other objects; the object could also be said to "stop" at a certain point before another object begins.\(^{148}\) However, although these constraints are a necessary condition of perceiving colour, they are by no means a sufficient condition.\(^{149}\) In this light, Stelarc's radical modifications of physiological architecture seem not to alter the basic characteristic of Maturana and Varela's notion of cognition as enaction: "The laser eyes stimulate vision as an active transmitter and a generator of images rather than as a passive receptor of light."\(^{150}\)

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\(^{148}\) Merleau-Ponty may have had reservations about a theory which would posit the necessity of such "object discreteness."

\(^{149}\) It is known, for instance, that certain birds (such as pigeons) have a chromatic space which is tetrachromatic (requiring four primary colours) as opposed to the (general) human requirement, which is trichromatic (requiring three primary colours).

\(^{150}\) Stelarc, "Electronic Voodoo" 49.
Perhaps Stelarc's actions only literalise performance's propensity to change the physical and perceptual state of its performers. Although much commentary has been devoted to the possible effects that the theatrical performance has on an audience, a far lesser amount has been concerned with the effects of actor training and performance on the performers themselves. And yet, figures such as Meyerhold, Stanislavski, and Grotowski have all suggested that actor training is a process which requires the initiate to develop increasing degrees of structural plasticity. Such training is able to dramatically shift the relationship between the subject and its environment. Through his "method of physical action," Stanislavski taught that certain corporeal configurations—physical postures—could exert profound changes in the dynamics of perceptual and emotional state. A seeming reversal of his previous reliance on "emotion memory," the method of physical action suggested that the "life of the human body in a role is no small matter .... the bond between body and soul is indivisible. The life of one gives life to the other."\(^{151}\)

Performance's deliberate intervention into ontology reveals neither a world that lies totally "out there," waiting to be retrieved by accurate representation, nor a world wholly "in here," a world of our own making which has no bearing to an external reality. Varela chooses to define cognition is a capacity to "bring forth a world."

Unlike Descartes, who starts with an epistemology that defines knowledge as certainty and then winds up with an ontology to reflect this (the structure of ontological dualism); or like eliminative materialism that starts with a reified ontology and then winds up with an epistemology to reflect this (the structure of physicalist monism which does away with "folk psychology"); Bateson, Maturana, Varela, and Stelarc all suggest that epistemology and ontology forever co-define each other in a kind of dynamic circularity.152

One might wish to contest the analogies between physical theatre training and Stelarc’s radical interventions into corporeal integrity. Surely they are worlds apart. And yet, as Stelarc himself often points out, very small shifts in physiological status or anatomical structure have had drastic effects on evolutionary history. It could be argued that the anatomical and physiological similarities which bind the hominid to the chimpanzee in evolutionary history, make trivial their respective differences. And yet these differences are present. They’re also crucial:

By slight modifications of musculature of the lower back and upper thighs, it was possible for hominids to have bipedal locomotion, and bipedal locomotion is probably the most significant event in our human history. Apparently the explosive growth of the cortex occurs after bipedalism. All of a sudden two limbs become manipulators, producing artifacts and instruments, and the whole relationship with the world changed. These minor anatomical changes produced a radical new orientation in the world.153

152 This point is a difficult one to make. If, in some senses, what is perceived to be "ontology" is the result of specific conceptual schemes (an epistemology), then it is equally true that our capacity to know is contingent on our cognitive architecture (ontology).

153 Stelarc, “Electronic Voodoo” 46.
Stelarc's work would seem to stand as a kind of performative "research," as speculative ontology which doesn't hope to represent possibility but to enact possibilities in real time and space. If cognition is "enaction," then Stelarc's performances may suggest an exemplary mode in which "hypothesis" may be creatively entertained.

**Guerilla Ontology: Madness?**

Although both Stelarc and Judith Butler challenge models of the subject construed as ontologically complete agents, they diverge in their respective characterisations of the limitations placed on the body's materialisation. Whereas Stelarc conceives of his project as an investigation into the technical limitations of the body as a cybernetic system—of the structural and kinaesthetic parameters of experience—Butler investigates the psychoanalytic and discursive limitations placed on a body's materialisation. Whereas Stelarc's conception of the body's limitations is techno-evolutionary, Butler's seems largely Foucaultian/discursive. A hypothetical materiality of the body is accepted by Butler, and yet its "appearance" is always marked in and by culture; matter only (dis)appears as a Lacanian Real. There is no body before discourse; it is both the site of the reification and contestation of knowledges and the most productive epiphenomenon of them.

The notion of "non-completeness" in Stelarc's conception of the body is derived from the mutability of perception and the exchangeability of bodily components, whereas the notion of "non-completeness" in Butler's conception of the body has two primary resonances. One is predicated on the normalisation of "sex," which
sees the subject caught in the interminable attempt to ontologically complete the process of sexualisation. Another employs the logic of Lacan's "mirror stage": the physiological and psychological underdevelopment and dissymmetry of experience which is temporarily overridden by the formation of the ego.\textsuperscript{154} Perhaps what is of interest here is not so much differing notions of materiality, but the disorientating poetic of non-completeness, common to both of their conceptions of ontology.

Descartes figures the body "as that which naturally inclines us to error": it "constitutes the primary force that clouds the intellect and seduces the will to err."\textsuperscript{155} There is an inherent tension in Descartes' work that seems located in his perception of the body as the cloud cast over the intellect and the seducer of the will. How could the body "seduce" the intellect if it is figured as the "other" of "will"? In the same contradictory breath, Descartes reduces the body to a brute materiality and then endows it with strategy for corruption of the mind. Although his axioms appear to deny it, Descartes is worried that perhaps the body may start to entertain some of its own "hypotheses."

Maybe Descartes' attempts to exclude madness from knowledge are acts of medical-epistemic prevention for the philosopher. The body must be subdued. Indeed, in the case of the "mental patient," isn't the symptomatology of heightened psychosomatic


differentiation suggestive of a body which has developed "a life of its own"? How could the twitches, ticks, and paralyses of "hysteria" be conceived—in the absence of organic or structural explanations—except as the body which has become an actor in its own time?

Descartes' procedure for reaching epistemological apodicity is not only contingent on eliminating all sensation, but also all images of corporeality:

I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself.156

The body is here something one "has" rather than something that one "is." And yet, despite its epistemological aims, how is Descartes' "ideal" to be differentiated from Madame I's "pathological" state of perceiving her body to be unrelated to her "self"? The idea of the body as a kind of "falsity" links the ontological and epistemological domains: Cartesian dualism founds both a theory of "things" as well as a theory of knowledge. If Descartes' attempts in the Meditations is to secure knowledge from madness, then it is peculiar that modern symptomatology often figures mental disintegration in terms of increasing disincarnation.157 In The Divided Self, R.D. Laing notes

156 Descartes, Selected Philosophical Writings 87.
that one of the primary symptoms of nascent mental pathology is a patient's growing sense of being a mind in possession of a body. For Laing, this is a pronounced split which may "provide the starting position for a line of development that ends in psychosis."\textsuperscript{158}

This psychosis represents the triumph of an alien body's "will" over the will of the self. The supposed perception of increasing distanciation between body and self-identity in those whose mental state is disintegrating finds its apocalyptic moment in the final subsumption of the "self" within its body. There is no longer the distanciation of consciousness that allows the mad person to differentiate "being" a self and "having" a self. They have lost the capacity to perform. In terms of agency, the annihilation of the sense of "having" a self construes the mad without agency. And yet, this is a highly tenuous construction of madness, one which will be the concern of the next chapter.

III. Michel Foucault: *Modes of Correction* and the Theatrical Ruse

The issue of my sanity cannot be easily dismissed, but after long consideration of the matter, I hold that I was not insane. Call it eccentricity if you like—but do not explain it away. The acts of the eccentric and the madman may well be the same. But the eccentric has made a choice, while the insane person has not .... —Susan Sontag

Towards the end of Sontag's novel *The Benefactor*, the narrator reflects on his life and concludes that he could not have been mad, because his life has been a series of decisions which—despite their idiosyncrasies—cannot be mistaken for evidence of mental pathology. For Shoshana Felman, what characterises madness is "not simply blindness, but a blindness blind to itself ...." The will of Sontag's narrator is not blind to itself; it has not been dissolved by the "will" of an alien body. The problematics of madness, with which the previous chapter concluded, is deeply implicated with questions of epistemology. One conception of madness, exemplified by the reflections of Sontag's narrator, holds it in opposition to voluntarism; the mad person has lost the requisite distanciation in consciousness that allows them to be both subject and object to themselves. They have lost, in other words, the capacity to perform.

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3 Recall in Chapter One, how Richard Schechner's notion of performance was introduced via a distanciation between "act" and "actor."
This conception of madness has found its way into definitions of legal subjectivity: to commit "murder," one must have mens rea, a guilty mind. Mad persons, by definition, cannot commit murder because they lack necessary agency. Following a precedent set by the M'Naghten Case of 1843, the common law insanity defence requires the accused be deficient in what is known as "volitional criteria." As I.G. Campbell argues, the capacity for choice, the distinction between actor and act, is the "fundamental assumption" of punishability.\textsuperscript{4} Voluntarism is a crucial link that ties agency to reason.

In the psychotherapeutic arena, this presumption of the absence of "volitional criterion" in the mad entails that the only "actors" in psychotherapy are its therapists. It is a presumption that can be read in terms of its dramaturgy, not only because literature, drama, and film often concern themselves with this issue, but also on account of the actual theatrical stagings of medical correction that histories of psychotherapeutics can provide.

This chapter attempts to engage with this presumed epistemic notion of madness in its relationship to agency and theatricalisation. It will seek to problematise figurations of madness which rely on the collapse of the distinction between "actor" and "action," the loss of the ability to perform. But first, we need to outline some of the ways that madness has been figured as the "other" of reason. Although the work of Descartes provides an initial orientation—the epistemic need to purge madness in order to secure veridical perception of the

outside world—it is perhaps Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* that stands as one of the most interesting examinations of the relationship between madness and epistemology. As such, an examination of some aspects of Foucault's text will lead us to consider some diverse "cases" of theatricalisation as a medical-epistemic strategy.

**Madness and the Real**

If the critical force of *Madness and Civilisation* lies in its problematisation of "insanity" as an ahistorical category, then it is not necessarily the result of dissolving mental pathology into a simple "nothingness." Foucault's thesis, unlike some of the theoretical works belonging to the "anti-psychiatry" movement of the 1960s, attempts to historically unpack madness and show its complicity with a series of other discourses. For Foucault, madness is an epistemically and politically diffuse field: if the therapeutics of madness is an applied psychology, then it is a psychology not wholly interiorised or localised in the head; if it is a medicine, then it is a medicine concerned with "truth" and "falsity"; if it is a philosophy, then it is a philosophy involving specific performances and bodily actions. It is precisely that the discourse of madness was (and still is) so convoluted that has made it such a rich field for reflection.

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5 The anti-psychiatry movement included theorists such as Thomas Szasz, Ronald Laing, and David Cooper. Sometimes grouped with Foucault, these thinkers were far more heavily indebted to phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism than the "historiography of the concept" that thinkers like Bachelard, Cavailles, and Canguilhem and Foucault himself were engaged in.
And yet despite this complexity, this diffuseness, Foucault orients his archaeology around the epistemic category of "unreason." There is good reason for this. Foucault argues that, despite its historical contortions, madness has always occupied a very special relationship to systems of knowledge. During the Renaissance, the epistemic imaginary of madness was captured by the Ship of Fools, the literary "drunken boat" which went down the rivers of the Flemish canals and the Rhineland, packed with the insane. The drunken boat held a conglomerate of unfortunate souls all embarking on a symbolic voyage to find their proper minds; they were, as Foucault suggests, "in search of their reason." The point made by Foucault is that these coerced counter-pilgrimages cannot be accounted for simply by notions of security or social utility; the passage of the Ship of Fools traverses a virtual geography (the rivers and canals) and thus is highly emblematic of the epistemically liminal position of the fool himself.

During the Renaissance, madness fascinated because it was "knowledge itself," what is characterised in Jérôme Cardan's language as the fool's "innocent idiocy": an inaccessible knowledge of esoteric learning. During the Renaissance, madness still partakes of, and is in conversation with reason, although presumably not with itself (Cardan's "innocent idiocy"). Madness still participates in the truth because it is seen as having the propensity to unmask the folly

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6 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London, Routledge, 1967) 9. Although the Ship of Fools was also a literary creation, Foucault makes the point that numbers of these boats, such as the Narrenschiff, actually existed; their major function usually to carry the mad away from the cities and trade centres to the countryside.

7 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* 22
of the so-called sane through an unconscious form of ironical "high" reason. The literature of the period seems to take account of this; it spans the sublimity of Cervantes' foolish knight to the wisdom held by the folly of Erasmus' encomium. Indeed, truth is often only revealed as a result of madness: Shakespeare's intensely "wise fool" in King Lear, and the fact that Lady Macbeth only begins to tell the truth when she begins to go insane. The literary madman is a "disguised philosopher."9

Yet at a crucial point—from the mid seventeenth century onwards—Foucault sees the beginning of a radical coupure epistemologique in the perception of the insane; the dialogue that had held between madness and reason ceases and the mad person's insanity becomes a language which is wholly incommensurable with the Real. Madness increasingly becomes perceived as an idiocy bereft of social utility required by burgeoning industry. The cardinal sin of the Middle Ages had been pride. Now, along with poverty and vice, the unreason of madness was incorporated into the more modern sin of sloth. Aquatic embarkation becomes gradually replaced with confinement, the Ship of Fools with the Madhouse. Only a short move away from excessive and unruly passion, madness comes to be seen as a form of animality, a devolutionary spectre whose locus was the body: "the madman's body was regarded as the visible and solid presence of his disease: whence those physical cures whose meaning

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9 Felman, "Madness and Philosophy" 207.
was borrowed from a moral perception and a moral therapeutics of
the body."\textsuperscript{10}

And yet this localisation of madness in the body did nothing to
displace the presumed epistemic status of madness as unreason. The
emphasis of the "treatments," although in some ways therapeutic,
seemed far more concerned with notions of severance and
"correction."\textsuperscript{11} In accord with the increasing demand that the Real
be performed—that the microcosm both can and should enact the
macrocosm—the mad person's body was continually coerced, in a
wholly measured and controlled way, to enact the \textit{telos} of the cosmos:

The animating idea of this therapeutic theme is the restitution of a
movement that corresponds to the prudent mobility of the exterior
world. Since madness can be dumb immobility, obstinate fixation as
well as disorder and agitation, the cure consists in reviving in the
sufferer a movement that will be both regular and real, in the sense
that it will obey the rules of the world's movements.\textsuperscript{12}

This is what Foucault refers to when he suggests that the
therapeutics of madness, if seen as a form of psychology, had not yet
been wholly interiorised. The attempts at an epistemic "correction" of
a patient had far less to do with modern notions of
representationalism than knowledge as contained and exemplified by

\textsuperscript{10} Michel Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 159.
\textsuperscript{11} Michel Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 159.
\textsuperscript{12} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 173. The epistemic nature of madness is
also exemplified by Tuke and Pinel's "humane" reforms of the treatment of the
mad through processes of "education." The notion of the mad as possessing an
incorrect epistemology is also reflected in areas of contemporary psychology
such as "Cognitive Therapy," which sees mental trauma in terms of the patient's
consistently inaccurate representations ("self-talk") about the world. See
the body and its movements. For instance, Gilchrist writes a treatise on the usage of the sea voyage as a treatment for melancholia. The sea and the sea-voyage once again become central to the treatment of madness, but this time they appear in the attempt to help correlate the natural movements of the ocean to the erroneous movements of the mad person. Foucault notes:

The rolling of the sea, the most regular, the most natural movement in the world, and the one most in accord with cosmic order ... was considered by the eighteenth century as a powerful regulator of organic mobility.\textsuperscript{13}

The therapeutics of motion attest to an idea of a patient alienated from the world who can be treated by the physical calibration of his or her body to the world's natural rhythms. It is an enacted antidote for solipsism, an escape from absolute subjectivism. It is only through a process of intense subjectification—of helping the mad person back "into" to the world—that one can hope to attain the cure of restored reason:

the subject must be wrested from his pure subjectivity in order to be initiated into the world; the non-being that alienates him from himself must be annihilated, and he must be restored to the plenitude of the exterior world, to the solid truth of being.\textsuperscript{14}

The treatment of madness belongs to the philosopher, an adept trained in the art of correcting unreason through the defeat of absolute subjectivism, of solipsism. It seems strange, then, that such a philosophical endeavour might involve theatricalisation in its modes of strategy. It was a therapeutic practice perhaps doubly precarious

\textsuperscript{13} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 174.

\textsuperscript{14} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 176.
because it had been often argued that the "imaginary desires" provoked by "theatre going" may have lead to the onset of diseases of the nervous system.\textsuperscript{15}

Theatres of Correction

We might find it difficult to conceive of an epistemic attitude towards madness bereft of the language-based representationalism that has come to dominate the contemporary era. Apart from the heterodoxy of Willhelm Reich's "bio-energetics," psychoanalysis has historically figured itself as the "talking cure." Psychotherapies, generally, have required that the ill recognise their illness. The mad must come to recognise their madness, their loss to or subsumption within their madness. They must recognise the loss of agency that their illness entails. And yet is this aim achievable when the patient is the Other of reason, incommensurable with the order of truth and falsity? As will be seen, there often seems little option other than intricate theatrical "stagings" and bodily manipulations of patients. When the Cartesian reason of a doctor meets the equally axiomatic reasoning of a patient, one may witness psychotherapeutics in its agonistic and theatrical mode. And yet, in the realm of "possible worlds," solipsism gives up begrudgingly, if it ever truly gives up at all.

In the chapter "Doctors and Patients," Foucault details the following case originally reported in the \textit{Gazette Salutaire}, August 17, 1769:

The case is cited of a sufferer who thought that he was dead, and was really dying from not eating; "a group of people who had made

\textsuperscript{15} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 167.
themselves pale and were dressed like the dead, entered his room, set up a table, brought food, and began to eat and drink before the bed. The starving 'dead man' looked at them; they were astonished that he stayed in bed; they persuaded him that dead people eat as much as living ones. He readily accommodated himself to this idea.\textsuperscript{16}

In this case of "cure by theatrical representation," the laborious task of awakening the patient through the deployment of reason seems to have met its match; the treatment requires a wholly imaginal framework, confident that a confrontation of the unreal with itself can precipitate a form of epistemological neuralgia. It is somewhat like the function of actors in a morality drama, where a staged death could always prevent an "actual" one.

In a strategic manoeuvre that Foucault perceives as "anti-dialectical," illusion must set itself up to cure the illusory; the work of the normal imagination goes to work on the pathological one. The acting of the doctor must be taken as "real" by the patient; one must feign madness in order to bring it to crisis. One should "pretend to the same substance," "continue the delirious discourse"; the madman's logic must be understood and adhered to.\textsuperscript{17} Madness is to be led to an internal collapse; faced with itself, the weight of its own unreality forces a crisis and the "spell" of the pathological phantasms can be broken: "It must be led to a state of paroxysm and crisis in which, without any addition of a foreign element, it is confronted by itself and forced to argue against the demands of its own truth."\textsuperscript{18} The technique of theatrical representation must stay very close to a confirmation of the delirium; it only escapes madness

\textsuperscript{16} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 188.
\textsuperscript{17} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 187-88.
\textsuperscript{18} Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilisation} 188.
itself through its self-realisation as a form of dramatisation: "if it represents it as the risk of confirming it, it is in order to dramatize it."19 Hence, the key to this mode of correction somehow lies in its relation to theatricalisation, and yet, through the conception of "cure by theatrical representation" as "anti-dialectical," Foucault's theory seems to deny madness a dramaturgy.

The medical efficacy of this treatment—rather than merely its theatrical efficacy—is contingent, Foucault informs us, on the presence of a ruse that effectively disguises the doctor's altered register. In other words, the doctor's ruse suggests a capacity for performance, an element which surreptitiously disrupts the autonomous operation of the delirium through a deception. The medical interference must come without corrupting the discourse of the delirium; madness must be turned back upon itself if it is to reveal its own truth. The ruse, if it is to be successful, must be bound to the back of the delirium without being tied to its truth. Foucault provides an example:

The simplest example of this method is the ruse employed with delirious patients who imagine they perceive within their bodies an object or an extraordinary animal: When an invalid believes that he has a living animal shut up within his body, one must pretend to have withdrawn it; if it is in the stomach, one may, by means of a powerful purge, produce this effect, throwing such an animal into the basin without the patient's knowing.20

The "cure by theatrical representation" is predicated on the distanciation for its supposed epistemic and therapeutic efficacy. The "non-being" of the delirium can only be allotted a therapeutic space

19 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* 188.
20 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* 190.
by luring it out into a world of reality—the "reality" of theatrical phantasy. The task then is to hold it captive until more orthodox Cartesian approaches can be applied.

Foucault's approach to madness is historical as well as philosophical. His analyses claim to deal with a three-hundred year period: from the Middle Ages to the start of the eighteenth century. And yet, his characterisation of a therapeutics in which madness is forced to confront itself raises some questions—and attests to some practices—that are not necessarily specific to the era that Foucault discusses.

**To Out-Mad Madness: A Medico-Epistemic Strategy**

The cure by theatrical representation that Foucault describes could be loosely described as "homoeopathic." Homoeopathy is a medical philosophy pioneered by the German physician Samuel Hahnemann in the early seventeenth century. Opposing the allopathic orthodoxy that "unlike should cure like," Hahnemann adopted an approach that worked on the principle of like curing like.\(^{21}\) The notion of "like curing like" is also deployed by René Girard, who argues in *Violence and the Sacred* that the formation of cultural order relies on an act of violence that purges the community of further violence.\(^{22}\) When employed in the psychotherapeutic context, however, its presence is somewhat different. It relies on a


conception of the patient as devoid of agency, even when they are construed as consummate performers.

In the Woody Allen film Zelig, a character by the name of Leonard Zelig is portrayed as the "human chameleon," changing his physicality (degree of adipose tissue, skin pigmentation, accent, etc.) in the presence of other people. Allen seems to want to literalise the idea of the "personality deficient," those who would turn themselves into any group of people that they happen to be spending time with. In the film, a number of "experts" posit theories as to the origin of his illness: glandular dysfunction, brain tumour, eating Mexican food, misalignment of the spine, etc. However, all of their attempted interventions fail. Finally, the brilliant psychoanalyst Eudora Fletcher, who had initially treated Zelig, is given one final chance. In the presence of Fletcher, Leonard Zelig turns into a psychoanalyst; he reads Freud during the day and speculates extensively on penis envy. At first, Fletcher continually insists that Zelig is a patient and that she is the analyst. Zelig scoffs and suggests that he'd better leave, as he is late for a course that he teaches at a local college on "masturbation."

One night when out to dinner, Fletcher conceives her "brilliant and innovative plan." Her breakthrough comes when she finally stops dialectically opposing Zelig's insistences that he is a Freudian analyst, and begins to ask him about his psychoanalytic practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLETCHER. Dr Zelig...</th>
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<tr>
<td>ZELIG. Yes.</td>
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<td>FLETCHER. I...I wonder if you could help me with a problem.</td>
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ZELIG. (fidgets nervously.) Yeah, I'll certainly try. Of course, we can't promise anything.

Fletcher explains to "Dr Zelig" that she lies about who she is, because she wants to be liked and desires to "be like everybody else."

ZELIG. (increasingly nervous.) You're a doctor...you...you should know how to handle that.
FLETCHER. The...the truth of the matter is...I'm not an actual doctor.
ZELIG. (shifting about in the chair.) You're not?
FLETCHER. No doctor. No I...I've been pretending to be a doctor to...to fit in with my friends. You see, they're doctors.
ZELIG. (confused.) That's something...
FLETCHER. But...but you're a doctor, and you can help me. You have to help me.
ZELIG. I don't feel that well, actually.

Lured by "momentary disorientation" (film narrator), Zelig is able to be hypnotised by Fletcher. It is at this point that the pathology is brought to crisis and movements towards a cure can be entered into. Through mimesis, Fletcher enters Zelig's communicative register and brings it to a crisis.

The story of Zelig's remarkable recovery finds strange analogues in the "taming" of Kate in Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew. The narrative, with which the reader may be familiar, tells the story of a rich statesman from Padua named Baptista, and his eldest daughter, whose loud and intemperate behaviour have earned her the nickname "Katherine the Shrew." Baptista had agreed not to allow any of his other daughters to marry until Katherine was wed. Petruchio, a visitor to the town, on hearing of Baptista's wealth and influence and unperturbed by her reputed ill-humour, sets about convincing Baptista to allow his eldest daughter's hand in marriage.
Although Baptista is somewhat surprised by Petruchio's strange request, he sets the day for the wedding. And yet, on the designated day, all of the wedding guests arrive except for Petruchio and his entourage, who stumble in very late and in entirely inappropriate attire. Baptista responds thus:

**BAPTISTA**

Why, sir, you know this is your wedding day,
First we were sad, fearing you would not come,
Now sadder that you come so unprovided.
Fie, doff this habit, shame to your estate,
An eye-sore to our solemn festival.24

It is only a few lines later, however, that Tranio—Lucentio's servant and confidante—admits to seeing a "meaning in [Petruchio's] mad attire,"25 although none quite seem to be aware of the trajectory of Petruchio's strategy. Petruchio's own "shrewish" behaviour goes on unabated; during the rites of the church ceremony, when asked if he wants Kate as his wife, he swears so loudly that the vicar drops his bible, and when bending over to pick it up, is promptly pushed over by the bridegroom. The guests are taken aback by Petruchio's behaviour as up until this day, he had showed himself to be a gentle and well-mannered man, even if somewhat peculiar.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Petruchio abandons the feast that had been laid out and takes his new wife home. During the couple's farewell, Luncentio enquires of Bianca what she thought of her sister's wedding, to which she replies: "That being mad herself,

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25 (III. ii. 23).
she's madly mated." And at first glance, Bianca seems correct. On arriving home, Petruchio promptly finds fault with all of the bedclothes, food, and garments that had been prepared for his new wife.

PETRUCHIO

What's this? Mutton?
FIRST SERVINGMAN Ay.
PETRUCHIO Who brought?
PETER I.

PETRUCHIO

'Tis burnt, and so is all the meat.
What dogs are these! Where is the rascal cook?
How durst you, Villians, bring it from the dresser
And serve it thus to me that love is not?
There, take it to you, trenchers, cups, and all.

_He throws the food and dishes at them_

You heedless joltheads and unmannered slaves!
What, do you grumble? I'll be with you straight.

_Exeunt Servants hurriedly._

Petruchio's explanation in such circumstances is that the goods offered were not of a high enough standard for his new wife. And yet, these histrionics are soon revealed to be a strategy of correction. Petruchio's method for curing Katherine's shrewishness is laid bare in his dealings with the dressmaker. After publicly castigating the tailor for the inadequacy of his garments, the following exchange takes place:

GRUMIO

O sir, the conceit is deeper than you think for.
Take up my mistress' gown to his master's use!

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26 (III. ii. 147-243).
27 (IV. i. 146-153).
O fie, fie, fie!

PETRUCHIO (aside)

Hortensio, say thou wilt see the tailor paid.

(to the Tailor) Go take it hence, be gone, and say no more.28

Hortensio privately informs the tailor that the garment will be paid for the next day, and instructs him not to take notice of Petruchio's "hasty words." Eventually, the story goes, Petruchio's strategy—unrevealed, one presumes, to Kate—is so effective that it becomes widely known that Katherine has become the best mannered and most obedient wife in all of Padua.

Like Foucault's case of the "dead man," Petruchio's ruse appears to share certain premises with the "cure by theatrical representation." When Peter suggests that Petruchio will kill Kate "with her own humour" he recognises that there is no straightforwardly dialectical opposition in Petruchio's behaviour; all is done for her benefit and with the temper to which she herself is accustomed. In other words, madness is again faced with itself: the "healthy" imagination of Petruchio wages war with the "madness" of Kate through a continuation of the delirious discourse. Kate's logic is adhered to until it collapses under the demands of its own register, a collapse which supposedly causes her to realise the truth of her own madness.

28 (IV. iii. 157-161).
Madness and Strategy

Using Richard Schechner's notion of "restored behaviour" as a conceptual tool, one can say that in the three "cases" detailed, the mad are perceived as wholly without such a facility. Indeed, it is the presence of restored behaviour—the particular state of consciousness that allows one to appear to oneself as a self, as a self engaged in repeating performative strips of behaviour—that endows the "treatments" in these instances with their medico/epistemological legitimacy. Without restored behaviour, none of these forces of "correction" could operate as such, as their ruses operate wholly within the economy of performance; the "therapists" are able to mimic a communicative register in order that this register be brought to crisis.

However, it stands to be asked whether such presumptions—those entertained by Foucault, Trallion, Petruchio, and Fletcher—can be substantiated. One should ask whether or not such "cures" were indeed effected, and whether or not, if they were, they in any way understood their own efficacy. Even in the cases taken from film and drama, whose instances are those of "fiction," it is left open as to what extent the "illnesses" have been purged. In the case of The Taming of the Shrew, directors are obliged to decide the extent to which Kate is "cured," to what extent she is "coerced," and even to what extent this distinction could be performed by an actor.

It was indicated in the first chapter that the ability to "hypothesise"—to postulate possible worlds in front of suitable audiences—made certain assumptions about agency; the savant who possessed a sufficient degree of sprezzatura could participate in the world of knowledge-creation. In other words, the capacity to act—in the senses of being proactive, of being able to mimic, and also simply
in the sense of being able "to do"—invariably suggests an ability for performance. Perhaps the oversight of both Foucault's and Petruchio's accounts is to forever reduce madness to a silence: to invoke accounts of theatricalisation without dramaturgy, to figure the dramatic without *agon*.

In the introduction to *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault suggests that he will be writing a book, not about the historical languages of madness, but about the archaeology of the silences.29 This introduction is not without critical weight, as it outlines a theoretical standpoint that forever allows the mad no strategy; they can never act, but only be forever acted upon. In the words of Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge: A Discourse of the Human Sciences*: "whether excluded or secretly invested with reason, the madman's speech did not strictly exist ... it was taken for mere noise."30

However, the efficacy of the "theatrical ruse" is perhaps predicated on a theoretical naivete, without which it could not function. The mad person is thought not to possess the capacity to perform, to counter-strategise against a doctor perceived by them as a foreign consciousness, one that might itself be construed by the patient as "mad." In this sense, the classical era's experience of madness carries through a certain anxiety that epistemology held towards illusion: that it could be strictly controlled for the purposes of the achievement of an ever more secure apodicity. In the first meditation, Descartes himself enters a kind of "madness"—an absolute subjectivity—which entertains the possibility that the world may

29 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* xiii.
prove to be an elaborate illusion. Descartes' "madness" is to cast doubt on the obvious. And yet this very act of critical distanciation is what separates him from the mad: madness is excluded by the doubting subject. Insanity is entered into only so that it can be finally eliminated by reason, the cogito. As Shoshana Felman has reformulated the cogito: "I think, therefore I am not mad; I am not mad, therefore I am."31

If the Meditations attest to the fact that metaphysics is haunted by the illusory, then the inverse might also be argued: illusion may prove to be a kind of metaphysics:

Illusion is certainly the source of every difficulty in metaphysics, but not because metaphysics, by its very nature, is doomed to illusion, but because for the longest time it has been haunted by illusion and because, in its fear of the simulacrum, it was forced to hunt down the illusory. Metaphysics is not illusory—it is not merely another species of this particular genus—but illusion is a metaphysics.32

In Artaud and the Gnostic Drama, Jane Goodall recounts a battle between Antonin Artaud and his psychiatrists predicated on a series of stagings of "correction." Artaud participates in a dialogue with his protagonists about his supposedly "paranoid" state, where at each stage, Artaud raises the stakes through the recourse to a previously overlooked "orthodoxy" from which those who wish to correct him may be manoeuvred into a position acknowledging that it may be they who are in need of "correction." They, the doctors, may be

31 Felman, "Madness and Philosophy" 210.
representatives of the false imagination, of heresy, of the "evil
demon" that they attribute to Artaud's dialogue in order to invalidate
his epistemology. Goodall picks up on the assumption in Foucault's
discourse that the only true "actors" allowed in the
psychotherapeutic performance are the doctors. Thus she argues:

The physician is pitted against the madman as philosopher and
hermeneuticist, charged with the task of outmanoeuvring him by
imposing upon him, often by quite violent tactics, the logics of
Cartesian thought. But Foucault's presentation of madness ... as that
which is always acted upon and cultivated by those who have an
investment in the teleologies of correction, cannot accommodate the
possibility of a competition between patient and doctor in which both
are strategists, and the madman's investment in what his opponent
calls "error" is also teleological.\(^{33}\)

Goodall's argument is cogent. In "A Matter of Identity," neurologist
Oliver Sacks describes a patient suffering with Wernicke-Korsakov's
disease. According to The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy the
aetiology of Korsakov's disease, in its early stages, involves what is
described as "confabulation," where a patient substitutes imaginary
experiences and identities to fill in the cognitive gaps produced by
amnesia.\(^{34}\) Sacks' chapter, which is worth quoting at length, opens:

'What'll it be today?' he says, rubbing his hands. 'Half a pound of
Virginia, a nice piece of Nova?'
(Evidently he saw me as a customer—he would often pick up the phone
on the ward, and say 'Thompson's Delicatessen'.)
'Oh Mr Thompson!' I exclaim, 'and who do you think I am?'

171.

\(^{34}\) Robert Berkow and Andrew J. Fletcher, eds. 16th ed. The Merck Manual of
Diagnosis and Therapy (Rahway, New Jersey: Merck Research Laboratories,
1992) 1397.
'Good heavens, the light's bad—I took you for a customer. As if it isn't my old friend Tom Pitkins ... Me and Tom' (he whispers in an aside to the nurse) 'was always going to the races together.'
'Mr Thompson, you are mistaken again.'
'So I am,' he rejoins, not put out for a moment. Why would you be wearing a white coat if you were Tom? You're Hymie, the kosher butcher next door. No bloodstains on your coat though. Business bad today? You'll look like a slaughterhouse by the end of the week!'\footnote{Sacks recounts the sorry tale of William Thompson, a patient whose existence is a whirlwind of "improvisations"; of identifying, mis-identifying, half-identifying himself and others, without actually ever identifying himself or his situation "correctly." Sacks recounts how confidently Mr Thompson shuttles from one "identification" to the next, never stopping to wonder, and never embarrassed by his admitted mistakes. As Sacks states, for Mr Thompson, the world was not a "tissue of ever-changing, evanescent fancies and illusions, but a wholly normal, stable and factual world. So far as he was concerned, there was nothing the matter."} \footnote{Oliver Sacks, "A Matter of Identity," in The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (London: Picador, 1985) 103.}

On one occasion, Mr Thompson went for a day trip, declaring himself "the Reverend William Thompson" at the front desk, ordering a taxi, and spending the day telling the cab-driver a series of fantastic stories about people he had met and places that he had been. On his return, the cab driver was amazed: "I could hardly believe so much was possible in a single life,' he said. 'It is not exactly a single life,' we answered.'\footnote{Oliver Sacks, "A Matter of Identity" 104.} Sack's explanation of Korsakov's syndrome is

\footnote{Oliver Sacks, "A Matter of Identity" 105.}
predicated on the biographical identity of the "normal" human subject.

For Sacks, each of us has biographically based "innermost story" that serves to ground our lives and provide a "a single narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us ....".38 Patients with Korsakov's, however, have had this denied them; Korsakov's, according to Sacks, is an inability to sustain this narrative of personal continuity. It reduces its victims to a delirium, a "shimmering" surface that lacks depth and feeling. And yet, for Sacks, this lack of human depth or feeling is an epistemological issue. Mr Thompson's improvisational frenzy bypasses emotional depth, and thus evades the duality of truth and falsity:

under his fluency, even his frenzy, is a strange loss of feeling—that feeling, or judgement, which distinguishes 'real' and 'unreal', 'true' and 'untrue' (one cannot speak of lies here, only of 'non-truth').39

The last statement of Sacks is a key to understanding his conception of Korsakov's syndrome: by denying Mr Thompson the capacity for "lying," he denies him the capacity for strategy against the neurological institute. Mr Thompson's discourse can only ever be seen thus as a general incommensurability with the symbolic order, never as a force deployed against it. Once again, madness and performance are placed as mutual exclusives. It is like the decision one must make about Hamlet—is he acting or is he mad? It might very well prove, as we shall see, that he is both.

38 Oliver Sacks, "A Matter of Identity" 105.
For Sacks and Luria (Luria was in many ways, Sack's mentor), the most desperate of patients are the ones who are utterly lost to their condition: to paraphrase Foucault, they have somehow lost the capacity to internalise their subjectivity and make it for themselves an object of reflection. In *The Man with a Shattered World*, Luria describes in heroic terms a patient named Zazetsky who is constantly described as a "fighter," a man ever conscious of his state and forever waging a battle against it. Read in other terms, Zazetsky is forever waging a war for *Luria*. For Sacks, Mr Thompson is damned because he doesn't realise that he is damaged. Of course, a specific question begs to be asked: how we *know* that Mr Thompson isn't "aware" of his condition—of his placement in an institution—of his designation as insane, of Sacks' and others' attempts to "cure" him, to proffer him a coherent biography and identity? When Mr Thompson books a cab as The Reverend William Thompson for a day trip, how do we know that he isn't fighting just as hard as our heroic Mr Zazetsky, just for the wrong side, and what's more, using the very presumptions inherent in his prognosis that suggests that he is incapable of performance, that he isn't fighting at all?

**The Non Agency of the Mad: Some Historical Considerations**

In his study *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession and Hypnosis*, Jean-Michel Oughourlian makes the somewhat startling claim that the history of modern psychology might be said to begin with the work of Anton Mesmer.\(^{40}\) It is

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surprising only in that today Mesmer is considered a quasi-scientist at best, a charlatan whose domain was parlour-psychology. And yet his performative "experiments" in "animal magnetism" and "Mesmerism" were starting points for a series of heated polemics which took place between Braid, Charcot, Freud, and Janet, around his ideas and practices. For the purposes of this study, Mesmer is important as he made the idea of involuntarism central to theories of psychosomatics.

It is interesting that the image portrayed of Mesmer is one of the consummate performer. Morton Hunt, in The Story of Psychology, recreates for his readers a characteristically "mesmerising" performance from Anton Mesmer:

It is 1778; we are in a dimly lit, mirror-hung, baroque salon on the Place Vendôme. A dozen elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen sit around a large oak tub, each holding one of a number of metal rods protruding from the tub, which is filled with magnetized iron filings and chemicals. From an adjoining room comes the faint keening of music played on a glass harmonica; after a while the sound dies away, the door opens wider, and slowly and majestically there enters an awesome figure in a flowing, full-length purple robe, carrying a scepterlike iron rod in one hand ... The patients are transfixed and thrilled as Mesmer, stern and formidable with his square-jawed face, long slit of mouth, and beetling eyebrows, stares intently at one man and commands, "Dormez!" The man's eyes close and his head sags onto his chest; the other patients gasp.\footnote{Morton Hunt, The Story of Psychology (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 98.}

Mesmer's chief concern was with the explanation of movement and "attraction," and he admitted that in these areas, his chief inspiration was Isaac Newton; in 1766, he published a thesis on the influence of
planetary movement on the human body. He predicated much of his theory on a notion of Newton's that the body possessed an invisible fluid subject to the influences of planetary gravitation. Addressing this aspect of his thesis, Mesmer explained:

I maintained that just as the alternate effect, in respect of gravity, produce in the sea the appreciable phenomenon which we term ebb and flow, so the INTENSIFICATION AND REMISSION of the said properties, being subject to the action of the same principle, cause in animate bodies alternate effects similar to those sustained by the sea.

Mesmer considered his task as involving a realignment of this fluid so that it was in harmony with the celestial bodies. Further suggesting that this fluid was magnetic rather than gravitational, he named the theory "animal magnetism," and treated very well-to-do people in "clinical" situations similar to the one described above.

By the late eighteenth century, a large-scale investigation into the alleged healing properties of magnets had the effect of confirming what the mainstream medical community of Paris had already thought: Mesmer was something of a charlatan. By the mid nineteenth century, however, mesmerism was undergoing a Renaissance. Braid re-named it "neuro-hypnology" and doctors such as W.S. Ward and John Elliotson began to use it for the purposes of anaesthesia and the treatment of neuroses. The new mesmerism

44 A study of "animal magnetism" was undertaken by Binet and Féré (assistant physician at the Salpêtrière) towards the end of the nineteenth century. See Alfred Binet and Charles Féré, *Animal Magnetism* (New York: D. Appleton, 1888).
had one main characteristic which separated it from the old kind—there were no longer any magnets involved. It might be said, that all that remained was a mesmerising performance.

This "neuro-hypnology" became slowly disentangled from its overtly "magical-mystical" trappings and was re-named "hypnosis." As a medical technique, the status of hypnosis rose towards the end of the nineteenth century through the extensive empirical investigations of Jean-Martin Charcot.46 As a distinguished professor of neurology at the Salpêtrière hospital, Charcot captured the imagination of a French public by staging a series of highly contentious theatrico-medical events based around the hypnotising of "hysterical" mental patients. Charcot's purpose in these displays was to refute the then-popular idea that hysteria was merely a form of "put-on," a performance staged for various reasons, one of them presumably, to engage sympathies with an unsympathetic "other." Instead, Charcot set out to provide evidence for hysteria as a "genuine" pathology.47 He advanced the hypothesis that only hysterical (neurologically ill) patients were capable of being put under hypnosis. In other words, only those who were already debilitated by their condition were amenable to a complete loss of agency:

47 This view was then know as "pathiatism," and its main representative was Joseph Babinski. Babinski believed that hysteria was a disorder ideally cured by persuasion and suggestion: "the reference here is to the theory that hysteria is a feigning or simulation that the patient might be persuaded to give up."


Notice that Charcot's notion of mental illness excludes the idea of performance, the "put on."
Hypnotizability ... appeared to depend on the neuropathic subject, not on the hypnotic suggestions provided by the hypnotist. Charcot accordingly believed that hypnotizability must be a fairly rare phenomenon, like hysteria itself, and that suggestibility in normal waking life was different from the sort of pathological suggestibility found in hypnosis.\textsuperscript{48}

Charcot's supposition—that the hysteric is void of agency—already had considerable precedent. In the middle ages, the Augustinian reading of hysteria's "dramatic symptomatology" had it positioned as a form of demonic possession: the hysteric was none other than a "victim of bewitchment." And yet this conception itself only theologised a form of "gynaecological determinism,"\textsuperscript{49} a conception of the involuntary "wandering womb" (\textit{hysteron}) of classical Greek thought, wreaking havoc with psychological and somatic functions.\textsuperscript{50}

It was only a brief interlude before attempted refutations of Charcot's involuntary notion of the hysteric were challenged. In the mid-nineteenth century, a series of publications such as Wilhelm Griesinger's \textit{Mental Pathology and Therapeutics} and Robert Brudenell Carter's \textit{On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria} suggested an alternate conception of the illness. These described a "hysterical constitution" or "temperament" which distanced it somewhat from a physical aetiology and placed it more in the domain of undesirable personality characteristics, among them

\textsuperscript{48} Sulloway, \textit{Freud, Biologist of the Mind} 44.


"eccentricity," "hypersexuality," and "deceitfulness." In other words, a proclivity for misleading performance.

Charcot took exception to such a conception and instead argued that hysteria was an illness of the central nervous system, more akin to the seizures of epilepsy than a Cartesian "immorality," believing it thoroughly explicable through anatomical pathology. Charcot, however, produced no "theory" of hysteria, and instead carried out his investigations of the illness in the amphitheatre of the Salpêtrière, using hypnosis before an audience as his diagnostic tool. It was, essentially, only the somatic effects of hypnosis that interested Charcot. Like Robert Boyle's experiments involving his pneumatic pump, Charcot refrained from extensive elaborations about these displays, allowing the "matters of fact" speak for themselves. During his amphitheatre lectures, it is reported that he "rarely failed to keep his packed audience spellbound throughout the two hours that he customarily devoted to each major neurological disease." It is ironic, then, that several contemporaries made the charge that Charcot's patients suffered abuse and that the demonstrations themselves were probably staged.

For Charcot, it was the physiological seat of hysteria that gave it its involuntary nature—an "innately predisposed reaction"—which gave the patient over to a series of somatic gratuities

51 Micale, Approaching Hysteria 24.
53 Micale, Approaching Hysteria 24.
54 Sulloway, Freud, Biologist of the Mind 29.
55 Micale, Approaching Hysteria 25.
56 Sulloway, Freud, Biologist of the Mind 46.
evidencing a breakdown in neurological function. And yet, the psychoanalytic conception of hysteria entails that this breakdown, although "anatomical," or "physiological," cannot be located "in" anatomy or physiology: it is a breakdown in function rather than structure.

"Can the Mad come out to Play?"

In Christopher Durang's absurdist comedy "Baby with the Bathwater," a dysfunctional couple—Helen and John—have recently had a baby. In an effort to make the infant act "normally," they resort to various methods of coaxing, coaching, and castigation. The following exchange takes place relatively early in the play:

HELEN. Smile, baby!

BOTH. (Angry:) SMILE! SMILE! SMILE! SMILE!

HELEN. (Pleased.) Oh, John, look, it's smiling.

JOHN. That's right, baby.

HELEN. Do you think it's just pretending to smile to humor us?

JOHN. I think it's too young to be that complicated.

HELEN. Yes, but why would it smile at us when we shouted at it?

JOHN. I don't know. Maybe it's insane.

HELEN. I wonder which it is. Insane, or humoring us?57

John and Helen have to make the same decision that needs to be made about Hamlet. It is the decision that Petruchio has already made about Kate, Oliver Sacks about Mr Thompson, and Eudora Fletcher about Leonard Zelig. Does the child have a mental condition or is it just acting? Is this pathology or strategy? Is it mad or just playing with

us? This chapter has attempted to trouble some of the premises on
which this "decision" is predicated. Perhaps, after all, the mad can
play.

The resonances of the term "play" have strong performative
overtones: a piece of written drama is often referred to as a "play"; to
"play with someone" is to act in a misleading way, unbeknownst to
them; to "play a game" is to enter into a willing suspension of
disbelief in order to posit another possible world with other players;
to "play with language" is to make words and phrases "perform" in
ways not suggested by their usual application. Play incorporates
notions of agency into its etymology: the term's Germanic origins, in
the form of pflegen, means to "have charge of."

In philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein has compared the
operations of language to a "game" where the meaning of a word is
related to a specific usage.58 And yet the term can signify both the
voluntary and the involuntary: to "play with" someone or something
implies volition, to be "played by" something or someone has
resonances with the self-as-automaton. Indeed, Jean-François
Lyotard has utilised Wittgenstein's notion of the "language game" but
has denied that language is a subjective strategy; language instead
plays us.59

The next two chapters will continue the discussion between
performance and agency through the notion of play. They will
attempt to engage with the role of "play" in the philosophical

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58 This compares, as an example, to a game of chess where the "meaning" of each
piece is contingent on its function on the game-board. See Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief, ed. C.
59 Jean-François Lyotard, Just Gaming, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1979) 49-53.
imaginary, and how notions of play help to figure conceptions of reason and truth.
IV. Derrida, Plato, and Play: Tensions in the Philosophical Tradition

'And so it is here, in education, that our Guardians must build their main defences.'

'It is in education that disorder can most easily creep in unobserved,' he replied.

'Yes,' I agreed, 'because people treat it as child's-play ....' —Plato

In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner discusses the inherent volatility of the term "play": the markers distinguishing this term from its "opposites" are by no means stable. The "play" of a "game," for instance, can become "work" when its techniques become a concern for its players; the formalisation of rules and strategies can shift the domain of the "game" from non-serious to serious. Turner offers a similar argument for the notion of "sex." To "play around" is to have illicit sexual encounters. Sex itself is structured in terms of "foreplay" and "play"; the first suggests preparation for play, and the second its actualisation. And yet, even sex can be divided within in itself: there is the "play" of sexual activity, which has also been historically constructed as the more "serious" business of begetting progeny. Modern industrial contraceptive technologies make this last division practically realisable.

For Turner, the division within sex exemplifies the separation of work from play central to modern modes of production and thought. Such a division has marked epistemological consequences: the objective/subjective division may itself prove, in part, to be an "artefact" of the distinction between work and play:

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"work" is held to be the realm of the rational adaptation of means to ends, of "objectivity," while "play" is thought of as divorced from this essentially "objective" realm, and in so far as it is inverse, it is "subjective," free from external constraints, where any and every combination of variable can be "played" with.2

Jacques Derrida's work has strived to articulate the instability of distinctions between the serious and non-serious, between work and play. Derrida has not only been concerned with these distinctions in terms of conceptual efficacy, but also in terms of the way that his writing itself "performs" or "enacts" the problematics of the question. Derrida's analyses cite, imply, and parody concepts, and then turn these thoughts on themselves in order to reflect on the performative nature of theoretical activity. Unsurprisingly, play (jeu) has become a recurring motif of some of Derrida's most influential work.3

The resonances of "play," when applied to Derrida's work do not only attach themselves to a thought directed towards play, but towards a thinking that is disruptively playful. In Derrida's œuvre, "play" not only refers to the notion of the referential undecidability—"free play"—of signification,4 but also to a critical

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4 Derrida's "para-concept" "writing" is heavily associated with an inherent mutability within signification which cannot be "arrested" through appeal to a
moment infused by the ludic, the comic, the playful. Derrida's analyses slide between a number of critical registers, sometimes confusing distinctions between explanation and demonstration: when is Derrida constating (referring to) a "concept" and when is he "performing" its implications?

For speech-act philosophers such as John Searle, the distinction between constative (referential) and performative utterances is to be found through a constative; it is not something enacted within the space of analysis itself. In a critical response to his analysis of J.L. Austin's speech-act theory, Searle writes that Derrida's obvious misunderstanding of Austin owes itself to a "generally mistaken account of the nature of quotation, and ... failure to understand the distinction between use and mention." If it is a "failure," then perhaps it is a strategic failure. It would be preemptive to conclude that Derrida is "unaware" of the use-mention distinction, as it this very distinction that provides his paper with its critical energy. Derrida's "Signature Event Context" does not conflate this distinction, it complicates it. Indeed, he recognises that the very project of conceptuality relies on a logic of either/or, of distinction:

Every concept that lays claim to any rigor whatsoever implies the alternative of "all or nothing." Even if in "reality" or in "experience" everyone believes he knows that there is never "all or nothing," a concept determines itself only according to "all or nothing." Even the concept of "differences of degree," the concept of relativity is, qua

concept, determined according to the logic of all or nothing, of yes and no: differences of degree or nondifference of degree.\(^6\)

The charge of conceptual conflation is one that has been reiterated by a number of critics. Of all of Derrida's most conspicuous detractors, Jürgen Habermas seems least likely to want to play along. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, he contends that Derrida subsumes philosophy within literary criticism. Here we see reiterated Turner's "opposition" between work and "play." Philosophy, like work, is not a recreation, it is the "duty of solving problems." If Derrida's re-figuring of philosophy were to succeed, then the discipline would be denied "not merely ... its seriousness, but ... its productivity."\(^7\) Turner's speculations about the opposition of work/duty/seriousness to play/nonseriousness are exemplified by Habermas' critique of Derrida.

Habermas' Derrida aims not to problematise conceptual oppositions, but to *invert* them, to stand "the primacy of logic over rhetoric, canonized since Aristotle, on its head."\(^8\) He objects to Derrida's failure to accept, prior to analysis, that "rational" discourses are wholly autonomous. To fail to do this is to wind up in the predicament of the liar's paradox: how can one "deconstruct" the authority of reason while employing it in the deconstruction of reason itself?

And yet, Habermas' Derrida is not merely conceptually incoherent—the exhibitor of "performative contradictions"—but also a

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\(^8\) Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse* 187.
jester who refuses to play the games of proper academic analysis. He asserts that Derrida fails to proceed "analytically," to "demonstrate," and to presume heuristic idealisations that transcend all textual formations. For Habermas, Derrida's theorisations are regressions to a pre-Kantian world where religion encroaches upon reason, Enlightenment critique is abandoned in favour of mysticism, and the over-generalisation of the poetic functions of language levels all distinctions between genres of discourse.

The next section will engage with Derrida's notion of "conceptuality" in relation to notions of performance and theatricality. It will attempt to indicate the ways in which Derrida has complicated the function of binary opposition in philosophical discourse, how the "identity" of the concept may be troubled in its self-sufficiency. Derrida's analyses attempt neither a neutralisation of binaries nor are they content to reside wholly within their "closed field." It is a performative philosophy, in Schechner's sense, insofar as it introduces a factor of distanciation: it "watches" concepts "act" during their deployment (iteration), and modifies them according to this action. Like performance, situated between script and action, Derrida's work is a "double-writing" (double séance).

Derrida has not only emphasised the necessity of opposition in concept formation, but also the way in which conceptual pairs have both a privileged and a divested term: "we are not dealing with peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) ..." Just in the way Turner has indicated that in

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9 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse 189-99.
industrial society, "play" is both opposed to and divested by "work,". Derrida's work points to the structure of these hierarchies within philosophical discourse. These are hierarchies that, as we will see, often betray philosophy's anxieties towards the theatrical.

The Philosopher "Actor": "Plato's Pharmacy" and the Phaedrus

In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida attempts to think through the logic of Plato's Phaedrus and in so doing, examines some of the problematics of the roles writing, representation, play, tradition, and translation have had in the history of metaphysics. In the Phaedrus, Socrates utilises the Egyptian myth of Thoth in order to demonstrate to Lysias the ethical and epistemological hazards of writing.\(^{11}\) The story is told that the King of Egypt, Thamus, was approached by the God Thoth (sometimes referred to as Theuth or Tehuti) in order that his many inventions—among them astronomy, writing, draughts and dice—be exhibited. Thamus examines each of Thoth's inventions one by one and offers comments and evaluations of each. When it comes to writing, Thoth declares: "Here is an accomplishment, my lord the king, which will improve both the wisdom and the memory of the Egyptians."\(^{12}\)

The king's response, however, is unfavourable. He believes that far from providing a new basis for wisdom and knowledge, writing may only serve to cripple the memories of his people and disrupt the faithful transition of knowledge:

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\(^{11}\) The Greek "equivalent" of Thoth is Hermes.

Those who acquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have a reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant.\textsuperscript{13}

The King construes writing as an inferior knowledge because it substitutes knowledge-as-memory for nonknowledge-as-inscription. Writing is not knowledge, but its simulation. What writing introduces, in other words, is epistemological conceit: it substitutes the intellectual with the \textit{actor}. What seems at stake in Socrates' rigorous logic of exclusion is the difference between a living knowledge and the mere recitation of a \textit{script}. Derrida argues that the rhetorical function of the Sophist, as the Other of knowledge, closely aligns it to pretence and simulation. The Sophist does not present true science, but only the signs of science; not philosophy, but a miming of philosophy; not knowledge, but only the superficial \textit{performance} of knowledge. In other words, Platonic epistemology is strictly tied to an exclusion of the theatrical. Derrida suggests:

In truth, the sophist only pretends to know everything; his "polymathy" ... is never anything but pretense. Insofar as writing \textit{lends a hand} to hypomnesia and not to live memory, it, too, is foreign to true science, to anamnesia in its properly psychic motion, to \textit{truth} in the process of (its) presentation, to dialectics. Writing can only \textit{mime} them .... What Plato is attacking in sophistics, therefore, is not simply recourse to memory but, within such recourse, the substitution of the mnemonic device for live memory ... the perversion of

\textsuperscript{13} Plato, \textit{Phaedrus} (Section 275).
substituting the passive, mechanical "by-heart" for the active reanimation of knowledge, for its reproduction in the present.¹⁴

The Sophist is a "mime" is only rehearsing lines; he is evidently *playing* at being a subject-who-knows. The Socratic strategy of convincing the Sophists that they in fact do not really know what they claim to know can be conceived as epistemological unmasking, of perceiving and disclosing the actor hidden behind an exterior. Some Sophists, Socrates laments, may even have come to believe in their "performance." Philosophical activity necessitates such unmaskings. Platonism requires the philosopher to be continually on guard against the "sham," including the danger of becoming one: the path towards truth requires pursuit "at all costs on pain of becoming an imposter and being excluded from true philosophy."¹⁵

The philosophical imposter is one who resembles a philosopher, "bears their marks," but is an actor. But the connections between sophistry and performance are not based solely on metaphorical happenstance. There is an epistemological morphology that accords them equi-resonance on the basis of their relationship to simulation: they are both at the same remove the Real. The Real, for Plato, is the realm of ideal types. Plato's metaphysics (like his "psychology") is fiercely dualistic: he contrasts a sensible world of appearances to an ideal realm of unchanging "Forms." The Forms are the origin and perfection of what exist as their concrete "occasions" in the world. The Forms, in other words, represent an ontological scheme that binds mental conception (*idea*) with perfection (*ideal*).

The body's materiality (its absence of ideality) links it with a perversion of the Real. And yet, there is a strange instability in Plato's attempts to effect a radical distinction between inner and outer, between mind (the realm of the idea), and matter. How is it that the mere performance of sophistry, its externalisation, should be *internalised* and become a "belief," a concept, which is held in the mind of the "actor"? And what happens to the Sophist's status as "actor" when their beliefs and actions are not divided by disingenuousness? If Sophists genuinely believe that they are "lovers of wisdom," how can their identity be disassociated from the philosopher? If Sophists "simulate," what is it that they're *simulating*?

However, it would be wrong to see these complications as a "contradiction," as an erroneous elaboration of a basic metaphysical scheme: the "original" instability of the integrity of these oppositions is necessary to Platonism's internal logic. The divestment of the performative is not an incoherent "addition" to Platonic metaphysics, it is an *aporia* that resides within the conceptual structure that supplies Platonism with its intelligibility.

It is no coincidence that the discussion of Plato's metaphysics in *The Republic* is integrated into his theory of art. In the section discussing the realm of the Forms, Plato argues that the craftsman, in constructing a bed, does not make "what a bed really is," but rather something that "*resembles* 'what is' without *being* it."16 The craftsman's products stand as poor copies of the real, "actually existing" bed, which resides in the realm of the Forms. Consequently, the artist's representations stand one rung below the craftsman, at a

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"third remove from reality." Like the Sophist, the tragedian is involved in a kind of epistemological counterfeit, offering appearances for reality: copies of copies that masquerade as origins.

The congruencies between notions of "truth" and "origin" are borne out in the Greek proverb "the beginning is everything." In his prescriptions on education, Plato suggests that "the first step, you know, is always what matters most." As the "first step" of reality, the Forms render artistic mimesis the ally of Sophistry, convincing through engaging the passions and an adept use of rhetoric. In discussing the negative influence of the Sophists on the young, Plato reports Socrates as arguing that perhaps the danger lies not so much with individual Sophists, but that Sophistry is nothing other than a form of overtly theatricalised pedagogy:

"Can the influence of individual Sophists really corrupt them to any extent? Isn't it really the public who say this who are themselves Sophists on a grand scale, and give a complete training to young and old, men and women, turning them into just the sort of people they want?"

"When do they do that?" he asked.

"When they crowd into the seats in the assembly of law courts or theatre, or get together in camp or any other popular meeting place, and, with a great deal of noise and a great lack of moderation, shout and clap their approval or disapproval of whatever is proposed or done, till the rocks and the whole place re-echo, and redouble the noise of their boos and applause .... Won't he be swamped by the flood of popular praise and blame, and carried away with the stream till he finds himself agreeing with popular ideas of what is admirable or disgraceful, behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them?"

Although the other arts engage the passions and have the potential to convince people of their reality, only theatre can enter so completely and surreptitiously into the public arena: through law, politics, and philosophy, the actor can make an entrance entirely undetected. Epistemologically, theatre is perhaps the most base of all arts because, although painting and sculpture present themselves as imitations of imitations, only theatre stands as wholly dependent on temporality, another antithesis to the immaterial and atemporal word of the Ideas. Where performance is a process and can only operate on contingencies, "eternal reality" is "the realm unaffected by the vicissitudes of change and decay."

In *The Republic*, such "vicissitudes" are no better exemplified than in "role play." In the ideal state, each person would be restricted to a single vocation. An occupation is, again, an integration of the real with the ideal, of epistemology and axiology: one should have only one vocation as that is what one both *is*, one's *telos*, and also *should be*, one's obligation. A discussion between Plato, Socrates, and Adeimantus on the role of dramatic poetry in education becomes a consideration of how any "division of effort" cannot but be a poor substitute for specialisation. Social and professional stratification guarantee the efficiency of the state via a recognition that each person, through natural inheritance, is capable of only one task.

'I suspect, he replied, 'that you are wondering whether we should allow tragedy and comedy in our state or not.'

'Maybe,' I replied, 'or maybe the question is more far-reaching. I don't know yet; we must go where the wind of the argument carries us.'

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Needless to say, the "wind of the argument" carries the interlocutors from a discussion of the role of dramatic poetry in the state to the question of whether members of the state are capable of "role-play":

'But perhaps you will say that it is unsuitable for our state, because there one man does one job and does not play two or a multiplicity of roles.'

'It certainly is unsuitable.'

'And so ours is the only state in which we shall find (for example) the shoemaker sticking to his shoemaking and not turning pilot as well, the farmer sticking to his farming and not taking on court work into the bargain, and the soldier sticking to his soldiering and not running a business as well, and so on?'

'Yes.\(^{22}\)

Socrates then suggests that if the ideal state were to be visited by a person who has the ability to "transform himself into all sorts of characters," he should first be treated with due reverence and respect, and then sent on his way. Such a person not only lacks ideality, they also lack reality. Later in The Republic, the suggestion is made that such a person could not possibly exist; that someone who purports to be able to play all roles is quite literally an actor, a fake, an imposter: "When someone tells us that he has met someone who is a master of every craft ... we must answer that he is a simple-minded fellow who seems to be have taken in by the work of a charlatan." Plato offers us an unstable characterisation of the "philosopher actor's" relationship to reality: because they threaten the Republic, they are real; because such people couldn't exist, they have no being. The only way that Plato is able to save this hypothesis is by predicating their falsity on the "genuine" quality of their self-belief:

\(^{22}\) Plato, The Republic (Part III, Book 3, 397d).
the charlatan's "apparent omniscience is due entirely to his own ability to distinguish knowledge, ignorance, and representation."\textsuperscript{23}

The epistemological spectre harboured by the threat of multiplicity of identity, of the dangers to knowledge inherent in "role-play," finds no better exemplification than in the convoluted figure of Thoth: the God of writing invoked by "Socrates" in the \textit{Phaedrus}. Lewis Spence tells us that this "highly composite deity" is the counter of the stars, the measurer of earth, the moon god, the lord of books, and scribe of gods; he is the inventor of astronomy and astrology, mathematics, geometry and medicine. His physical identities are also characteristically diverse: he is sometimes represented with the head of an ibis, other times in the shape of a bird, and still at other times as a dog-headed ape. Thoth's eye signifies the full moon, but also the left eye of Ra (whose eyes apparently signify the sun at mid-day), or alternatively the cold half of the year. And yet, does even the word "Thoth" provide a centre for these divergences? This "figure" has gone under the names of Thoth, Theuth, Aah-Tehuti, Trismegistos, and Hermes the Thrice Great.\textsuperscript{24}

Derrida argues in "Plato's Pharmacy" that it is perhaps this very mutability, this undecidability, that itself provides Thoth with his mythical function, perhaps even a certain kind of "identity":

No doubt the god Thoth had several faces, belonged to several eras, lived in several homes. The discordant tangle of mythological accounts in which he is caught should not be neglected. Nevertheless, certain constraints can be distinguished throughout, drawn in broad letters with firm strokes. One would be tempted to say that these constitute the permanent identity of this god in the pantheon, if his function, as

\textsuperscript{23} Plato, \textit{The Republic} (Part X, Book X, 598d).

we shall see, were not precisely to work at the subversive dislocation of identity in general.\textsuperscript{25}

Thoth's proclivity for this "dislocation of identity" appears by virtue of his capacity for doubling, for simulation. Thoth, it seems, is an actor who can appear and substitute for other characters. At the going down of the sun, Thoth, appearing as the moon-god, takes its place; and yet the moon is not an equal of the sun, but only its replacement, its subordinate. He approaches at being a tautology: he is the substitution of a replacement. At various points, Thoth is co-conspirator of Seth in the murder of Seth's father, Osiris, and then becomes an accomplice of Horus in avenging Osiris' death. His facility for sliding between roles and substituting for other characters makes him the consummate threat to the Republic, to philosophy, to identity-in-general. And yet Thoth has an identity. He is identical to himself: he is a substitute of a replacement, a replacement of a substitute.\textsuperscript{26}

He is the actor, the imposter, who is only capable of being a supplement. Like the shadows cast by distant figures in Plato's myth of the cave, Thoth would seem to suggest a realm of "pure" simulacra, if simulacra were not the very unmaking of purity. Thoth is "never quite" real, and for that reason he is also dangerous. It is not Thoth perceived as an "identity," a "knowability" that he is dangerous, but rather his unknowability, his indifference to identity. He has mastered the deceptive performance, the masquerade, and thus people can always mistake him for the Real. He is able, in the words

\textsuperscript{25} Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 86.

\textsuperscript{26} The law of identity entails the feature of "symmetry": that \(a=b\) is the same as \(b=a\).
of Socrates, to "transform himself into all sorts of characters." And yet, the "himself" here is indistinguishable from its "transformations." Derrida argues that Thoth functions:

As a substitute capable of doubling for the king, the father, the sun, and the word, distinguished from these only by dint of representing, repeating and masquerading, Thoth was naturally also capable of totally supplanting them and appropriating all their attributes.27

He is a conceptual personae akin to the Sophist, one who can act the philosopher and convince an audience that he is, but in actual fact is "a sham," who should forever be "excluded from true philosophy."28 It is through a kind of rigorous necessity, then, that Plato's argument requires the mythical figure of Thoth: it is through his logic of substitution and continual masquerade that Thoth represents the vain attempt to take the place of speech by supplanting it with writing. Thoth substitutes the presence of true memory with the disingenuous recitation of a script.

In the Phaedrus, Derrida detects a gesture that is, in a restricted sense, philosophy's "inaugural" moment. It is not that the Phaedrus represents philosophy's point of conception as an historical unity, but rather that it exemplifies the impetus towards inauguration itself, towards pure origin, as the discipline's perennial gesture. And yet Derrida sets about showing how Plato's attempts to fix an origin for truth in speech becomes involved in a series of textual complications that Plato can neither predict or control. Plato's logic of exclusion cannot accomplish what it sets out to do because it is already contaminated by what it hopes to divest: although speech is

27 Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 90.
supposed to be the guarantor of philosophical truth, Plato must continually write this fact down; although mythos must be abandoned for logos, Plato invokes the myth of Thoth in order to establish his point. In other words, Derrida's point is that although Platonism predicates itself on certain exclusions, these exclusions are integral to its functioning.

Modes of Exclusion: Philosophical Purity and Theatricality

In The Philosophical Imaginary, Michèle Le Doeuff argues convincingly that philosophy's self image is constituted by an irresolute opposition to the mythical, the poetic, and the fabulous. And yet, she argues that if one goes in search of such a "pure" philosophy in the canon, one will come away empty handed: one will return with a collection of "comedies, tragedies ... clocks, horses, donkeys and even a lion."²⁹ Le Doeuff argues that if one were to write a history of philosophical imagery, it would be doubtful as to whether it would be received as a "history of philosophy," despite the omnipresence of imagery in the philosophical text. Like Plato's invocation of Thoth, the image is considered extrinsic to the work. In other words, Le Doeuff suggests that the identity of philosophy is constituted by the image at the very moment that it attempts to repudiate it.

For Le Doeuff, the location of the image in the philosophical text locates the primary lines of tension in a work, the neuralgia, the sensitive or difficult points that the deployment of the image attempts to suppress or bypass. The image thus works for and against

the philosophical project. It works for it by glossing over lacunae in
the "pure reason" of the text. Images may function as a kind of
philosophical self-promotion that the educated reader can always
pass over without critical objections, because it is accepted that such
images are extraneous to the logic of the work. The way that this
"impurity" in the philosophical work is accounted for by the
discipline is through a projection of the necessity of the image onto
an imagined Other. One way that this is done is the positioning of the
image as a pedagogic or didactic device, a bridge used for getting the
philosophical neophyte onto the other side of pure reason. The
image, thus, is thought to "illustrate" or translate a pure
philosophical content for the purposes of education. And yet, the
image can also work against the philosophical work by being an
aspect of it that is incompatible with the broader project. This is often
what provides deconstruction with its objects of analysis.

For Le Doeuff, the philosophical imaginary is constituted by its
self-concept as meta-theory: that it possesses theoretical mastery
over itself and is also in a position to judge the validity of other areas
of knowledge. Philosophy is imbued with the idea of its absolute
purity, its self-presence and autonomy, all the while surreptitiously
invoking reason's "Other" in order to sustain the imagined self-
sufficiency of the Concept. Le Doeuff finds the image of the island
often deployed in philosophical texts (for instance, in Bacon's
Temporis Partus Maximus and Kant's Critique of Pure Reason) as a
symbol of philosophy's independence. In another essay, Le Doeuff

31 There are resonances between Le Doeuff's notion of the philosophical
imaginary as predicated on a certain idea of "bodily integrity" of the discipline
(1989: 13) and Jacques Lacan's theorisation of the mirror stage in which the
argues that philosophy is intrinsically nervous and "fundamentally concerned with the question of its frontiers, borders, or limits, its difference with everything else."32

Purity and Theatricality

In this way, the philosophical imaginary could also be read in terms of a hostile attitude towards the *theatrical*. As a logical successor to Clement Greenberg's idea that art is the continual search for its own "essence,"33 Michael Fried, in his essay "Art and Objecthood," launches a critique of minimalist art for what he suggests is its inherent theatricality. For Fried, theatricality is a state of impurity, of an artefact's intrinsic interdependence on extra-


32 Michèle Le Doeuff "Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders,"

Philosophers are forever claiming to have discovered methods which are presuppositionless, or perfectly rigourous, or transcendental, or at any rate purer than those of nonphilosophers ... Philosophers who betray this gnostic ideal (like Kierkegaard and Dewey, for example) are often discovered not to have been "real philosophers." in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Essays: 1972-1980) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 19.

artistic factors. In this sense, Fried is correct. Theatre is a divided art form: it resides neither in its scripting nor in any single performance; it exists only at the occasions of its appearance. What troubles Fried so much about minimalist art is that it situates itself as neither painting nor sculpture, it is self-conscious of the contexts of its reception, and it is aware of its extension in time. In other words, minimalism exemplifies impurity; it is always divided within itself.

It is for these reasons that Fried has infamously argued that the "success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre." Theatre poses dangers for Greenberg and Fried's ideal of absorbed presence: the contamination of the work of art through "theatricality" displaces its purported self-identity. There are obvious resonances here with Le Doeuff's arguments about philosophy's attempts to figure itself as wholly autonomous and Derrida's para-concept différence: both point to philosophy's anxieties about the theatrical, its reliance on that which is, by definition, outside itself (the myth, the image, the fable, the concrete), its epistemological disdain of the temporal in favour of the atemporal, and its proclaimed reticence to entertain an "audience."

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35 Fried, "Art and Objecthood" 139.
Playing with Philosophy

Expressing a sentiment of perhaps wide currency, Newton Garver asserts in his preface to *Speech and Phenomena*, that Derrida is continually "willing to risk equivocation for the sake of a pun." That Garver asserts Derrida is "willing to risk" equivocation is significant insofar as it infers equivocality operates as a contingency that is entered into through an act of willing, rather than an *a priori* condition of all discourse. It might perhaps be more useful—at least for the purposes of the following discussion—to invert Garver's assertion and suggest that Derrida is continually willing to risk punning for the sake of equivocation (if equivocation is, in fact, a kind of Derridean "thesis"). To what degree might "equivocation" be construed as an epistemological strategy?

It is important to note that in his analysis of the *Phaedrus*, the equivocation doesn't lie with Derrida, but with Plato himself. Derrida chooses to follow the play of pharmaceutical terminology that Plato invokes in his discussion of writing. When Theuth presents his gift of writing to the king, the king describes it as a *pharmakon*. The Greek term *pharmakon*, according to Derrida, cannot be rendered unambiguous: it means both "poison" and "cure." It is strictly undecidable as to which of these meanings Plato is referring at different points in the text. As a result, Derrida asks whether the question of meaning can be tied to the intentionality of the speaking subject.

The equivocality of the term *pharmakon* raises crucial issues of translation. However it is not just an issue of the translation of

Greek into English (alternate translations of the *Phaedrus* vary considerably as to where they render pharmakon "poison" and where they render it "cure") but rather the translation of Greek into itself. It is this semantic slippage or play which philosophy attempts to stabilise or eliminate through its divestment of "writing," but which nonetheless is there with the birth of the concept: the attempt to suppress the equivocality of the sign is "the very passage into philosophy."³⁷

What connects this suppression of equivocality to theatricality is exemplified by the figure of Thoth. He is both the god of writing and also the god of play. He threatens identity through his capacity for substitution—he is the consummate actor—and through this "identity," his mutability, represents a disruption of the concept. His disruptive identity is not marked by his difference from an origin, but rather by his *indifference* to one. Put simply, Thoth cannot be told apart from the "real" because of his capacity to always *become it*.

Thoth is opposed to its other ... but as that which at once supplements and supplants it. Thoth extends or opposes by repeating or replacing. By the same token, the figure of Thoth takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for .... He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguér and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play .... He would be the mediating movement of dialectics if he did not also mimic it, indefinitely preventing it, through his ironic doubling, from reaching some final fulfilment or eschatological reappropriation.³⁸

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³⁷ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 72.
³⁸ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 92-3.
It might seem then, that if equivocality inheres in the philosophical text as neuralgic loci in its conceptual structure, any text attempting to engage with this feature might stand to benefit from a consideration of some of its own slippages. Derrida attempts to do this by drawing attention to the ambiguities of key philosophical terms in a text, and by directing attention to such terms in his own texts. As a critical strategy, this technique—of examining equivocality, and at the same time self-consciously performing it—has raised the ire of several critics.

The War on Play

Derrida's displays, which "play"—both constate and perform—with notions of equivocality, have prompted the scorn of some "serious" linguists. Noam Chomsky, in a summary assessment of modern French thought, refers to Jacques Lacan and Derrida as "infantile and ridiculous."39 For Chomsky, both of these thinkers exemplify "the peculiar and Dadaist character of certain currents of intellectual life in postwar France which turns rational discourse into a bizarre and incomprehensible pastime."40 Note again, that the serious intellectual must be engaged in "work." The application of the trope "infantile" associates contemporary French thought with the cognitive and ethical strategies of the immature—the "unproductive" caste—whose poor command, and/or deliberate obfuscation of the

40 Chomsky, _Language and Politics_ 309.
elementary conventions of analytic discourse render their texts opaque and below "serious" merit.41

The milieu of the "playing juvenile," however, is not only to be associated with the cultural climate (and adult philosophers) of continental Europe. Play has long insinuated itself in arts pedagogy. The Rousseauistic declarations of early educational drama, found in the work of theorists such as Brian Way and Peter Slade, championed dramatic play as the cognitive method most appropriate for the child. The paedocentric theories of "art as self-expression," which provided a telos for progressivist aesthetics, eschewed "adult" theatre in favour of a child drama, a process play, which was ostensibly the heuristic tool most "natural" to them: "Play is the child's way of thinking, proving, relaxing, working, remembering, daring, testing, creating and absorbing. Except for the actual physical processes, it is life."42 There are resonances here with Le Doeuff's notion of the image as a pedagogical device, used to initiate apprentice philosophers into the thought of the profession. With play thus established and perhaps delimited as the intellectual œuvre of the child, it would seem then, that the adult—let alone the philosophising adult—who engages in play seems to parade an embarrassing state of arrested development.

However, for all the privileging that the activity of play receives in Way and Slade's work, its locus remains somewhat vague and problematic. In remaining consistent with the broader tenets of Romanticism, play is construed simply as what a child does

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41 In Greek, both play (paidia) and education (paideia) concern children (paides).
"naturally" and the task of the pedagogue is to facilitate the unfolding of dramatic exploration. The child-subject, as ontologically prior to the symbolic contaminations of the adult world, plays, so that she or he can "naturally unfold out of their own uncorrupted nature." The notion of "play" is somewhat convoluted: it functions as the ideal heuristic "safehouse," and yet is epistemologically naïve (it is not the "real" world); it acts as an experiential confirmation or "proof" of what has been learnt and an articulation of an autonomous creative self, and is supposedly unsupplemented/originary; it is "natural" and somehow also needs to be induced and guided by a teacher.

The indeterminacy of reference and the structural/thematic importance of play that characterised the early theories of educational drama, is also evident in the work of Derrida. Indeed, the term itself seems an exemplar of the indeterminacy that supposedly characterises reference: the Derridean employment of "play" blurs notions of the commutability of signification (the movement of "supplementarity"), intentional and unintentional modulations of textual register (uses of irony, citations, "constative" utterances, etc.), of the chance/necessity of the performative act, the disruption of conceptual oppositions, and lastly (perhaps) the jouissance of the polysemous text.

Although Peter Slade never seemed explicitly concerned with questions of jouissance, he did endorse a certain kind of plaisir. When asked for the aims of his "child drama," he replied simply that the shortest answer was "a happy and balanced individual."44

However, play, it would seem, has never pleased everyone. Apparently not even the children. David Hornbrook has targeted both the process/play and socio-cultural\textsuperscript{45} models of drama-in-education as being severely "limited by an inheritance of psycholinguistic and phenomenological ontologies" which necessarily preclude student access to the symbolic forms of "the lexicon of ... culture"\textsuperscript{46} and the "narratives of our historical consciousness."\textsuperscript{47} For Hornbrook, "play" leaves children aesthetically illiterate and critically mute. Perhaps play is an illiteracy, a frivolous nonengagement, a nonlearning, a pedagogic tool best left to species left standing (or crawling) on the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder.

In "Structure, Sign, and Play"—which contains some of Derrida's most flamboyant writing—Derrida speaks of an "event" in the history of the concept of structure. This event is the realisation that the philosophical concept has always been predicated on an identity, a presence, which functions to both open and limit the play of its structure. The "unthinkable" element of this event is the realisation that the "centre" of a structure, although it works to regulate the play of its elements, is not properly \textit{inside} the structure: the concept can formalise the logical and syntactic rules which a certain discourse must obey, but cannot itself be regulated within that structurality.\textsuperscript{48} The concept itself, plays: it is neither wholly

\textsuperscript{45} Normally associated with the theories of Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote.

\textsuperscript{46} David Hornbrook, \textit{Education and Dramatic Art} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 87, 96.

\textsuperscript{47} Hornbrook, qtd. in Abbs, \textit{The Educational Imperative} 136.

\textsuperscript{48} There are perhaps connections to be made between Derrida's notion of a structure whose centre escapes structurality and mathematician Kurt Gödel's
"within" the structure nor wholly "outside" it. Ideally, play should be thought as prior to the option of "within," or "outside," between presence and absence.

Derrida illustrates two reactions to the "event." The first reacts to the absence of centre as a loss, with a nostalgia for lost origins. The other derives from the thought of Nietzsche. It involves:

the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.

This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center. And it plays without security.49

Although Derrida, in this passage, invokes Nietzsche without deploying him, some have taken this as Derrida's actual response to the "terrifying form of monstrosity" that destabilises the concept. In philosophy, the spectre of play precipitates metaphysical and existential chaos; there is no fun in games at all when the distinction between play and work becomes undecidable. Some critics have latched onto the phrase "plays of absence" and have taken it to imply an utter derealisation of reality, an ontological vacuum, which leaves nothing in its wake. Play "produces" (a) nothing. In the face of these supposed "un-sayings,"50 Gertrude Himmelfarb seizes Derrida's expression "the abyss" and speaks sternly of the perils of gazing into its dark recesses. It is this stark encountering of the "abyss of play"

contention that it is impossible to prove the consistency of a formal system within that system itself.


50 "Play is the ultimate well-spring of un-saying." (George Steiner, Real Presences: Is there Anything in What we Say? (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 131.)
that, apparently, only Paul De Man has survived; he is, David Lehman suggests, "the only man who even looked into the abyss and came away smiling."\textsuperscript{51} However, one wonders whether it is actually the abyss, and not the grin itself that unsettles Lehman or Himmelfarb. Philosophy stands as an enterprise predicated on "serious" "work."

In Book Three of The Republic, Socrates warns his interlocutor of the grave dangers of unrestrained humour in the polis. Anything that depicts the Gods or heads of state in fits of laughter has no place in the society ruled by the philosopher-king:

'And surely we don't want our guardians to be too fond of laughter either. Indulgence in violent laughter commonly invites a violent reaction.'
'I have noticed that,' he said.
'We must not therefore allow descriptions of reputable characters being overcome by laughter. And similar descriptions of gods are far less allowable.'
'Far less, I agree.'\textsuperscript{52}

The will to smile and conceptualise simultaneously, it seems, somehow frames de Man as the consummate deconstructionist. He is not only the critic who can navigate us through the "non-theories" of textual nihilism, but also the literary adept who can delight in the levities and freedoms of slippage. The Derridean transformation of Heidegger's "ontological difference" into "différance," which results

\textsuperscript{52} Plato, The Republic (Part III, Book III, 388e).
in a destabilisation of *archia* seems to invite an unmitigated Will to Play.\(^5\)

It is precisely this affirmation that "determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center," that signifies for some a radical departure from philosophical and cultural modernism. The era of the intellectual raconteur has arrived, and the witticisms are not only an adjunct to "his" theories; the displays of performative showmanship, its "gymnastics" and its "contortions," are actually what produce its analytic results:

the critic can elicit the puns, double entendres, paradoxes, ambiguities, and antitheses that testify to the intrinsic 'aporia' of language, the infinite play of *différance*... By such verbal gymnastics, the critic can engage in the most elaborate contortions and produce the most startling effects, unrestrained by anything but the limits of his own wit and audacity.\(^6\)

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**Play: from Nostalgia to Affirmation**

The "postmodern turn" itself has often been identified as entailing a particular temperament, rather than the deployment or refinement of any particular series of arguments. Although Jeffrey Nealon has persuasively argued against any easy assimilation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* into the modernist catalogue—on account of Lucky's disruption and transgression of conceptual thought—it is modernist in that it exemplifies a loss and not merely a negation of transcendence. Nealon argues that postmodernism's

\(^5\) Derrida interprets "*archia*" as a token of presence, and thus this decentring could be extended to other metaphysical representations of centred structure, such as *eidos*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia*, and *aletheia*.

"affirmation of a noncentred world ... rejection of the grand Narratives ... celebration of play ... is what most sharply separates the postmodern from the modern."55 The propensity for lamentation directed towards that "phantom of grammar," Godot, effectively prevents Vladimir and Estragon from achieving a "deconstructive breakthrough," the psychological transformation which refuses to see absence as loss. For Nealon, nostalgia and discourses of regret become the stumbling blocks for the liberating play of "the postmodern condition."

Godot seems peculiar, if only because his ontological status is instantiated solely through repeated reference; he is like the "imaginary friend" of the child. It is not Vladimir and Estragon, but their language that "owns" Godot: Estragon himself admits that waiting for Godot simply involves "blathering about nothing in particular." He is a Wittgensteinian Lebensform trapped in a "language game" whose material absence, it seems, actually serves to exaggerate his discursive presence. As George Steiner notes, it is "precisely that absence which the sign stands for, which makes the sign functional."56 Nealon's Vladimir and Estragon—as "modernists"—refuse the Derridean affirmation that "determines the noncenter otherwise than as a loss of the center."57 As the last remains of a bygone metaphysic, Godot becomes another lamented dinosaur within discourse, a figure of speech which has become eroded: a "phantom of grammar."58

56 Steiner, Real Presences 121-2.
57 Derrida, Structure, Sign and Play 292. And yet, is Derrida or Nietzsche the author of this "affirmation"?
58 Steiner, Real Presences 3.
The bond that ties Vladimir and Estragon—their tie being a spatial one, an inability to leave—is one of waiting for an appearance, a presence. And it is the reliance on this game that dooms Vladimir and Estragon to a playing at which they can only lose. Their melancholia finds its energy in their fated wait for an "appearance," not quite realising that that is all they have ever had. They do not realise that in the "absence of transcendence, interiority and depth give way to a labyrinthine play of surfaces. When nostalgia is gone and waiting is over, one can delight in the superficiality of appearances." Thus, Vladimir and Estragon's "play" is without delight and without heresy, perhaps without the delights of heresy. They are allowed to play in, but not with metaphysical parameters, and Lucky, as a kind of pre-Derridean envoy, is severely punished for doing so: he is a disturber of the peace (piece) insofar as his monologue appears to "recite" philosophical jargon without championing any thesis. It is thought without a definable limit, but this also raises the question: is it simply nonsense? Or if it is, is nonsense quite so simple? Lucky does not seem very lucky in the context of Waiting for Godot, and if Lucky is Derrida's envoy, it might be asked if Jacques Derrida is any luckier?

59 This has also associated Beckett with a kind of Sartrean existentialism, ala. Huis clos.

60 Nealon, Samuel Beckett and the Postmodern 522-3.

61 Mark C. Taylor, Erring: A Postmodern Atheology (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 16. Although Taylor is deliberately inverting conceptual pairs (from depth to surface, etc.) to re-open space for theological discourse, Derrida argues that the necessary divestment of the privileged term (in this case, depth) needs to not only be encountered, but passed through if the conceptual oppositions are to be displaced, and not merely inverted. Inversion, although 'revolutionary', remains an act of preservation.
To make issues more historically concrete, is his nonsense (if it is such) worth an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University?

"Professor Barry Smith and others" (the opening signature to a letter to the London Times, May 9, 1992) do not seem to have thought so. In a protest letter that hoped to "throw some needed light on the public debate" surrounding Derrida's proposed receiving of a honorary doctorate from Cambridge University, Professor Smith (and "others") contended that Derrida's work did "not meet the accepted standards of clarity and rigour," whose writings "seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes," their author having made a "career out of ... translating into the academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or of the concrete poets." The problem seemed not that Derrida's work was bad philosophy or even that it was not philosophy, but that it was not quite philosophy. As the protest party note: "his writings do indeed bear some of the marks of writings in that discipline." Is this the reason that the protest group accuses Derrida of not being unintelligible, but "semi-intelligible"? And if Derrida is not a philosopher (despite receiving the honorary degree, and also describing himself as such) but also not not a philosopher, what or who is he? Just lucky?

Luck would seem—at least for the moment—to be out of the question. Philosophy and "natural language" do not exclude each


63 Qtd. in Derrida, "Honoris Causa" 420.

64 Qtd. in Derrida, "Honoris Causa" 419.

65 Derrida, "Honoris Causa" 420. Interestingly enough, as Derrida points out in an interview, the protest letter claims that his writings both "defy comprehension" and are "false" or "trivial." (404)
other; philosophy uses and refigures natural language, whose terms it "plunges in order to gather them up and to make them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement."66 These "metaphorical displacements" then often seep back into the natural language through the "successes" of the philosophy. Its interactions with natural language mean that philosophical language cannot be strictly formalised, nor, can it be wholly "abjured" from. Languages whose formation took from Greek notions such as reason (nous), form (morphe), thought (logos), goal (telos), or substance (ousia) are partially structured by the conceptual matrices that these terms figure.

That Derrida somehow—like the Sophist—seems to "bear the marks" of a philosopher plunges him into an institutionally and epistemologically interesting interstitial space. If Derrida is a "performer," and performance is revealed to be an epistemological strategy, then it also might be asked whether or not more conventional modes of "theatrical" performance are in some ways "analytic." The problematics of this relationship, between performance and epistemology (and more broadly situated, between axiology and epistemology), are at least as old as the Platonic dialogues, and quite possibly as old as Aristophanean comedy. The tensions in this relationship have not only been taken up in philosophical texts, but also literally "taken to the stage."

In the first chapter, we saw how experimental science requires its concrete exemplars: the success of empirical inquiry relies as much on corporeal calibration as it does the calibration of equipment. Boyle's and Galileo's programs required audiences,

66 Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play" 278.
"actions," and specific kinds of subjects who were "supposed to know," savants who could freely "hypothesise." Seventeenth century experimental science relied on a kind of mimetic reproduction that I dubbed an "aesthetiquette": a kind of performance that allowed the experimental scientist to possess agency in the theatres of scientific contests.

In the second chapter, the question of agency was taken up again, but this time to discuss the complicities between performance, ontology and epistemology. It discussed the notion of "materialisation" in terms of performative action. Substance (morphe) is as much a result of physical recitation as it is of discursive representation. The work of Judith Butler and Stelarc were discussed in relation to how performance can figure as a locus at which given formulations of the body's material configurations can be contested. And yet, analytic epistemology has worked towards establishing a relation of identity between apodicy and disincarnation: representationalism asserts that the mind must possess willful control over the body.

The third chapter concerned itself with this notion of agency in relation to Reason's Other: madness. A well-established philosophical and literary corpus attempts to construe madness as a kind of involuntarism: madness is not only blind, but blind to itself. The mad person has lost the requisite distanciation in consciousness—a performative ability—that allows them to appear as both subject and object to themselves. I contested this notion of madness, and argued for the possibility that "madness" may be an epistemic strategy, one that concedes that the mad may not simply be incommensurable with the symbolic order, but in actual opposition to it.
The current chapter has explored the ways in which philosophy has attempted to compensate for its anxieties towards theatricality. It was argued that performative citation is a condition of signification, not only its "undoing." The notion of "play" was discussed in relation to performativity and an analysis of Derrida's work looked at the way in which theory must perform as well as constate: it is an \textit{ado}. Theatricality was positioned as a consummate threat to "purity": an imaginary that has considerable truck in the history of philosophy.

The next chapter attempts to deepen the discussion of how philosophy has attempted to handle theatricality; it will endeavour to recall some of the ways that notions of play and performance have been taken up by philosophy itself, and assumed their place in some of its critical vocabularies.
V. Games of Various Kinds: Performativity, Play, and Reason

CLOV (imploringly) Let's stop playing.
Hamm Never! —Samuel Beckett

The phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and to some extent, Sartre, as well as the more recent theorisations of Foucault, Deleuze, Butler, and Lingis have all, in their own way, attempted to "recorporealise" theory. A reconceptualisation of subject formation as operating through performative acts allows a space for knowledge systems to be analysed in terms of performative "success" and "failure" rather than "truth" or "falsity"; truth-effects might be seen as the result of successful stagings.

The theorisation of discourse in relation to its capacity for failure or success rather than its truth or falsity was introduced into analytic philosophy by J.L. Austin's influential work in the philosophy of language. In a way analogous to Saussurian linguistics and the later work of Wittgenstein, Austin's "speech-act theory" questions both the primacy of language's function as nomenclature as well as the subject's status as the "generator" of discourse. Developing his theories in the wake of the positivism of the Vienna Circle, Austin sought to investigate sentences that escaped a true/false binarism and yet could not be designated as "nonsense." Some so-called "pseudo sentences," Austin suggests, never set out to be statements in the first instance; they do not attempt to represent the world or report any state of affairs in it:

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The type of utterance we are to consider here is not, of course, in general a type of nonsense ... it does not by any means necessarily masquerade as a statement of fact .... Utterances can be found ... that ... do not "describe" or "report" or constate anything at all, are not "true or false" ... the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as saying something.2

For this kind of statement, Austin coins the "new ... and ... ugly word"3 "performative," which designates an utterance entailing the performance of that which it names. Examples of performative utterances include: "I promise to return this watch," "I now pronounce you husband and wife," and "I resign." They are, in other words, a special kind of ado. Performative utterances escape the binarism of being either "true" or "untrue" and are instead reinscribed into the different economy of "success" and "failure," or as Austin sometimes prefers, "happy" and "unhappy": if something goes astray during the performance, "the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy."4 For Austin, the failure of an act entails some kind of performative infelicity. For example, the priest who marries the couple may not be a priest at all (he may, for instance, only be dressed as one or be acting like one) or the sentencing of a person to prison may occur on a stage at the theatre. In other words, the performative may be undone by virtue of it being a performance; performative utterances require a specific

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4 Austin, How to Do Things 14.
context and the intentionality of the speaker in order for them to have "illocutionary" force.

Derrida takes up Austin's discussion of performative utterances in his essay "Signature Event Context." Pursuing his usual interrogation of philosophy's anxieties towards "writing" (gramme), Derrida asks whether Austin's categorisation and assumptions about the intentionality that secures the felicitous speech act are philosophically adequate. Austin's notion of the happy performative requires a propriety of context and yet Derrida asks whether "the conditions [les requisits] of a context" are "ever absolutely determinable." It is this problematisation of Austin's notion of "context," of the "total situation" as a means of securing the felicitous performative, that Derrida pursues in "Structure Event Context."

In all of the examples that Austin offers as "unhappy performatives," one thing remains consistent: they are all construed as being parasitic on an originary, "valid" performative. Derrida notes that Austin's designation of performative utterances delivered on stage during a play as "hollow" or "void" is predicated on a logic of the theatre-as-parasite. What Derrida sees Austin as rejecting, in the form of the special or exceptional performative, is the cited. For the theatre to enact a wedding does not entail an "actual" marriage ceremony, as the stage is merely the site of reiteration of a normal or valid performative sequence.

However, Derrida points out that this effacement of reiteration misconstrues the structure and function of the sign: "the possibility of disengagement and citational graft ... belongs to the structure of

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6 Austin, How to Do Things 22.
every mark ... constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication." Derrida poses the question, "What would a mark be that could not be cited?" The recognition of citation as intrinsic to signification is perhaps Peircian. Charles Peirce, in his *Collected Papers* (1931—1958) emphasises the centrality of the interconnectedness between signification and repetition: "A representamen which should have a unique embodiment, incapable of repetition, would not be a representamen." This suggests that what Austin hopes to exclude as the infelicitous speech act is actually the condition of possibility for all "successful" ones as well.

isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, "non-serious," citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a "successful" performative? So that—a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion—a successful performative is necessarily an "impure" performative, to adopt the word advanced later on by Austin when he acknowledges that there is no "pure" performative.9

In other words, the convention that provides the "context" for the speech act relies on its status as a citation for it to be comprehensible. A marriage ceremony wouldn't make sense unless it possessed a recognisable "code," unless it was, in some senses, already a "citation." Austin's attempt to predicate the successful performative on the exclusion of a parasitic or "citational" factor overlooks that all

7 Derrida, "Structure, Event, Context" 12.
performatives conform to a general iterability. It is important to note that Derrida does not equate citation with pure repetition, which relies on an singular "originary" event. Repetition is both a necessity, and also a strict impossibility: alteration "always already" accompanies repetition. The sense of a sign is guaranteed by its repeatability, but signs are never repeated in exactly the same way, in exactly the same context. Derrida's radicalisation of the general iterability (alteration/repetition) of the sign would seem to destabilise Austin's theatrical/non-theatrical hierarchy. In some senses, the hierarchy is inverted. If it is citation or parasitism that designates the theatrical, and yet a generalised iterability that characterises all signification, then perhaps even constative utterances are "actually" instances of the performative.

**Being Absurd: Theatre and the Real**

Theatre has often made explicit attempts to engage with questions of language. Two plays by Tom Stoppard—*Doggs Hamlet* and *Cahoots Macbeth*—are self-conscious experiments into the workings of Wittgensteinian "language games." The language spoken by the majority of characters in Dogg's Hamlet is one devised by Stoppard; "Dogg Language" was created by altering the use/meaning of several English terms and phrases, and then allowing these conventions to "play themselves out" in a dramatic situation. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the "existence" of Godot is solely the result of repeated reference; his material status owes itself to a grammatical cycle. The centre of the play, is quite literally a "word." In Beckett's *Play*, faces peering out from urns are prompted to speak when illuminated by a spotlight. This reverses the normal order of a light
responding to the movement of an actor; the actors respond to the movement of the light. They are not "playing" but being played.

It is a contention of this chapter that theatre is an ideal medium for philosophical investigations into the workings of language, even when these investigations, are in some senses "absurd." The notion of the "absurd" probably underwent its first theoretical formulation in Euclid's *Elements*, which attempted to codify classical geometry. In Book Ten, Euclid attempts to give geometric equivalents to what is now known in arithmetic as "surds;"¹⁰ in attempting to consider numbers containing irrational roots, such as two to the square root of three, he rendered the Latin word *surdus* into Greek as *álogos*. In definition 10 of Book 10, Euclid defines *surdus* as "irrational" or "speechless." Both of these senses of the term carry through to modern day usage: in phonetics, the *surd* is an adjective that describes a "voiceless" consonant.

And yet, the prefix "ab" complicates the "absurd's" relationship with (ir)rationality. In Latin, the prefix "ab" modifies a verb's status by qualifying its meaning by rendering it as "away from" or "in opposition to" the verb. Julia Kristeva has used the term "abject" to designate that which upsets a stable opposition, such as between human and machine, or life and death. The abject is neither subject or object, it is the cyborg, the corpse: it "disturbs identities, systems and orders. Something that does not respect limits, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the mixed up."¹¹

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In this sense, the "absurd" is something which is not irrational, but something which is "thrown away" from the irrational, even "opposite" to it. In 1961, Martin Esslin coined the phrase "theatre of the absurd" in order to describe a kind of dramatic text which eschewed a number of conventions integral to nineteenth and twentieth century naturalism: plot, psychological depth of characters, a central "theme" which works towards a resolve, and grammatically "standard" dialogue.\(^{12}\) Although these plays attempt to wrestle with the question of "absurdity," Esslin argues that they do not deploy philosophical arguments about absurdity, but work to present it.\(^{13}\)

In his account *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin devotes more commentary to the writings of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco than any of the other dramatists. For him, these authors exemplify the absurdist's propensity to construct a literary work which engages with reason in an "out of tune" way.\(^{14}\) Absurdism places in parentheses some of the more central notions of twentieth century science and philosophy: linear causality, the laws of logic, and inference. And yet some critics have taken the theatre of the absurd as exemplifying a repudiation of reason, of works that reduce language to either a mumble or a silence.

In June 1958, the English critic Kenneth Tynan had published in *The Observer* an article entitled "Ionesco: Man of Destiny?" After serving to publicise Ionesco's work in England, Tynan had some second thoughts that he publicly voiced. He began to think that

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\(^{13}\) Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 25.

\(^{14}\) Esslin derives his usage of the term from its history in musicology: the "absurd" was literally "out of tune."
Ionesco's work was "anti-theatre": his plays were both "anti-realist" and "anti-reality." His work marked something truly different whose significance Tynan expressed in terms of language:

Here was a writer ready to declare that words were meaningless and that all communication between human beings were impossible .... Words, the magic innovation of our species, are dismissed as useless and fraudulent.15

Tynan's argument about Ionesco's plays as "anti-reality" (and not merely "anti-realist") relies on a conception that construes them not as absurdist, but "surdist": they are irrational and encased within the silence of their solipsism, speaking to nothing but themselves. And yet, Ionesco's own account is that they have a far more ambiguous relationship with reason. For Ionesco, Tynan's "social realism" solves the problem of reality only by denying that it is a problem: it assumes what it attempts to investigate.16

The idea of theatre as a sensible "discussion" about social reality necessitates that all language must be centred on equivocal reference. And yet, for Ionesco, such a restriction on language eliminates its theatricality, its multivocality, its status as action, as opposition. Theatrical language cannot be formalised:

If one believes that 'theatre' merely means the drama of the word, it is difficult to grant it can have an autonomous language of its own: it can then only be the servant of other forms of thought expressed in ... philosophy and morals ..... There are means of making words more theatrical: by working them up to such a pitch that they reveal the true temper of drama, which lies in frenzy; the whole tone should

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16 Ionesco, Notes and Counter-Notes 94-5.
almost break up or explode in its fruitless effort to contain so many meanings.17

The final scene of Ionesco's one-act play *The Bald Prima-Donna* seems to carry the logic of the "language game" to the point of seizure: the protagonists are slowly overtaken by discourse and eventually suffocated by it. The play's two couples (the Martins and the Smiths) who, earlier in the play, are involved in a kind of jejune social exchange at once both axiomatic and a-logical, become quickly embroiled in a mounting flurry of non-sequiturs:

MR. MARTIN: One can prove that social progress is definitely better with sugar.
MR. SMITH: To hell with polishing!
MR. MARTIN: One doesn't polish spectacles with black wax.
MRS. SMITH: Yes, but with money one can buy anything.
MR. MARTIN: I'd rather kill a rabbit than sing in the garden.
MR. SMITH: Cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos.18

It is a point at which there seems no escape from the prison of their own vapid, congealed language. Ionesco's technique of escalating internal logics to the point of seizure, also used to great effect in other plays such as *The Lesson* and *Rhinoceros*, achieves a kind of violence which he suggests as being the origin of the tragic: everything should be "raised to paroxysm, where the source of tragedy lies."19

17 Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes* 27.
19 Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes* 24.
And yet, if "tragedy" was Ionesco's aim in writing *The Bald Prima-Donna*, then the project threatens to collapse under the weight of an anarchic humour predicated on the sliding logics and insipid preoccupations of a complacent and almost desireless middle-class.\(^{20}\) The play opens like a savage drawing-room comedy, with Mrs Smith engaged in recounting for Mr Smith a seemingly arbitrary list of "states of affairs" that are so banal that their very banality constitutes a large part of their comic impact:

MRS. SMITH: Mary did the potatoes very well, this evening. The last time she did not do them well. I do not like them when they are well done.

MR. SMITH: [continues to read, clicks his tongue.]

MRS. SMITH: The fish was fresh. It made my mouth water. I had two helpings. No, three helpings. That made me go to the w.c. You also had three helpings. However, the third time you took less than the first two times, while as for me, I took a great deal more. I eat better than you this evening. Why is that? Usually it is you who eats more. It is not appetite you lack.\(^{21}\)

The insipidity of statements such as "The fish was fresh" and "I had two helpings" not only reflects the likely insipidity of their speaker but perhaps, more importantly, the banality of phenomenalism and the predicate form itself. Ionesco reports that he got the idea for *The Bald Prima-Donna* from an "English-French Conversation Manual for Beginners." And yet, on reading it, he realised that it was not only useful for learning English, but also provided some valuable insights

\(^{20}\) Ionesco asserts that when he had finished writing *The Bald-Prima Donna*, he imagined that he had "written something like the tragedy of language!" *Notes and Counter-Notes* 186.

\(^{21}\) Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano" 9.
into the Real. Ionesco learnt, for instance that there were "seven days in the week":

which I happened to know before; or that the floor is below us, the ceiling above us, another thing that I may well have known before but had never thought seriously about or had forgotten, and suddenly it seemed to me as stupeying as it was indisputably true ... these were not just simple English phrases with their French translation which I was copying into my exercise-book, but in fact fundamental truths and profound statements.\(^{22}\)

Ionesco's ironical tone makes clear the philosophical nature of the phrase-book. The structure of the book works from the statement of universals to particulars and uses the dialogue form, the author "doubtless inspired by the Platonic method."\(^{23}\) He goes so far as to describe the "Cartesian approach" of the author of the English manual: "it was his superlatively systematic pursuit of the truth which was so remarkable."

In the fifth lesson the Martins, the Smiths' friends, arrived; the conversation was taken up by all four and more complex truths were built upon these elementary axioms: 'The country is more peaceful than big cities', some maintained; 'Yes, but cities are more highly populated and there are more shops', replied the others, which is equally true and proves, moreover, that contrasting truths can quite well coexist.\(^{24}\)

The types of assertions made by the English manual's "Martins" and "Smiths" share not only a more than passing resemblance to the Martins and the Smiths in Ionesco's play, but also to introductory

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\(^{22}\) Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes* 181.  
\(^{23}\) Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes* 182.  
\(^{24}\) Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes* 182-3.
texts in philosophical logic. A brief and largely random perusal of examples used in discussing both inductive and syllogistic (or deductive) reasoning reveals that: "All professional tennis players are athletes," "Inge Broverman is a Greek," "New York is larger than San Francisco," "Red is a color," "Many houses are lighted by electricity," "Mr Nogot does not own a Ferrari," and "I remember drinking coffee for breakfast." Obviously, the semantic mechanisms that Ionesco perceives and puts to work in his dramatic writing cannot find their origin or end in the English manual. Ionesco seems interested in logics which, although to some extent captured by the dramatic form, reach far beyond its boundaries.

Although early in The Bald Prima-Donna, no explicitly inferential connections between the propositions in Mrs Smith's factual inventories have been made, it is not long before this happens. Reportage is transformed into reasoning at the point at which Mr Smith shifts Mrs Smith's monologue into dialogue:

MRS. SMITH: Yoghurt is excellent for the stomach, the kidneys, the appendicitis, and apotheosis. It was Doctor Mackenzie-King who told me that, he's the one who takes good care of the children of our neighbours, the Johns. He's a good doctor. One can trust him. He never prescribes any medicine that he's not tried out on himself first. Before operating on Parker, he had his own liver operated on first, although he was not the least bit ill.

MR. SMITH: But how does it happen that the doctor pulled through while Parker died?


MRS. SMITH: Because the operation was successful in the doctor's case and it was not in Parker's.

MR. SMITH: Then Mackenzie is not a good doctor. The operation should have succeeded with both of them or else both should have died.

MRS. SMITH: Why?

MR. SMITH: A conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can't get well together. The captain of a ship goes down with his ship in the briny deep, he does not survive alone.

MRS. SMITH: One cannot compare a patient with a ship.

MR. SMITH: Why not? A ship has its diseases too; moreover, your doctor is as hale as a ship; that's why he should have perished at the same time as his patient, like the captain and his ship.

MRS. SMITH: Ah! I hadn't thought of that ... Perhaps it is true ... And then, what conclusion do you draw from this?

MR. SMITH: All doctors are quacks. And all patients too. Only the Royal Navy is honest in England.28

Mr Smith attempts to establish his argument by positing a spurious analogy between the patient and a ship: both are capable of having "diseases" and hence all doctors and patients are quacks. This kind of exchange, which is by no means exceptional in the play, seems to work at violating Aristotelian logic. Indeed, the play itself is a veritable tour of category mistakes ("MRS. SMITH: Yogurt is excellent for the ... apotheosis").29 excluded middles ("FIRE CHIEF: ... When the doorbell rings, sometimes there is someone, other times there is no one"),30 contradictions/violations of the law of identity ("MARY: Elizabeth is not Elizabeth, Donald is not Donald"),31 and induction gone awry ("MRS. SMITH: ... Experience teaches us that when one

28 Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 10-11.
29 Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 10.
30 Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 26-27.
31 Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 19. Another interesting example of violating the law of identity is the mention of a whole family who go by the name of Bobby Watson, and who are all commercial travellers.
hears the doorbell ring it is because there is never anyone there\textsuperscript{32}). The play often lampoons processes of inferential reasoning. Mr and Mrs Smith's guests, the Martins, are left alone in the Smith's living room and, on facing each other, begin a protracted process of logical deduction which culminates in the discovery that they are in, fact, married. Even Ionesco's stage directions indicate an imperative to tease the mentality of the "either/or": Mr Martin "[... either kisses or does not kiss Mrs. Smith]" and Mrs Smith "[falls on her knees sobbing, or else she does not do this]."\textsuperscript{33}

Interestingly enough, one of the few logical errors which is not committed by any of the characters in the play is the \textit{ad hominem} fallacy, which usually uses an appeal to authority to legitimate a proposition.\textsuperscript{34} In this sense, the processes of validation used by characters in the play might be seen as classically "philosophical," in that reasoning attempts to extricate itself from the contingencies implied by the position of the speaker, and uses instead a kind of "pure" logic as its \textit{organon}. Ionesco's preoccupation with rationality can be discerned at many points in the play. Indeed, the dilemma posed by the insistent ringing of the doorbell might be profitably (and playfully) seen as an absurd re-staging of the seventeenth century debate between rationalism and empiricism, a debate that

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{32} Ionesco, \textit{The Bald Prima-Donna} 23.
\textsuperscript{33} Ionesco, \textit{The Bald Prima-Donna} 32.
\textsuperscript{34} An \textit{ad hominem} argument can also attempt to refute a proposition or account by casting aspersions on the person making it. This is a technique occasionally used by barristers in the court room to invalidate evidence by a process of invalidating the integrity of the witness. For the Royal Society of London, the \textit{ad hominem} was perhaps the worst fallacy of all. They thought of themselves as appealing neither to authority nor involved in skirmishes which would violate "courtesy" codes of politeness.
\end{footnotes}
had enormous impacts on the way western conceptions of reason took shape. In the scene, the doorbell rings twice and both times Mrs Smith gets up to answer the door, only to find that there is nobody there. After the third ring, she resorts to a kind of radical empiricism that doesn't respect Mr Smith's seemingly more reasonable claim that when the doorbell rings, it is because someone is ringing it:

MRS. SMITH: The first time there was no one. The second time, no one.
Why do you think that there is someone there now?
MR. SMITH: Because someone has rung!
MRS. MARTIN: That's no reason.
MR. MARTIN: What? When one hears the doorbell ring, that means someone is at the door ringing to have the door opened.
MRS. MARTIN: Not always. You've just seen otherwise!
MR MARTIN: In most cases, yes.
MR. SMITH: As for me, when I go to visit someone, I ring in order to be admitted. I think that everyone does the same thing and that each time there is a ring there must be someone there.
MRS. SMITH: That is true in theory. But in reality things happen differently. You have just seen otherwise.35

Ultimately, however, it is Mr Smith who is proved correct when he finally gets up and answers the door on the fourth ring. The Fire Chief is let in, and is then used by both couples in their attempts to validate their respective hypotheses that when the doorbell rings there is "always someone" or "never anyone." Surprisingly, he denies ringing the bell the first two times, suggesting that he was standing at the door "thinking of many things." And yet, the third ring is admitted to:

MR. MARTIN [to the Fire Chief]: But the third time—it was not you who rang?

35 Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 23.
FIRE CHIEF: Yes, it was I.
MR. SMITH: But when the door was opened nobody was in sight.
FIRE CHIEF: That was because I had hidden myself—as a joke.
MRS. SMITH: Don't make jokes, Mr Fire Chief. This business is too sad.36

Sad business indeed. Ionesco admits to being "almost surprised" at the laughter of the audience when it was first performed; it was, after all, about "the tragedy of language."37 Ionesco has argued that it attempts to renew thought by choosing as its target the increasingly fossilised language of the petit bourgeoisie: as yet, for Ionesco, this was not an issue of class: The Bald Prima-Donna is, above all "about a kind of universal petite bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeois being a man of fixed ideas and slogans, a ubiquitous conformist."38

Perhaps part of the tragedy that The Bald Prima-Donna portrays, its implicit pairing of ideas and language, is an anxiety common to late twentieth century thought—there is no exit out of discourse. The play implies a kind of Huis-Clos eternal return; it "concludes" with the Martins taking the place of the Smiths and repeats their lines from the beginning of the play while the curtain "softly falls."

Playing and Being Played: Language Games and the Theatre of the Absurd

It seems that much of the humour to be found in Ionesco's writing is derived from his characters' capacity to argue through absurdities with unnerving systematicity. There is, in The Bald

37 Ionesco, Notes and Counter-Notes 186.
38 Ionesco, Notes and Counter-Notes 186.
Prima-Donna, a thoroughness with which it works to anomalise techniques of reasoning. At the departure of the Fire Chief, Mrs. Martin makes a show of appreciation that might have easily been Ionesco's after his first contact with the English Manual: "Thanks to you, we have passed a truly Cartesian quarter of an hour." Axioms are deployed by the Martins and the Smiths and then played through to their spurious conclusions; words are defined and then redefined through an intricate series of ad hoc qualifications. Although the territories on which these intricate dialectics are played out are bizarre, the various logical manoeuvres deployed by the characters often demonstrate an alarming self-consistency. The world of Ionesco's theatrical logics seems to bear striking similarities to the epistemological language games Ludwig Wittgenstein theorises about in The Blue and Brown Books and the Philosophical Investigations.

According to the later Wittgenstein, philosophical problems arise through an unclear use of language. Wittgenstein's strategy in philosophical debate was not to take sides on the "classic questions" of philosophy, but rather find the common discursive ground of the arguing parties. In line with this, he envisaged his task as dissolving rather than solving problems through a clarification of language. For him, "Philosophy results in the disclosing of one or another piece of plain nonsense and in the bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language."

The notion of the "game" was, for Wittgenstein, a key to understanding axiomatic systems. The meaning of a symbol—and this is a conceptualisation that Wittgenstein eventually held true of

39 Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 37.
mathematics, formal logic, and "natural language"—is the sum of the rules that, within a limited domain, specify its functions. The notion of the "language game," a term which Wittgenstein used repeatedly from the early 1930s onwards, signified an effort to extend his formalistic conception of axiomatic systems to language as a whole. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word does not tie it to an "object," but expresses the rules under which the sign is allowed to "move." In the game of chess, one does not learn the game by associating the name of a piece to a shaped figurine, but by learning how the pieces function on the board, how they stand as "one expression within a calculus."\(^{41}\) Just before The Bald Prima-Donna takes off into its final barrage of non-sequiturs, Mrs Smith asserts that "When I say yes, it's only a matter of speaking."\(^{42}\)

A chess piece is defined only through its strategic importance on the game board: there would be little use for a pawn or a knight in checkers, or for settling disputes between rival nation states: a chess piece is what it does in a restricted domain. Meaning is contingent on function, but function is modified by shifting context. Although chess pieces have set ways of moving, their movement is limited by the movements of the other pieces, and by certain "special" situations that occur during the game (such as "castling" or "queening a pawn").

Theatre has often proved to be a rich medium for the exploration of philosophical problems, as well as being capable of investigating aspects of these problems that are not "properly"


\(^{42}\) Ionesco, The Bald Prima-Donna 38.
philosophical. Tom Stoppard's play *Dogg's Hamlet* is a dramatic experiment explicitly formulated to stage some of the implications of Wittgenstein's theories of language. In the introduction to *Dogg's Hamlet*, Stoppard recounts an example which appears in the *Philosophical Investigations* and the opening section of the *Brown Book*.

Wittgenstein asks us to envisage a scene in which a man is constructing a platform from pieces of wood thrown to him by another man. When the first man shouts "plank," he is thrown a flat piece of wood; when he shouts "slab," a differently shaped piece is thrown; when he calls "block" a third shape is thrown; and "cube" elicits the fourth piece. Some observers may make the assumption that the terms called out by the first man correspond to the objects thrown. And yet, drawing on this example, Stoppard asks us to envisage a scenario where the thrower knows in advance which pieces of wood are required by the builder and merely needs to know when he requires the next one. In such a situation, the terms could be translated as: plank=ready, slab=okay, cube=thank you, and block=next. The call "block" is a request for a piece of wood; the term "cube" expresses appreciation. This example leaves open the question that the observer may not share a common language with the builders, and be totally unaware of it. It also engages with the possibility that the builders themselves don't share the same language and are equally oblivious to the fact.

In *Dogg's Hamlet*, Stoppard eschews English in favour of a synthetically created language called "Dogg language." He admits that *Dogg's Hamlet* was an attempt to teach an audience a simple

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synthetic language during the course of a play. It is set, interestingly enough, on a preparatory school speech day and involves a character named Easy (the only non-Dogg speaker in the play), who is hired by the principal to build a platform for a prize-giving ceremony and the boys' performance of Hamlet. The challenge for Easy, like that posed to the audience, is to master the complex conventions of Dogg language in order to understand what they "see." And yet Dogg-language is more complex than Wittgenstein's example. The vocabulary is extensive and sometimes convoluted. Here we witness several schoolboys discussing their respective lunches (translations follow each statement):

ABEL: (Looking in his sandwich.) Pelican crash. [*Cream cheese.]
(To BAKER.) Even ran? [*What have you got?]
BAKER: (Looking in his sandwich.) Hollyhocks. [*Ham.]
ABEL: (To CHARLIE.) Even ran? [*What have you got?]
CHARLIE: (Looking in his sandwich.) Mouseholes. [*Egg.]
ABEL: (To CHARLIE.) Undertake sun pelican crash frankly sun mousehole? [*Swop you one cream cheese for one egg?]
CHARLIE: (With an amiable shrug.) Slab. [*Okay]
(ABEL and CHARLIE exchange half a sandwich each.)
BAKER: (To Abel.) Undertake sun hollyhocks frankly sun pelican crash?  

Needless to say, Easy has considerable problems. In attempting to help the boys construct their platform, he becomes perplexed by their "cooperation." Stoppard replays Wittgenstein's scenario of the builders, but in Dogg's Hamlet, the functionality of the two languages sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. When Easy requests a plank, he is calling for a thin piece of wood, when the boys say "plank," it

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44 Stoppard, Dogg's Hamlet 142.
45 Stoppard, Dogg's Hamlet 149.
means "thank you." Although the construction seems to go well at first, complications arise when Easy, after a number of successful operations, calls for a "slab" and is thrown a "block." In Dogg's Hamlet, two language games interact, sometimes proving to be functionally commensurable, and at other times, not.

Stoppard's characters are distanced by language games that call attention to the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. The play is a dramatic experiment that works to interrogate and problematise the view of language as representation. Doggs Hamlet presents a world in which language functions through ostension: words and phrases are learnt by their association with events. Wittgenstein argues that even the most abstract notions, such as "number," can only be inferred from their instances: concepts are always learnt through a correlation to their "instances"; they need to be "indicated." And yet, Wittgenstein's work represents only one attempt to critique "referential" theories of language.

What has become known as the "linguistic turn" in theory—anticipated by Sapir and Whorf in anthropology, Saussure in linguistics, and Wittgenstein in philosophy—exemplifies a kind of thinking which proposes a morphological or near-morphological identity between thought and discourse. As Sapir and Whorf suggest in Language, Thought, and Reality:

The forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own language .... And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the person not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types
of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.\textsuperscript{46}

The effect of such a view not only destabilises the ontologies and so-called "onto-theologies" of western metaphysics, it also breathes new and unexpected life into one of philosophy's oldest demons: the closed system.\textsuperscript{47} Like the proto-surrealist machines that appear in the work of Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel, language seems to reach escape velocity and becomes the paradigmatic expression of simulacra. Michel de Certeau argues of Jarry and Roussel that:

These are the myths of an incarceration within the operations of a writing that constantly makes a machine of itself and never encounters anything but itself. There are no ways out except through fictions, painted windows, mirror panes. No rips or rents other than written ones. These are comedies about people stripped naked and tortured, 'automatic' stories about defoliations of meaning, theatrical ravagings of disintegrating faces. These productions are fantastic not in the indefiniteness of the reality that they make appear at the frontiers of language, but in the relationship between the mechanisms that produce simulacra and the absence of anything else. These novelistic or iconic fictions tell us that there is no entry or exit for writing, but only the endless play of its fabrications.\textsuperscript{48}

In other words, a playful view of discourse assumes a somewhat more sinister visage when a theory of language as a "game" becomes disengaged from its ostensibly heuristic function and instead operates as a trope suggesting that language is a game not played by


\textsuperscript{47} The "closed system," like the "involuntary" is one of the richest images of determinism.

us, but as one which plays us. In Notes and Counter-Notes, Ionesco admits that The Bald Prima-Donna operates as an exploration of "mechanisms," of that which is "automatic in the language and behaviour of people." 49

Thus, absurdism could be seen as not interested in "logic," but logics; not "irrationalism," but that which is "away from" the irrational. The language games that the Martins and the Smiths engage in are systematic, even if they often achieve this by systematically undermining systematicity-in-general. The "nonsense" which parades as Dogg-language is a nonsense formulated with specific rules designed to enable it to operate autonomously. The characters' thought owes its movements to syntactic and semantic rules; they are as much "thinking language" as language is thinking them. Wittgenstein's thought is often characterised by citing one of his most notorious statements: "The limits of my language are the limits of my world."

Jean-François Lyotard makes use of Wittgenstein's notion of "language games" through radicalising it to include a theory of the subject. In the appropriately titled Just Gaming (Au juste), he argues that language is never a subjective strategy, but an operation through which subjectivity is produced. Although Lyotard argues that these games "exist," their boundaries are hard to locate:

We merely know that there are several of them, probably not an infinite number, but we really do not know. In any case, the number is not countable for the time being, or if it is, it is so provisionally at

49 Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes 186.
best. We also know that these games that we can enter into but not to play them; they are games that make us into their players ...\textsuperscript{50}

In Samuel Beckett's \textit{Play}, three characters recount a love affair from their own perspective, and yet none of them can hear either of the others talk. This aspect of the work—its status as a \textit{multi-character} monologue—not only disrupts any notion of drama as a literary \textit{genre} grounded in dialogue, but also the sense that language reliably connects to anything in the "external world." As Jiri Veltrusky argues in \textit{Drama as Literature}:

unlike monologue, dialogue is always integrated into the \textit{extra-linguistic} situation. This comprises not only the material situation, that is, the set of things that surround the speakers, but also the speakers themselves, their mentality, intentions, knowledge pertinent to the dialogue, their mutual relations, the tensions between them, and so on—in short, what might be called a psychological situation.\textsuperscript{51}

In Beckett's \textit{Play}, only the face of each character can be seen; the characters' heads sit atop individual funerary urns that are placed in a line along the front of the stage. In the notes to the play, Beckett specifies that the directing of a spotlight projected onto the character's face cues speech, and that the actor's response should be immediate.\textsuperscript{52} There is a sense in which the spotlight functions as an extra "player" in the drama, perhaps the only one. The spotlight suggests an interrogator who possesses the capacity to elicit action,

\textsuperscript{50} Jean-François Lyotard, \textit{Just Gaming}, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979) 51.


and yet is without either corporeality or teleology. There is an on/off
game played by the spot; the characters are never able to act, but
only react to its prompting, one which Beckett's Man describes as
"Mere eye. No mind":

W1: Weary of playing with me. Get off me. Yes.
[Spot from W1 to M.]
[Spot from M to W2. Laugh as before from W2 cut short as spot from her
to M.]
M: Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me. Am I as much—
[Spot off M. Blackout. Three seconds. Spot on M.]
Am I as much as ... being seen?53

The notion of entrapment is further exacerbated by Beckett's
instructions at the end of the play to repeat the action, with the play
finally concluding at the beginning of the second repeat. It is a work
that is richly suggestive of characters living a groundhog's day,
unable to either change anything or cease their discursive cycle.
They—like Lyotard's subject caught in the language game—are not
playing themselves. In other words, they have gone from "playing
around" (allusions to the affair) to being played. And finally, Play is
replayed. The light, like Lyotard's conception of language,
effectively "speaks" the characters. Theory entranced by such a
mood becomes not only a mise-en-scène for the playing out of
nightmarish fantasies about the loss of the Real, but a stage for
dramatising our entrapment within a mechanics of representation
which has engulfed us by becoming wholly automated.

And yet this portrayal of "engulfment" can only operate, as
Ionesco suggests, through the "breaking up" or "explosion" of

53 Beckett, Play 317.
language. The absurdist, ironically, could only present their dramatic images of engulfment and automation in ways that profoundly disrupted the operations of the machine. "Absurdism" seems less a "thesis" about the workings of language and the existential despair of the subject, than it is a playing out of some of these possibilities. It is thought in its subjunctive mode; it is concerned with the "what if?" not the "it is." Play, in other words, can be deployed as an epistemic strategy.

Knowledge at its Borders: Play as Epistemic Strategy

Georges Bataille, in his extended meditation on Nietzsche, speaks of "play" in distinctly heuristic terms. Thought that "plays" is that which opens the thinker to a transgression and transcendence of limits; it is thought which makes available "the possibility of exploring the far reaches of possibility," where the "for" and "against" of traditional argument is repudiated and "cautious logic ... baffled."54 Bataille goes further to suggest that, in writing the book on Nietzsche, the only approach suited to its construction was that of chance and play: the "day-to-day record of what turned up as the dice were thrown."55 There seems a degree of credence in this idea, as Nietzsche himself declares that he knows "no other way of associating with great tasks than play: as a sign of greatness, this is an essential presupposition."56

55 Bataille, On Nietzsche xxvi.
For Derrida, the (para)concept "writing" (gramme) (re)presents the force of play, the equivocality of the concept. The concept is that which regulates the play of its elements: it "limits what we might call the play of the structure." In Of Grammatology, this is what he characterises as the "play in the world;" it is the transformation of elements circumscribed by a conceptual system's matrices of intelligibility.

The structural psychologist Jean Piaget offers a provisional definition ("a first approximation") of structure that has much in common with Derrida's view:

a structure is a system of transformations. Inasmuch as it is a system and not a mere collection of elements and their properties, these transformations involve laws: the structure is preserved or enriched by the interplay of its transformation laws, which never yield results external to the system nor employ elements that are external to it. In short, the notion of structure is comprised of three key ideas: the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation.57

For Derrida, this construal of structure, as a system of transformations and substitutions (plays) within a complete system, is the way that structure has always been figured by philosophers, "for the purposes of containing it."58 The idea of structure as a "wholeness," "closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible."59 Play, for

59 Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play" 279.
Derrida, is not simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality in general.60

Needless to say, Derrida is not primarily interested in play in the "world," but the play of the "world." The (metaphysical) concept reveals itself to be not wholly contained by its own structurality; it attempts to govern structure without being contained within it. The play of the concept is itself properly outside the metaphysical oppositions that it attempts to put in place. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, the concept "is a whole because it totalizes its components, but it is a fragmentary whole."61 This is why Derrida does not flatly oppose one concept with another, but shows that the opposition already takes place in the movement of the concept itself. He does not oppose "realism" with "anti-realism," "objectivism" with "subjectivism" or argue for the primacy of "writing" over "speech." Although the inversion of conceptual oppositions plays a part in Derrida's style of analysis, it is only a formative stage. Reversals of oppositions are required, and yet deconstruction needs to be followed by a displacement of the system upon which these oppositions are predicated. The displacement is the site for the "irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,'" a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime.62

Aspects of Derrida's project could be construed as "absurdist" to the extent that it has complex relations with the "irrational" and the "voice." His is a writing that engages with the irrational at the same

time that it attempts to be "away from" or even "opposite" to it: a "general displacement" of a system cannot take place wholly within the system that it attempts to displace. Like Ionesco's and Beckett's dramatic works, Derrida's writings do not present a "thesis" of textual idealism, an "entrapment" within discourse, but work to play through some of discourse's possibilities and traps. His analyses are self-consciously constative and performative: to eliminate the performative aspects of his writing—if they could be found—would effectively undermine their veracity. If Derrida's thought could be said to privilege the role of language in structuring reason it is thought achieved—like Ionesco's—only by "exploding," language, "breaking [it] up," by following its aberrant paths and attempting to trace the intricate lines of its logic.

And yet, as we have seen, this theoretical and dramatic "play" is often seen by critics not only as trivial, but also trivialising: it conflates logic and rhetoric, "textualises" reality and, through its ludic tendencies, disregards the gravity of the academic enterprise. Play, for some, not only articulates the movement of polysemy, but also suggests a temperament of Nietzschean "joyous affirmation." The veracity of these kinds of ethical and ontological critiques are often undone by overlooking a crucial element of play's oeuvre: its complex relations to structurality, and hence, its epistemological force.

To set oneself the task of extending the discussion of play from the point of epistemology is to immediately encounter the term's inherent elusiveness. In the Future of Ritual, Richard Schechner opens his discussion of play with an explicit recognition of this central problematic:
If the old dichotomies dividing play from work, seriousness, and ritual are too rigid and/or culture bound; if the classic distinction fencing child play off from adult play is improper; if play need be neither voluntary nor fun; if both flow and reflexivity characterise play; if ethological and semiotic studies asserting that play's functions are learning, exploration, creativity, and communication are really as much about nonplay activities as about play; if psychoanalytic studies linking play with the expression and reduction of anxiety and aggression are also as much about nonplay as about play; if the negotiated time/space between infant and parent is not the foundation of child and adult play activities, including art and religion; if play is not always transitional or liminal or liminoid; if all definitions of play are 'ideologies'—cultural projections and impositions—how can we talk about what ever there is to talk about?63

Perhaps it is this indeterminacy that prompts Schechner to (playfully) suggest declaring a moratorium on defining play, a moratorium which he himself defies in the very next paragraph.

Play's reticence to localisation is also recognised by Victor Turner. In an essay which attempts to link notions of neurological function, soma, and play, he entertains the possibility that play might fit in with models of the brain which suggest left/right hemisphere structure. And yet, he reaches the conclusion that play does not seem amenable to "localisation": "As I see it, play does not fit in anywhere in particular; it is a transient and is recalcitrant to localisation, to placement, to fixation—a joker in the neuroanthropological act."64

Despite Schechner's caveat, perhaps it is play's very liminality and unstable locus which itself provides a convenient, if provisional,
interpretive framework for examining play and its relation to the episteme.

In Playing and Reality, D.W. Winnicott advances a psychoanalytic theory of the liminality of play by postulating it as a case of his theory of transitional phenomenon. Immortalised in popular culture by Linus and his blanket (of "Peanuts" fame), the transitional phenomena evinces a psychosexual phase of transition between the first oral relationship with the mother to what might be called a "true object-relationship." The ontological status of the transitional "object" is ambiguous, as it antedates "reality testing," standing between subject and object. It resides, as Winnicott asserts, "between the thumb and the teddy bear." Although he argues that play has both a place and a time, it is by no means inside or outside either. A term that Winnicott often uses to relate play and ontological ambiguity is "precarious": play is precarious, as it is situated in the "interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects." The transitional phenomena allows no questions to be admitted as to its existence or non-existence:

Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: "Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?" The

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67 Winnicott, Playing and Reality 55.
important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated.68

And yet, despite its ontological mutability, play does have a time and place because it is in time and space. In many of Beckett's and Ionesco's dramatic works, questions of time and space are often suspended: questions as to the play's locale" are irrelevant, as well as the time that the action is taking place. Both time and space are potentials; the works are not "in" time and "space" but actually work to reconfigure them. Plays such as Beckett's Rough for Theatre I exemplify his increasing tendency to write and score "silence"; the play opens with the scraping of a fiddle, then a character "listening," then "pausing," then followed by one line of dialogue before, finally, "silence." Beckett's description for the setting of the play is "Street Corner. Ruins."69 In the play What Where—equally full of scripted silences—no setting is offered at all. The "times" and "places" of many absurdist works seem to lie in the realm of the subjunctive, the hypothetical. Beckett's and Ionesco's spaces are, in other words, potential spaces: they work to antedate "reality testing."

Winnicott indicates that the "precarious" space of play entails a certain "potentiality." Although he describes the potentiality of the space in terms of its subject-object and spatio-temporal intermediacy, play is also potential in the sense that it is a site for creativity:

This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the

68 Winnicott, Playing and Reality 14.
intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work.\textsuperscript{70}

The non-recognition of subject-object dualism in Winnicott's account of transitional phenomena can be seen as an aspect of the history of the self's psychosexual development, but it can also perhaps be recast as a means by which certain meta-philosophical questions can be raised. The opening of a space, in some senses virtual, in which subject-object distinctions can be problematised could be likened to the play of a child before it has fully constituted its "objects."

Like Winnicott, Derrida speaks in terms of the opening of a "space" or "site" that is eminently liminal:

I am not sure that the "site" of my work, reading philosophical texts and posing philosophical questions, is itself properly philosophical. Indeed, I have attempted more and more systematically to find a non-site, or a non-philosophical site, from which to question philosophy. But the search for a site does not bespeak an anti-philosophical attitude. My central question is: from what site or non-site (\textit{non-lieu}) can philosophy as such appear to itself as other than itself, so that it can interrogate and reflect upon itself in an original manner.\textsuperscript{71}

This "\textit{non-lieu}" could be likened to Winnicott's "potential space."

Derrida's "non-site" suggests a place where thought, attempting to think itself, rethinks itself. Arguing that an episteme can only be sufficiently problematised when a certain step beyond (or behind) its tendencies towards self-legitimation is undertaken, Derrida is perhaps "absurdist," but certainly not "surdist."

\textsuperscript{70} Winnicott, \textit{Playing and Reality} 16.

In the history of philosophy no one ever suspected a philosopher of irrationalism when he asked a question about reason. If there is ... a critique of reason ... then it doesn't at all mean a rejection of reason, a tendency towards irrationalism, but, on the contrary, to a large extent a responsibility and a consciousness of the responsibility of the philosopher before reason ... If you ask about the origin of the principle of reason, of the *Satz vom Grund*, then obviously this question is not regulated by reason and is not simply under the authority of the principle of reason.\(^{72}\)

It is difficult to peremptorily dismiss this approach as "irrational": for Derrida, it "first opens the possibility of questioning reason."\(^{73}\)

Derrida's analytic "play" has often concentrated not only on the periphery (*limen*) of a text, but on the generation of peripheral texts. With this epistemically disruptive writing, he is, in a sense playing both *in* and *with* the performative regularities and discursive strategies of philosophical thought. And yet, such a formulation of Derrida's thought—of playing both "in" and "with" the episteme—is inherently problematic; it overlooks the notion that a text, never being simply the result of its structural determinants, necessarily modifies the system of which it is also supposedly an example. A philosophical text is both an "instance" of philosophy and also a modification of the category of which it is supposed to be a n


\(^{73}\) Derrida, "Jacques Derrida" 43. There are resonances between Derrida's contention and the philosophy and historiography of science formulated by Thomas Kuhn. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn claims that scientific rationality cannot be prescribed in advance through a series of "methodological directives," because scientific change itself is predicated on the very modification of what is understood as "rational criteria."
example: like dramatic writing, philosophical "reason" can not be formalised a priori. And yet, while being a "necessity," we have seen how this conceptual play can also operate as a form of voluntarism, as a strategy of opposition.

The final chapter attempts to engage with this issue. Where the previous two chapters have examined philosophy's anxieties about the theatrical, the next will attempt to examine some of its unacknowledged complicities with the dramatic: with the agon.
VI. Mimesis and Agon: Philosophy and/or Violence

philosophy ... has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and its wellspring .... —Jacques Derrida

Plato's hostility towards artistic mimesis has been well documented and need not be extensively reiterated here. The epistemological framework that Plato develops makes clear that there is no place in philosophical inquiry or the ideal state that would allow any privileged place for the imitative. Particularly in Book Ten of The Republic, Plato's case against mimesis is sustained and tersely stated. However, there is an ambiguity in Plato's rejection of mimesis that has been overlooked by the majority of contemporary commentators. Most notions of artistic mimesis have been interpreted solely at the levels of representation or mimicry, at the level that construes this term as somehow parasitic on the Real. Even in studies as comprehensive as Erich Auerbach's Mimesis: Representations of Reality in Western Literature and Suzanne Langer's Feeling and Form, mimesis is only ever absorbed into theories of art which take positions on the merits and demerits of art's relationship to an external "reality."

What such interpretations tend to overlook is an inherent and essential tension in Plato's notion of mimesis, even when such commentaries take issue with it. The question in classical philosophical aesthetics as to whether "art imitates life" undoubtedly has its place, but such a view unfortunately domesticates the question

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of mimesis to the point where contemporary minds, in the wake of artistic modernism, see such a debate as somewhat trivial. Theorisations such as Auerbach's and Langer's fail to ask to what extent the Real is "always already" in the realm of representation, but they also overlook the inherently dramatic qualities of mimesis which tie it to the *agon.*

Plato, more than contemporary commentators, seems acutely aware of the oppositional nature of mimesis, both in the sense that the action of Greek tragedy was predicated on the agency of the conflicts between protagonist and antagonist, and in the sense of the violence that mimicry threatens to engender *outside* of the theatre. Not only are Plato's sanctions on mimesis based on an abstract epistemological scheme which couples it to a perversion of truth, but also on the potential violence that imitation might bring to the state. To suggest that "conflict" has been an almost universal dramaturgical principal in western conceptions of drama seems obvious, and yet in western aesthetics, the *agon* of the drama has been all but hermetically sealed from considerations of mimetic activity.

Perhaps this lack of conceptual intersection has something to do with the Platonic dialogues themselves and some unresolved tensions in Plato's writing, tensions which he himself could never fully articulate. Additionally, perhaps some of these conceptual tensions are, in some senses, still eminently *pre-philosophical* and find their place in the theatrical *agon* of the Socratic dialogues themselves: they are found in their material conditions of possibility rather than in their discursive content. This chapter attempts to think the relations between mimesis and the *agon* and asks to what

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2 Although this chapter will explore the resonances of this latter term, it can be provisionally rendered into English as "contest."
extent the much talked about "deconstruction of metaphysics" remains enclosed in a conceptual economy that still ignores the dramatic and violent aspects of theory generation. The truth claims of philosophy's status as being able to hold a "mirror up to nature" have been problematised in many ways, and yet the project—if it could be called such—still seems caught in a deadlock, the nature of which might reveal something about philosophy's enduring anxieties towards the theatrical.

Platonism and Mimesis as Double-Bind

It needs not be contended that mimesis is, for Plato, an epistemologically corrupt activity, and much of Platonic philosophy is explicitly centred around this conception. As argued in the previous chapter, mimesis, according to the theory of the Forms, stands at a remove from reality. And yet Plato's attempt to assimilate this epistemological theorisation into considerations of the proper running of the Ideal state creates disjunctions in the Platonist oeuvre which beg consideration. It is perhaps the depiction of mimesis as both a force of social cohesion and disintegration that suggests a neuralgic locus at which an examination of Platonic philosophy's relationship to mimesis can be initiated. Plato seems eminently aware of the way in which theatre-as-mimesis threatens the state by being a harbinger of social disintegration. How could the polis be unified if the epistemological claims of the theatre were multiple?3 The poets,

3 It has been pointed out by J.O. Urmson that in the Illiad, Homer's first request to the Muse was that she inform him of the cause of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. Urmson argues that for the Greek citizen, poetry was considered a source of real knowledge, both of the world and of the Gods. Plato,
through presenting widely divergent views of the world and the variegated perspectives of the Gods, could cause conflicts between people who chose to side with opposed poets.

One of the problems for Plato was that artists presented claims about facts without actually reasoning them through: it was not that the poets had mistaken premises, but rather that they had no premises at all. The problem of choosing one's own beliefs, like the problem Plato surmises about democracy, is that a state which allows for individual whims cannot be a united (or "singular") entity, either in war or in peace. And yet one of the manifest tensions running through Plato's work is that he sees very clearly that dramatic mimesis is also a powerful force of social cohesion. In Book Six of The Republic, Plato details how the philosopher-ruler may be corrupted by the force of a crowd. Even when the well-trained philosopher enters a theatre—or any other place that harbours an "audience"—Plato expresses concern for his wellbeing:

How can his individual training stand the strain? Won't he be swamped by the flood of popular praise and blame, and carried away with the stream till he finds himself agreeing with the popular ideas of what is admirable or disgraceful, behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them?  

The theatre, it seems, is a place for both social integration and disintegration. Plato is indicating, although not explicitly, that the
force of mimesis is not restricted to the stage alone, but actually infuses the audience: actors and authors not only "imitate" the Real, but crowds tend to also imitate the actors as well as each other. This is why, for instance, actors should not play foolish or ignoble characters, but only those which promote and represent Platonic ideas. By gratifying the "lower parts" of the mind and causing the audience member to empathise with "a man we should ourselves be ashamed to resemble," theatre threatens, through an empathetic engaging of the passions, the risk of mimetic contagion:

For very few people are capable of realizing what we feel for other people must infect what we feel for ourselves, and that if we let our pity for the misfortunes of others grow too strong it will be difficult to restrain our feelings in our own.6

Plato knows very well that the dramatic form possesses an inestimable power that is, in some senses, "conversionary." And yet, ironically, Plato utilises the dramatic form itself in the construction of the dialogues in which he denounces that form: he constructs characters—and himself as a character; he tells stories and recounts myths; he utilises the dialogue form which reads, to all intents and purposes, like a play script. Perhaps above all, Plato's dramatic texts often depict heated struggles between philosophical antagonists, men who invariably enact philosophy itself as a kind of contest.

In What Is Philosophy?, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest that philosophy and its domain—the concept—demands a cast of "conceptual personae" [personnages conceptuels]. They suggest that one such figure in philosophical history is that of the "friend";

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5 Plato, The Republic (Part X, Book X, 605d).
philosophers are the supposed "friends of wisdom," and—with the knowledge that friends cannot be possessed—Deleuze and Guattari suggest that philosophers are people who love wisdom without actually ever possessing it. And yet this "friendship" or "love" is inscribed into a triangle of desire, one which emphasises not only the two lovers (the philosopher and wisdom) but also the third party: the rival claimant of knowledge for whom the philosopher has "competitive distrust."\(^7\) This schema of rivalry is, for Deleuze and Guattari, the "first aspect" of philosophy:

> It is in this first aspect of philosophy that philosophy seems to be something Greek and coincides with the contribution of cities: the formation of societies of friends or equals but also the promotion of relationships of rivalry between and within them, the contest between claimants in every sphere, in love, the games, tribunals, the judiciaries, politics, and even in thought, which finds its condition not only in the friend but in the claimant and the rival ... It is the rivalry of free men, a generalised aestheticism: the agon.\(^8\)

In the dialogues, Plato seems acutely aware that philosophy must proceed by the exclusion of rival claimants. Most of *The Republic* finds its dramatic and epistemological impetus in the defeat of rival opinion through debate: philosophy needs not only its friends (protagonists), but also its Others (antagonists). Although rarely mentioned much by name, *The Republic* stands as an elaborate refutation of Homer: footnotes to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* appear on many of its pages. Plato refers to the "ancient quarrel" between

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philosophy and poetry and hesitates little in declaring his allegiances to the former.

The epistemological exclusion of the sophist—a kind of "philosopher actor"—and the poet from "justified true knowledge" is intimately tied to the more explicitly disciplinary measure of his physical banishment from the polis. Socrates argues that "mimics": "have no place in our city, their presence being forbidden by our code"; the philosopher-king should send the unfortunate soul elsewhere, "after anointing him with myrrh and crowning him with fillets of wool." Arne Melberg has perceptively noted this somewhat more anthropological aspect of Plato's philosophy, in a study devoted to mimesis:

Only the greasy pole is missing when Socrates rejects the imitator; meaning that his ironic celebration seems ominously like those popular rituals that we associate with king-for-a-day or other kinds of scapegoats before they are physically humiliated and thrown out or lynched. And we should not forget—Plato did not—that Homer is to be imagined as the humiliated and as the rejected! Plato has Socrates remind us of that when he comes back to the question in the tenth book and the second rejection. There the argument is resumed and reservations left aside. There we learn, as already mentioned, that poetry starts with Homer ... who is therefore the "leader" of tragedy ... and that poets, no matter how they write, "are all altogether mimetikous" ... That infectious drug called mimesis has contaminated its environment, and no pure and diegetical narration and no knowledge and no idea were good enough as an antidote.

Surprisingly however, Melberg develops the idea of philosophy-as-violent exclusion no further. One might wonder why in a study

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devoted exclusively to the study of mimesis, and a study which notes the role of force and exclusion in Plato's philosophy, no subsequent mention is made of the explicitly agonistic overtones of philosophical activity.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari attempt to outline a distinction between communication and philosophy. They seem to be under no illusions that philosophy is in any way allied to communication, which operates under the weighty sway of popular opinion and attempts to attain consensus rather than generate the Concept. The idea of philosophy as an attempt to "communicate" "ideas" in an amiable conversation between friends is anathema:

The idea of a Western democratic concept of a conversation between friends has never produced a single concept. The idea comes, perhaps from the Greeks, but they distrusted it so much, and subjected it to such harsh treatment, that the concept was more like the ironical soliloquy bird that surveyed *[survolait]* the battlefield of destroyed rival opinions.11

Although Deleuze and Guattari remark that the *agon* is the "first principle" of philosophy, this "principle" receives, quite remarkably, no further treatment in their study. Perhaps the anxieties towards the theatrical, of which the *agon* is the most dramatic principle, survive even in the thought of those who believe that they have "evacuated" Platonism from their thought. Indeed, perhaps this "evacuation" is the re-emergence of the figure of "banishment" which possibly sustains the philosophical imaginary itself.

This is not to argue, of course, that philosophy always speaks of a simple rivalry. Deleuze and Guattari seem correct in noting that epistemological justification adheres to a model of triangulation, and yet in reifying "philosophy" as the friend of the philosopher (against his or her rival) they perhaps fail to note that philosophy can only ever take the form of a far more historical or corporeal figure. Let us not forget that Socrates and Plato are both a historical "double" and a conceptual "single." When Socrates makes battle with the sophists, their exclusion from the "truth" is not only based on Socrates' theoretical "singularity" (his monopoly on reason) but also on Plato's function as post-hoc legitimator. In other words, perhaps the sophists are always "outmanoeuvred" because they are, in the Socratic dialogues, outnumbered.

Deleuze and Guattari seem correct in suggesting that very few have actually attempted to question what philosophy is. They assert that the question comes very late to most thinkers, and although in some senses, the question has "always been asked," it was invariably asked too "indirectly" or "obliquely"; instead of "being seized by it, those who asked the question set it out and controlled it in passing .... There was too much desire to do philosophy to wonder what is was, except as a stylistic exercise."12 Apart from Deleuze and Guattari's final project, one other notable exception that deals with the same problematic comes to mind: José Ortega Y Gasset's The Origin of Philosophy.

In 1943 Gasset undertook to write an epilogue to Julián Marías' History of Philosophy which he hoped would attempt to come to terms with and reconstruct the "dramatic occasion" of the origin of

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12 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy? 1.
philosophy. Needless to say, the planned epilogue became a seven-
hundred page manuscript and was subsequently published under the
title The Origin of Philosophy. Gasset's task suggested to him the
necessity of distinguishing between a "radical" and a "relative" past
of the discipline.13 For Gasset, philosophy's "relative past" is easy
enough to discern: it is the plethora of proper names and texts that
the discipline claims for itself, its constitutive canon. In distinction,
the "radical past" is far more difficult to recover. If the relative past
was the act of people doing philosophy, the radical past was a
"moment" at which philosophy came across its founding energy or
impetus.

One of the central problems for philosophy has been its lack of
an unambiguous self-concept. Many introductory texts in the
analytic tradition skirt this question by suggesting philosophy is
simply "what philosophers do." It might seem somewhat ironic for a
discipline that invented and subsequently privileged the principle of
identity—the thought of the Same—that philosophy's identity itself
appears multiple, contested, divided, and highly ambiguous. As
Richard Rorty points out in "Keeping Philosophy Pure," if a list of
philosophers were chosen at random (Rorty's list is Heraclitus,
Spinoza, Marx, Kierkegaard, Frege, Gödel, Dewey, and Austin) it would
be very difficult to argue that a common set of questions, theories, or
research programs could be attributed to such a diverse collection of
thinkers.14

13 José Ortega Y Gasset, The Origin of Philosophy, trans. Toby Talbot (New
York: W.W. Norton, 1967) 56.
14 Rorty, "Keeping Philosophy Pure," in Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays:
It is this conundrum which Gasset hopes to address in *The Origin of Philosophy*. If philosophy does not constitute a series of common questions, assumptions, or theoretical protocols, then how can it be constituted as a homogeneity? Gasset argues that philosophy is an historical contingency, and wants to inquire into its "radical past," its founding gesture. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Gasset sees philosophy as involved in the act of formulating concepts, and also like the former, Gasset represents a kind of inverted Hegelianism which sees "reason" as a product of history rather than history as a product of reason.\(^{15}\) It is at the moment in his analysis that Gasset puzzles over philosophy's apparently solid but paradoxical "identity" that he comes quite close to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "first principle."

He postulates that perhaps philosophy's identity is partially secured on a dissensus which always attempts to "begin again." Unlike experimental science, which attempts to accumulate knowledge through mathematical modelling and consensus secured through empirical prediction, philosophy cannot be said to "progress" in any concrete way. Philosophers' continual attempts to refute previous theorists could be said to produce a strange identity: philosophy is an epiphenomenon of sustained polemical disidentification. In examining the work of Parmenides and Heraclitus, Gasset sees that what is essential in an examination of their respective theories is a search for their *adversaries*.\(^{16}\) His is not only a conception of philosophy as the "creation of concepts," but the determined and irresolute *opposition to prior ones.*

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\(^{15}\) Gasset, *The Origin of Philosophy* 36.

\(^{16}\) Gasset, *The Origin of Philosophy* 79.
For Gasset, the philosopher must necessarily make an agonistic move: a "violent interruption of the dialectical series."\textsuperscript{17} The historical past is construed by the philosopher as a perennial error, and yet for the author of \textit{The Origin of Philosophy}, it is philosophy's "precious error," one which nourishes the whole theoretical enterprise. Philosophy's "error," in other words, is perhaps its only "truth." And yet Gasset, like Deleuze and Guattari, seems to baulk at the more radical implications of this initial insight. He moves from a conception of philosophy as a dialectical \textit{agon} to one that domesticates and dematerialises dramatic opposition to the \textit{aporetic}.

The early Socratic dialogues are called \textit{aporetic} because they present philosophical impasses without arriving at any solutions. The role of the \textit{aporetic} in theoretical activity has been noted by several theorists. Michel Serres, in his essay "Platonic Dialogue," adopts the language of communications theory in order to discuss the role of the \textit{aporetic} in philosophical activity. He posits that all forms of exchange attempt to eliminate "noise" in order that messages can be carried faithfully along a pathway. Noise, for Serres, is anything that degrades information to the extent that its "code" becomes less univocal. This noise might range from accidental or unintentional variations in graphic form and spelling mistakes, to the static heard on a telegraph wire.

Noise is a pathology of communication that requires the receiver to become an "epigraphist," someone who is trained in decoding ancient or obscure codings. Serres then switches his analysis from "cacography" as an obstacle of communication, to one that considers its absolute \textit{necessity}. He metaphorises the notion of

\textsuperscript{17} Gasset, \textit{The Origin of Philosophy} 17.
"noise" and constructs a scenario in which two interlocutors are united against the phenomena of "interference" and "confusion," and by implication "against individuals with some stake at interrupting communication." In this sense, the two main protagonists of the Socratic dialogues—Plato and Socrates—assume an identity ambiguous enough for us to garner that the aporias of theory do not lie with them, but with another conceptual personage: the third "man":

They exchange roles sufficiently often for us to view them as struggling together against a common enemy. To hold a dialogue is to suppose a third man and to seek to exclude him; a successful communication is the exclusion of the third man .... Dialectic makes the two interlocutors play on the same side .... In a certain sense, they struggle together against interference, against the demon, against the third man. Obviously, this battle is not always successful. In the aporetic dialogues, victory rests with the powers of noise; in the other dialogues, the battle is fierce—attesting to the power of the third man. Serenity returns little by little when the exorcism is definitively (?) obtained.

Serres' vivid language—of "exclusion," "struggle," "enemy," "battle," "victory," and "exorcism"—attests to the agonism of the aporetic. His analysis portrays philosophy as a particular kind of violence. There is a more anthropological edge to Serres' portrayal of "noise" which Gasset's analysis shies away from. And yet, Gasset intuits that philosophy's past is strewn with corpses: in philosophy, to "remain

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in the past means to be dead."\textsuperscript{20} His language of violent opposition begins to gain momentum in the first chapter of the book:

The philosophical past ... strikes us at first glance as a congeries of errors ..... Hegel, referring more generally to all of human life, maintained that "when turning our gaze to the past the first thing we observe is ruins." ..... Noteworthy is the fact that we are not the ones to discover the breach of error in bygone doctrines, for a reading of history reveals how each new philosophy began with a denunciation of its predecessor, and further, that by its formal recognition of the latter's invalidity, it identified itself with a new philosophy. Hence the history of philosophy is simultaneously an exposition of systems and, unintentionally, a critique of them. It represents an effort to construct doctrine after doctrine, thought each time is constructed it is beheaded by its successor, and time is strewn with corpses.\textsuperscript{21}

One should wonder why it is then, that Gasset asserts that the philosophical past continually commits "suicide" rather than parricide.\textsuperscript{22} Several pages later, after he has compared philosophy to "a scalded cat fleeing the house in which is was burned,"\textsuperscript{23} Gasset ponders and then baulks at the resonances of the word "refutation." He freely admits that it is a "ghastly term," but then, in the same sentence adds the peculiar qualification that it "is not at all similar to an electrocution," (!) "although the phonetics of the word would seem to promise no less awesome a spectacle."\textsuperscript{24} It is at this point in the analysis that Gasset all but abandons the explicitly dramatic conception of philosophy which he has been outlining, in favour of

\textsuperscript{20} Gasset, \textit{The Origin of Philosophy} 14.
\textsuperscript{21} Gasset, \textit{The Origin of Philosophy} 18-9.
\textsuperscript{22} Gasset, \textit{The Origin of Philosophy} 19.
\textsuperscript{23} Gasset, \textit{The Origin of Philosophy} 20.
\textsuperscript{24} Gasset, \textit{The Origin of Philosophy} 25.
developing an argument more concerned with "concept generation," the epistemological function of "error," and the "dialectical series."

One should ask why these analyses steer away from philosophy as a kind of dramatic *agon* after they introduce it as a founding gesture. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the way that philosophy has traditionally set itself up as a discipline "opposed" to the drama. And yet careful scrutiny would suggest, ironically, that such an opposition is always inherently dramatic. Perhaps another reason for this oversight is the way in which theorisations of drama render *agon* as "conflict" rather than "opposition"; the semantics are not unimportant. The application of the term "conflict" has a certain value when applied to drama, but the associations of the word tend to retroactively restrict the *agon* to the realm of the *psychological*, a realm with which philosophy has no truck.

On the other hand, "opposition" carries a broader valency, one in which the *agon* is more closely associated—but not tied—to the philosophical. Anthony Kubiak has taken note of this difference in *Stages of Terror: Terrorism, Ideology, and Coercion as Theatre History*:

While *conflict* is certainly one of the key elements in the history of drama, conflict is not the same as opposition. Conflict indicates a difference in desire between characters that ultimately leads to confrontation and (sometimes violent) resolution. By opposition, I mean a broader and also more particular structure of forces opposing each other. Conflict suggests an often poorly delineated antagonism between characters. Opposition implies other *imaginary* possibilities:
class contentions, metaphysical, material, and ideological struggles; the resistance of sanity and madness; either/or; life/death.  25

The dramatic violence of opposition can be clearly discerned in The Republic, where the denunciation of the poets and the sophists not only requires sustained epistemological invalidation, but physical banishment: that is, epistemology and corporeality are both tied inexorably to a logic of exclusion. The notion of the violence of philosophy—or occasionally, "metaphysics"—has been taken up at length by several influential theorists of postmodernity. In "The Discourse on Language," Michel Foucault begins by expressing the desire that he would have preferred to be spared the burden of having to begin. He would have preferred to be already "in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings." 26 However, he relates this fear not to the burden of making explicit his theoretical assumptions, but to the apparently grave dangers inherent in theoretical discourse itself.

The maleficence that discourse potentially harbours, "however humdrum and grey it may seem," is one of "unimaginable power," which becomes clearer when we pause to consider the "conflicts, triumphs, injuries, dominations and enslavements" that lie behind words. 27 In some senses, Foucault's whole oeuvre, from Madness and Civilisation to the volumes on The History of Sexuality, seems to be a

26 Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 215. We will see later, however, how "beginning" suggests other dangers.
27 Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" 216.
sustained engagement that links certain forms of oppression and violence to systems of knowledge. His conception of epistemology is inherently corporeal and disciplinary. Foucault argues that the production of discourse in every society functions, at least in part, to both exclude and prohibit certain alternative knowledges.

Only selected people are qualified to give opinions about certain events, some people are banned from speaking of things that they are thought to know nothing about, and others still may be required to say certain things at certain times: the complex web of discourse allows and disallows in kind, and does not only express conflict, but is actually the site at which many power struggles are waged. Foucault's thesis in *Madness and Civilisation* is predicated on a certain violence exhibited by regulations regarding the functioning of language. Madness, for Foucault, consists of a certain kind of speech that has no epistemic force: the mad person's discourse is considered to be without truth or import. Regardless of the validity of Foucault's notion of madness as a kind of "silence" (an issue that I took up in Chapter Three), he seems correct in suggesting that, from the seventeenth century onwards, madness has become increasingly perceived as without positive content, a mere noise.

This violence, Foucault asserts, is the child of ostensibly "abstract" Cartesian epistemology, the embodiment and institutionalisation of a certain framework of truth, a "truth regime." And yet, in "The Discourse on Language," Foucault talks about another era in the history of philosophy, one which he associates with the ancient Greeks. In relation to Plato's expulsion of the poets and the sophists, he sees the origin of the philosophical "will to truth." What this "will to truth" carries out, in effect, is the dissociation of the links between power and knowledge, one to which
Foucault himself always seems to want to draw attention. Foucault argues that the poets and the sophists were considered by their societies to speak truth because of what these modalities of enunciation did. The poets' powerful language held sway and people lived by it not because it was an abstract representation of an external reality, but because the poetry itself, in foretelling events, actually contributed to the unfolding of history itself.

For Foucault, Plato is the figure under which truth's relationship to power and violence was to be indefinitely submerged. His analysis is significant insofar as it points towards the mask that philosophy wears with regard to the dramatic. The drama, in other words, is philosophy's constitutive amnesia. The birth of philosophy changed truth from what it did—an ado—to what it said, its positive content.²⁸ For Foucault, this historical juncture renders philosophy unable to perceive the economies of desire and the oppositional will to truth behind its own activities. This perhaps makes philosophy's violence more insidious, because its structuring principle, predicated on an ahistorical notion of "reason," denies the very possibility of its own violence. It evades the idea that philosophical discourse exerts agonistic powers of oppression and exclusion. Foucault himself wants to dig up this unthought dimension: "We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity."²⁹

Most of Foucault's work has attempted to engage with how knowledge systems, through various scientific and philosophical rationalities, construct people as subjects, and thus "subject" them to

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²⁸ Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" 218.
²⁹ Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" 229.
various forms of disciplinary control. His work relies on the resonances that tie various "disciplines" to forms of "disciplinarity." The historical genealogies of his work uproot the contingencies of reason and link them to far more diffuse systems of control and subjection, of how epistemologies exclude whole "tetralogies" of knowledge and attempt to reduce unassimilable utterances to mere silences. Much of his work might profitably be seen as a concerted attempt to retroactively give "voice" to such silences before regimes of truth pushed them towards the void.

However valid its aim, Foucault's project seems caught in a strange philosophical impasse. As a voice which attempts to give voice to unreason, how can this project reach fruition except in a language which resuscitates the exclusionary discourse? If madness is—quite literally—an unassimilable voice trapped in the prisons of reason, how can one use reason to open up the prison gates? If discourse is a "violence that we do to things," how does Foucault avoid reenacting that founding violence at the moment that his philosophical archaeology wants to unveil it?

Although he does not express it in quite these terms, this is an aporia that Jacques Derrida takes up in his essay "Cogito and the History of Madness" in order to problematise certain aspects of Foucault's project. Foucault's archaeology of madness attempts to write the silence that reason had attempted to enforce on madness from the mid seventeenth century onwards, to re-invigorate the voice that had been exiled by its passage from a speaking subject to a spoken-about object. And yet Derrida wonders how such a "silence" could be ever written. And even if it could, how could such an analysis escape the traps of reason which was the origin of the violent rupture which divided the two histories? To put it another
way, if madness is the "outside" of reason, how might one get outside reason to write its muteness?\(^{30}\)

The impetus to think outside reason is itself within the confines of reason; silence "itself" must necessarily escape its domain:

if discourse and philosophical communication ... are to have an intelligible meaning, that is to say, if they are to conform to their essence and vocation as discourse, they must simultaneously in fact and in principle escape madness. They must carry normality within themselves. And this is not a specifically Cartesian weakness ... it is not a defect or mystification linked to a determined historical structure, but rather is an essential and universal necessity from which no discourse can escape, for it belongs to the meaning of meaning. It is an essential necessity from which no discourse can escape, even the discourse which denounces a mystification or an act of force.\(^{31}\)

It is for this reason that Derrida cautiously hints that Foucault's attempted "internment of reason" is a project that eventually falters on its premises. It is important to note that Derrida is not contesting the view that "discourse is a violence that we do to things," but rather that discourse deludes itself when it attempts to escape its own violence. In relation to Foucault's project, Derrida is at pains to point out that any writing of a "silence" is always already a kind of positivity: it will still operate within the space of writing-in-general. Any attempt to escape this totality will inevitably return one to it.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida calls into question a chapter of Claude Lévi-Strauss' autobiography *Tristes tropiques*. Derrida

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concentrates on one chapter—"one of its more theoretical" ones—that he sees as advancing a theory of writing. In the chapter "The Writing Lesson," Lévi-Strauss describes how, on one particular field trip, he distributed a number of pencils and sheets of paper among the Nambikwara people. Lévi-Strauss reports that, after several days, members of the group began to draw undulating lines on the sheets but progressed no further in their "writing." It is then reported that the chief took this practice one step further and began to write lines on his sheets of paper when he was working with the anthropologist. Then, reading them out aloud to Lévi-Strauss, he pretended that they contained "sense."

Later, when Lévi-Strauss asked the chief to take him to other Nambikwara groups in order to complete a demographic record, the groups expressed hostility towards the foreigners. In order to calm them, the chief suggested that they immediately proceed to the customary exchange of gifts, to which end the chief took out his pad and read aloud the "list" he had previously written down. Troubled by this scene, Lévi-Strauss contemplates this anthropological theatre and then draws several conclusions about the functions of writing.

He posits that the chief, although he clearly did not understand the lexical or semantic conventions of written language, perceived its sociological function. The chief saw that writing had symbolic value which coupled it to a certain power relation: "it was not a question of knowing specific things, or understanding them, or keeping them in mind, but merely of enhancing the prestige and authority of one individual ...."32 Lévi-Strauss follows this

observation with an analysis of the historical function of writing and its role in socio-cultural exchange. Briefly stated, he argues the following: writing is the handmaiden of the powerful elite; writing has no necessary correlation with the advancement of knowledge or science; writing is correlated to the formation of violent class differentiation and caste systems; literacy rose at the time when state and military control became a permanent feature of western civilisation.

In some respects, Lévi-Strauss' analysis presents a romantic inversion of Plato. For the anthropologist, the chief's mimetic performance as an "actor" or even "anthropological sophist" does not degrade his perception or "knowledge" of the situation. To the contrary, it reveals to Lévi-Strauss that the chief understands perfectly well the historical functions of writing. However, Lévi-Strauss stays well within the Platonic system that sees writing as an inherently inferior mode of knowledge formation. He suggests that the foreign tribe were unaware that this first contact with writing was based on a deception to gain strategic advantage: it was a kind of violence done to a neighbouring group.

For Derrida, Lévi-Strauss' arguments about writing are contingent on a previous portrayal of the Nambikwara as possessing an "original" innocence, an inherently non-violent nature which had steadily become corrupted by alien forces: the alien force of introduced diseases and well-intentioned missionaries, and above all else, the alien violence of the concept, as well as writing. As Derrida argues:

Only an innocent community, and a community of reduced dimensions ... only a micro-society of non-violence and freedom, all the members of which can by rights remain within the range within the range of an
immediate and transparent, a "crystalline" address, fully self-present in its living speech, only such a community can suffer, as the surprise of an aggression coming from without, the insinuation of writing, the infiltration of its "ruse" and of it "perfidy." Only such a community can import from abroad "the exploitation of man by man." 33

Once again, Derrida's sustained critique of Lévi-Strauss preserves the notion of writing as a "kind of violence done to things," but problematises his conception of what writing actually is. For Derrida, Lévi-Strauss must figure writing as something alien to speech, something whose introduction to the tribe is "instantaneous." This, Derrida dubs Lévi-Strauss' "epigenetism"; the anthropologist does not consider that writing might already inhere within speech itself, but is always introduced anterior to it. Derrida explains that the anthropologist cannot assume that the symbolic borrowing of the chief somehow "explains" the violent emergence of writing, because Lévi-Strauss explains it only as an instance of the imitation of writing, of mimesis. He argues that Lévi-Strauss' account of the "sudden" introduction of writing is neither "sudden" nor an invention, but rather, "the importation of an already constituted borrowing." 34

Lévi-Strauss' account is quite explicitly based around a "fiction," the fiction of the chief's "acting" when the list of gifts was being read aloud. This allows him to discern the "sociological" rather than "intellectual" function of writing. And yet Derrida expresses concern that this model of writing is too precipitate; he calls into question the notion that the Nambikwara are a "people without writing" by drawing attention to Lévi-Strauss' premature conclusion

33 Derrida, Of Grammatology 119.
34 Derrida, Of Grammatology 127.
that the "dots" and "zig-zags" on the group's calabashes are not writing, but a kind of "aesthetic" decoration. For Derrida, this reliance on the term "aesthetic" is an imposition of an ethnocentric, phonocentric, and metaphysical concept on a culture alien to such thinking. It is, ironically, an imposition of which anthropology first made the western intellectual world aware.

Derrida contends that the Nambikwara do have a system of writing: "not merely ... representational designs showing a man or a monkey, but of diagrams describing, explaining, writing, a genealogy and a social structure." Derrida's discussion of Tristes tropiques is really an extensive introduction to a more deliberated discussion of the theory of writing in the work of Rousseau. Rousseau, like Lévi-Strauss, sees writing as an instrument of violence: both of Derrida's analyses come under the chapter heading "The Violence of the Letter." Although Derrida comes to ostensibly reject both Lévi-Strauss' and Rousseau's "romantic" theories of writing, his own analyses can be seen as a radicalisation of the romantic tradition itself, one which maintains a strong correlation between language and violence. Although Derrida problematises the adequacy of the notion of speech as a kind of "innocence," he does not challenge the relationship between discourse and oppression:

that digression about the violence that does not supervene from without upon an innocent language in order to surprise it, a language that suffers the aggression of writing as the accident of its disease, its defeat and its fall; but is the originary violence of a language which is always already a writing. Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss are not for a moment to be challenged when they relate the power of writing to the exercise of violence. But radicalising this theme, no longer considering this violence as derivative with respect to a naturally

35 Derrida, Of Grammatology 124.
innocent speech, one reverses the entire sense of a proposition—the unity of violence and writing—which one must therefore be careful not to abstract and isolate.\footnote{Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology} 106.}

Derrida is not blind to the manipulation-through-mimesis that the chief performs to the other tribe, and yet questions Lévi-Strauss' reasoning about this scene. Thus, implicit in Derrida is a conceptual connection between mimesis and \textit{agon}, but we will have to return to a section of \textit{Dissemination} to look further into these relations.

In "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida raises questions about the univocality of the Greek term \textit{pharmakon}, a word which seems to create unresolvable problems with the translation of this term into English—or indeed, even into "itself." The equivocality of the term allows Plato to direct it at both the sophists, cited in a pejorative sense, and Socrates, cited in a positive sense. And yet, the structure of opposition that Plato attempts to establish between genuine philosophy and the "philosopher actor" is undone by the reciprocity suggested by recourse to one and the same term. The word suggests a kind of mimetic doubling that takes place between true and false philosophy, a doubling that can only be resolved by the physical banishment of the poets and the sophists from the \textit{polis}.

Derrida sees writing as (like the mythical character of Thoth) capable of a kind of mimetic doubling: it is a supplement to speech that is always in danger of supplanting it. Likewise, the sophist as a parasite on the actuality of genuine knowledge can double for the philosopher and supplant him. Derrida perceives, in subsequent translations of the \textit{Phaedrus}, the effacement of an "original" ambiguity in meaning which serves to cover over the arbitrary use
of the term: the translators establish "after the fact" a kind of conceptual univocality that Plato's text itself never achieved.

And yet Derrida gives relatively little attention to another ambiguity of the term. As well as a word whose meaning shuttles between "remedy" and "poison," the term also has strong associations with the *immolation of the sacrificial victim of ancient Greece*. Although Arne Melberg, in his study of mimesis, does not explicitly make this association, he alludes to it when he aligns Socrates' rejection of the poets with the ancient rituals of humiliation and lynching carried out at ancient festivals. As Cesáreo Bandera notes in "Literature and Desire: Poetic Frenzy and the Love Potion," "the *pharmakos* is the scapegoat, the sacrificial victim that the city of Athens used to expel and kill in order to purify itself from the curse of any present or possible calamity."

Derrida is not blind to the associations between the *pharmakon* and the *pharmakos*. In fact, he points out that Socrates was born on the day that the Athenians purified the city by expelling the *pharmakos*. And yet this theme receives relatively little attention in his analysis. By not embroidering the more anthropological resonances of the term, Derrida risks repeating Plato's silence about the violent implications of his epistemological scheme.

For René Girard, the notion of the *pharmakos* is central to an understanding of the cultural formation of ancient Greece.

The city of Athens prudently kept on hand a number of unfortunate souls, whom it maintained at public expense, for appointed times as well as in certain emergencies. Whenever some calamity threatened ...

37 Arne Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis* 20.
there was always a pharmakos at the disposal of the community ... Like Oedipus, the victim is considered a polluted object, whose living presence contaminates everything that comes in contact with it and whose death purges the community of its ills ... He was used as a kind of sponge to soak up impurities, and afterward he was expelled from the community or killed in a ceremony that involved the entire populace.39

Girard's analysis is interesting in the way in it figures the scapegoated pharmakos as a means by which the polis rids itself of impurities. There are parallels between Girard's characterisation of the Greek city state with Michèle Le Doeuff's analysis of the philosophical imaginary. For Le Doeuff, philosophy is pre-eminently concerned with its borders, and its own identity; it is driven into a perennial search for a kind of "purity." The search for purity can manifest itself in any number of guises: the project of a philosophical (Kantian) "pure reason"; the continual invocation of images in philosophical discourse which construe the discipline as an "island"; the sustained attempt within philosophy to weed out "non-philosophy" and "non-philosophers"; philosophy's anxieties towards its declared "others": the mythical, the sacred, the fabulous, the imagistic, the poetic.

In the case of The Republic, philosophy's purity is upheld at the cost of banishing the poets and the sophists.40 The gesture of purification has many successors in philosophy's two and one-half thousand year history.


40 As will be argued, perhaps philosophical purity finds its "radical past" in this banishment.
Early in the twentieth century, "logical positivism" flourished in Vienna, the United States, and especially, England. Originating in Vienna, a group of philosophers led by the theorists Rudolf Carnap and Moritz Schlick attempted to formulate a philosophy which would be properly "scientific," insofar as it would be able to set out in advance a series of procedural rules encompassing all forms of reasoning and proof. The group attempted to purge philosophy of metaphysics (for them, a kind of "non-philosophy") through a prescription which has subsequently come to be known as the "verification principle." 41

Simply stated, the positivists believed that any meaningful statement, that is, any statement amenable to interrogation regarding its truth or falsity, would have to satisfy one of two criteria. The meaningfulness of a philosophical proposition should either follow strictly from analytic (deductive) premises—syllogistic logic—or it should be amenable to confirmation from the availability of sense data: phenomenal empiricism. For the logical positivists, philosophy had for far too long concerned itself with wide varieties of "nonsense," statements that were unavailable to analytic or synthetic verification.

Unfortunately, the positivists' eagerness to purify philosophy of metaphysics left their own project floundering. Their contention that a philosophical statement should be either logically deduced or empirically confirmed could itself be neither logically deduced nor empirically confirmed. The positivists found themselves to be unwitting metaphysicians, and positivism split, having some of its results used in the development of information technology and other

aspects taken up by philosophers of science. The irony of this attempted cleansing of philosophy, an attempt to move it away from the realm of metaphysics and religion, ended up reproducing one of the sacred's essential gestures: the rite of purification.

That philosophy systematically attempts to purge itself of its "impure" elements through an expulsion of the pharmakos links it to a sacrificial logic at the very moment that it attempts its escape. The ever renewed attempt to purge philosophy of its "charlatans" and "sophists" appears reliant on an anxiety which could not be predicated on the charlatan's difference from the real philosopher, but their indifference: their capacity to function as a kind of philosopher double and supplant or replace the philosopher at their rightful station. By examining the sacrificial purge which attempts to regain philosophical identity (via the banishment of the actor) we can begin to discern what philosophy unwittingly seeks to repress: the logic which links mimesis to agon.

Mimesis is neither the simple re-presentation of an already given reality, nor is it simply a function of linguistic or pictorial "iteration" that is without discernible limit. Rather, it is a kind of symbolic and corporeal doubling which threatens to upset epistemological hierarchies. In the contemporary era, it is perhaps René Girard who has most clearly perceived and articulated the dramatic resonances of mimesis.

In Molière's *The Would-Be Gentleman* (Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme), a well-to-do member of the bourgeoisie begins to convert his own home into an educational institution, with himself as its only student. Various masters come to visit the pupil (Mr Jourdain) only to become somewhat dismayed by his relentless philistinism. They remain, however, because Mr Jourdain pays very well. During
the third act, several of the masters become involved in an altercation, each claiming the superiority of their own discipline. This altercation, which had been stewing since the first act, is brought to a head on the entrance of the fencing master. Eventually, the philosophy master enters, much to Mr Jourdain's relief, and attempts to solve the escalating quarrel through an appeal to abstract reason; he reminds them of Seneca's discourse *On Anger*. The scene is worth reproducing at length:

PHILOSOPHER. A wise man is superior to any insults which can be put upon him, and the best reply to unseemly behaviour is patience and moderation.

FENCING MASTER. They had the impudence to compare their professions with mine.

PHILOSOPHER. Well, friend, why should that move you? We should never compete in vainglory and precedence. What really distinguishes men one from another is wisdom and virtue.

DANCING MASTER. I maintain that dancing is a form of skill, a science, to which sufficient honour can never be paid.

MUSIC MASTER. And I that music has been held in foremost esteem all down the ages.

FENCING MASTER. And I will stick to my point against the pair of them that skill in arms is the finest and most necessary of all the sciences.

PHILOSOPHER. In that case where does philosophy come in? I consider you are all three presumptuous to speak with such assurance before me and impudently give the name of sciences to a set of mere accomplishments which don't even deserve the name of arts and can only be adequately described under their wretched trades of gladiator, ballad singer, and mountebank!

FENCING MASTER. Oh get out! You dog of a philosopher!

MUSIC MASTER. Get out! You miserable pedant!

DANCING MASTER. Get out! You beggarly usher!
PHILOSOPHER. What! Rascals like you dare to— [He burls himself upon them and all three set about him.]42

There is a force at work here which seems to suggest that the more each master wants to differentiate himself from the others, the more they all begin to assume an indistinguishable identity: they gravitate, in other words, towards becoming mimetic doubles. The epistemic priority that each ascribes to his own domain (the claim for it as a "science") is an attempt to put in place a hierarchy which nevertheless disintegrates, despite—or perhaps because of—these attempts. The philosopher's attempts to settle the dispute on the grounds of "wisdom"—a form of dispassionate reason—fails because the very attempt to adjudicate unfailingly between rival claimants places one in a field where each claimant is a strategist involved in the same drama.

The implicit privileging of philosophical discourse becomes more explicit as the philosopher disparages the rival claimants in his own bid for ascendancy. The comedy in the scene comes from its capacity to show attempted difference collapsing towards sameness; Molière's dramatic comedy couples mimesis and agon to show their complicity. The scene is, in its own way, a dramatic critique of idealist philosophy through its unmasking of the power relationships between knowledge claims. If Foucault is correct in suggesting that Plato is the name under which the complicities of power and knowledge become submerged, then perhaps one potential of the drama is to periodically re-energise this connection.

Philosophy, in banishing the drama, has allowed it to become its generative unconscious. Its anxiety towards the dramatic has the effect of continually domesticating mimesis in the direction of representation or repetition/alteration, although all the while competing knowledge claims take as their dramaturgical principle a form of opposition. Girard mentions the Molière scene in his essay "Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis." He argues that comedy requires a certain distanciation for the spectator that allows him/her to construe themselves as superior to what is happening on stage.\footnote{René Girard, "Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis," in To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 127.} In the instance of the scene above, the philosopher begins by taking a standpoint which is ostensibly external to the quarrel; presumably, this generates a certain empathy between the philosopher and the audience. However, soon, the philosopher becomes embroiled in the quarrel which he is supposed to be adjudicating, and the comic effect is heightened. We discover the imposture of the meta: the philosopher's external mediation is actually internal to the melee.

Girard draws striking parallels between Molière's philosopher and the character Teiresias in Sophocles' King Oedipus. As the city of Thebes becomes engulfed in a wave of pestilence and famine, the people appeal to King Oedipus—husband of Jocasta—and Creon to solve the dilemma. Oedipus and Creon quickly become embroiled in a quarrel which sees them appeal to the prophet Teiresias. Teiresias is a sage, who, like Moliere's philosopher, is envisaged as external to the quarrel. He is the one with the gift of wisdom who can see the truth:
CHORUS:

There is one who can find him out. They are bringing the prophet
In whom, of all men, lives the incarnate truth.

Enter TEIRESIAS, blind, led by an attendant.

OEDIPUS:

Teiresias, we know there is nothing beyond your ken;
Lore sacred and profane, all heavenly and earthly knowledge
Are in your grasp. In your heart, if not with the eye,
You see our city's condition: we look to you
As our only help and protector.44

However, Teiresias' epistemological superiority soon becomes challenged. At first, he refuses to speak, raising the ire of Oedipus, who is keen to know the truth about the chaos. Then when Teiresias reveals—under extreme duress—that the killer of King Laius is Oedipus himself, a quarrel ensues which turns three supposed "mediators" (Creon, Oedipus and Teiresias) into doubles; each persists in denouncing the other and eventually resorts to personal insults. All three are reputed to be temperate men, especially Teiresias, who is supposed to be a paradigm of virtue, and yet all are drawn into heady conflict.

Central to both of these scenes is the dramatic movement from external mediation to internal doubling: philosophy invokes a self-image of discipline external to the objects it contemplates. American philosopher Thomas Nagel characterises this objectivist imaginary as "the view from nowhere." Nagel argues that much philosophy has attempted to construe itself as, quite literally, without perspective, a view which believes it has transcended its own personal (subjective)

experiences and all forms of thought regulated by semantic and syntactic form. And yet Nagel sees that this view from nowhere, "the attempt to give a complete account of the world in objective terms ... inevitably leads to false reductions or to outright denial that certain patently real phenomena exist at all."\(^{45}\)

Molière's philosopher and Sophocles' Teiresias, like philosophy itself, attempt to obtain a perspective that is external to all "interests." There is a temporal movement in this construal which entails that the philosopher and sage arrive at the site of analysis late, where the object or scenario is already constituted. They are all, in other words, members of a kind of "audience":

Eagerness to arbitrate the conflict is rooted in the illusion of superiority created by a pure spectator status ... We must not even think of him as a philosopher first and a spectator second. His status as a philosopher is rooted in his status as a spectator. The philosophical attitude depends entirely on the type of observation a late appearance makes possible. Hegel compares philosophy to an owl that begins to fly at dusk. As he contemplates the wreckage left by his predecessors, the philosopher cannot help feeling superior.\(^{46}\)

How close this seems to come to Deleuze and Guattari's "first principle" of philosophy and Gasset's image of philosophy as a field of "ruins"! As noted, Girard has been particularly astute in discerning and analysing mimetic contagion in anthropological studies, literary texts, and mythology, but aside from a small section devoted to Heidegger in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* and the above paragraph, he has not applied his analyses to


\(^{46}\) René Girard, "Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis" 127.
philosophy. However, by examining Jacques Derrida's work on Plato in relation to the author of *Violence and the Sacred*, an interesting structural relation can be discerned between these two theorists, one that might offer several insights into the dramatic structures of philosophy.

**Girard and Derrida: Doubling and Epistemology**

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, his first book, Girard identifies a kind of literary work that he calls "novelistic" or "romanescque." The romanescque novel, Girard argues, figures desire as something *interindividual*, rather than *individual*. In the works of Flaubert, Stendhal, Dostoyevski, Cervantes, and Proust, he detects a structure of rivalrous desire that circulates between central characters, a desire which gradually begins to mould them into doubles of each other. Interestingly enough, Girard attempts an analysis of desire that uses mimesis as its primary descriptive if not explanatory principle.

In Girard's view, these romanescque novels disclose the fact that subjects do not desire objects per se, but only ever desire what the Other desires. Like Freud, Girard's model of desire is characteristically triangular insofar as the subject requires a model whose desire they are able to imitate, as well as an "object" which provisionally serves to "ground" their fantasies. According to Girard's analyses of these novels, mimetic desire may not only produce *agon*, but in some crucial ways, depends on it. He argues that

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48 Girard associates the latter with romanticism.

49 In later works, Girard does not restrict himself to these writers, turning instead to drama, and particularly, the work of Shakespeare.
desire is always mediated, that is, it requires the desiring subject to choose, consciously or unconsciously, a subject who will act as model for their own desire.

In the same book, Girard goes on to differentiate between two types of mediation of desire: external and internal. External mediation involves the mimetic reproduction of the desire of a model who is sufficiently removed from the field of relations to prevent mimesis turning into agon. One example of this might be members of an Islamic community imitating the desires of Mohammed, an historical and religious figure who could not conceivably become a rival.\textsuperscript{50} Internal mediation, on the other hand, allows the model (or "mediator") to become an obstacle to the fulfillment of desire.

One illustration of internal mediation that Girard offers in Deceit, Desire and the Novel is the rivalrous desire enacted between Rênal and Valenod in Stendhal's The Red and the Black. Rênal and Valenod are depicted by Stendhal as consummate members of the bourgeoisie and, like Molière's Mr Jourdain, consider it appropriate to find a tutor, although neither can see the benefit of one outside the domain of social prestige. Rênal's desire in hiring the tutor—Julien—only becomes concrete after Julien's father insinuates to him that they have had a better offer elsewhere. The father's remark is wholly fictitious, but it nonetheless transforms Rênal's vague interest into a full-blown obsession. Rênal concludes that it must be Valenod who has offered the better sum and sets about trying to get Julien to return. Meanwhile, Valenod receives news that Rênal

\textsuperscript{50} Undoubtedly, there is a possibility that this might happen, but seems unlikely. There are numerous examples of so-called external mediation turning into internal mediation. One example is the assassination or stalking of well-known celebrities by their biggest "fans."
has attempted to secure Julien as a tutor and becomes equally obsessed with the same pursuit.

The irony, of course, is that this vigorous attempt to differentiate oneself from a rival progressively eliminates all differentiation via the progressive action of mimetic doubling. Girard draws on Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sancho to illustrate a point which could be equally applied to Rénal and Valenod: "Don Quixote and Sancho borrow their desires from the Other in a movement which is so fundamental and primitive that they completely confuse it with the will to be Oneself."51 Girard points out that the subject's relation to its object—in the case of the Red and the Black, Julien—is never as important as the relationship between the rivals, Rénal and Valenod. Girard, unlike other theorists mentioned in this chapter, makes explicit connections between mimesis and opposition. It is a thought that has perhaps been buried beneath the weight of the philosophical canon, and thus Girard's thought creates an opportunity to re-think the more dramatic resonances of mimesis.

In his next book, Violence and the Sacred, Girard develops his mimetic theory of desire by outlining how the doubling or symmetry of gesture between rivalrous parties works on a cultural and societal scale. Where his concerns in Deceit, Desire, and the Novel are more "psychological"—albeit a psychology that refuses to reduce the subject to a conflux of individual desires, drives, or urges—his concerns in this later work are of a far larger scale. Girard refuses to accept that mimetic desire can be restricted to the interpersonal. One of the primary emphases in Violence and the Sacred is that mimesis

is highly contagious. Plato also points this out in *The Republic* when he observes that action on a stage can spread to members of the audience, who then are able to infect other spectators with their imitative disease. This is perhaps the primary reason that Plato disallows certain actions to take place on stage in order to safeguard the *polis*.

Several anthropologists have pointed out the relationship between gestural symmetry and violence. Girard examines the Tupinamba, who use the word *tobajara* interchangeably as both a verb and a noun to describe the fate of captured prisoners of rival communities, as well the executioner who administers the punishment. And yet another meaning of *tobajara*—for Girard its "primary sense"—denotes a gestural symmetry between the prisoner of the rival community and the executioner, both of whom engage in a series of movements which closely resemble each other. In another chapter, drawing on the work of Victor Turner, Girard draws attention to the pervasiveness of the use of masks during ceremonies of ritual violence, masks which are often put on just before the sacrificial *denouement*:

In many cases the celebrants ... don masks at the climax of the rite, just before the sacrifice ... They are enemies first, engaging in mock combats and symmetrical dances; then they put on their masks and change into monstrous doubles.

In the same book, Girard adds another level of speculation to his theory of mimetic desire. As mimetic contagion sweeps through a

community, hierarchies begin to dissolve and the collapse of structures on which culture is founded threatens a plague of anarchic violence, one that has the potential to annihilate everything in its path. It is because Girard has already linked desire with mimesis (perhaps, unfortunately, he makes the two terms virtually synonymous) and then both of these to rivalry, that he can then proceed to ask how the task of redifferentiation and reintegration can take place after mimetic contagion.

Girard suggests that the agon\textsuperscript{55} which results from mimesis typically reaches a point of crisis or paroxysm, a point at which a scapegoat is chosen for punishment or execution. The act of selecting a scapegoat and accusing them of being responsible for the anarchy that has beset the community functions as a pacifier and offers an opportunity for a new form of differentiation to take shape. In some instances, the function of the scapegoat becomes quite formalised and integrated—albeit unconsciously—into the social structure of the community. In the case of the Tupinamba, rival communities wage a perpetual war with each other: the number of captured prisoners held for execution remain fairly constant between the warring parties. There seems to be an implicit recognition that ritual violence confers certain social advantages. By externalising internal conflicts onto an external party, social cohesion through a renewed unanimity seems all-but guaranteed.

At first glance, the theorisations of Girard and Derrida seem to have very little in common. Girard is a literary critic and armchair anthropologist in the Durkheimian tradition, who wants to posit an origin of cultural formation. Derrida, by contrast, is a philosopher

\textsuperscript{55} Girard, strangely, never uses this term.
who incessantly problematises the notion of origin. And yet, there seem to be definite convergences in each of their respective works that can be teased out in order to help to illuminate and clarify the other.

In Chapter Four, Derrida's discussion of Plato's *Phaedrus* was considered. In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida deconstructs the conceptual oppositions that sustain Plato's divestment of a "dead" writing in place of "living" speech. In order to illustrate his point, Socrates draws on the myth of Thoth, a character whose propensity to double and supplant other characters makes him the paradigmatic expression of writing, an art which he is said to have invented. Thoth's "chameleon" capacity to become a double of the "real" can be likened to Socrates' rejection of the sophists, who are able to double for "real" philosophers. This potential symmetry of "real" philosophy with its double threatens to collapse epistemological hierarchies in the same way that Girard suggests that mimetic desire threatens to level cultural orders.

As Deleuze and Guattari remind us in *What is Philosophy?*, philosophy not only requires its lovers of wisdom, but also its rival claimants. The inscription of philosophy into a model of rivalrous triangulation, without the psychoanalytic baggage that usually accompanies such a model, places Deleuze and Guattari's initial analysis in strange proximity to Girard's. Partaking in perhaps both of these viewpoints, Michel Serres suggests that Platonic dialogue inaugurates an intellectual poetic which seeks to exclude a "common enemy," which he calls—invoking, like the others, a model of triangulation—the "third man."

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The operation of exclusion is central to Girard's concept of the scapegoat mechanism. Exclusion is the means by which society can purge itself of contagious violence: it considers exclusion a "beneficial" or legitimate violence. In anthropology, exclusion is closely associated with the goal of "purifying" society, of expunging the "bad seed" or contaminant. Elaborate rites of purification, needless to say, invariably follow sacrifices.\(^5\) As has already been discussed via the work of Le Doeuff, the perennial anxieties that philosophy has towards its own purity, of its self-sufficiency and self-identity, has provoked the philosophical canon to be littered with images of islands and other hermetic seals, images which it claims are extrinsic to philosophy.

Additionally, movements in philosophy such as logical positivism and Kant's separation of "critical" from "dogmatic" thought attempt to "start again" the philosophical enterprise, to purify it of metaphysics, "superstition," and the sacred. Once again, like the Sophocles' Teiresias and Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, the attempt to differentiate oneself through the imposture of a "view from nowhere," of a vantage point ostensibly removed from the contagion of mimetic escalation, urges one back into the mêlée itself. The meta-discipline which attempts to purge or purify itself of the contaminations of "lesser" disciplines like the "sacred" unconsciously re-enact one of their quintessential gestures.

Jacques Derrida himself has been subject to various "unmaskings" which have attempted to expose him as a philosopher double. As previously mentioned, Cambridge University's attempt to award Derrida with an honorary doctorate met with a wave of

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\(^5\) See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 29; 36-7; 57-8.
opposition from professional philosophers, culminating in a letter sent from a "protest group" to the *Times* (London), published May 9, 1992. An excerpt of the letter reads as follows:

M. Derrida describes himself as a philosopher, and his writings do indeed bear some of the marks of writings in that discipline. Their influence, however, has been to a striking degree almost entirely in fields outside philosophy—in departments of film studies, for example, or of French and English literature.\(^{58}\)

The letter then goes on to accuse Derrida of a conspicuous lack of "rigour"; he is a thinker whose writing both "defies comprehension" and is also "false."\(^{59}\) Apart from the highly ironic logical violation involved in declaring something both incomprehensible *and* untrue, one of the most interesting parts of the protest letter (reproduced above) is the accusation of disciplinary impurity. It is an accusation which does not target Derrida's work itself, but its institutional uptake. Like the Sophist, Derrida apparently "bears the marks" of a philosopher, but is evidently the equivalent of Thoth: he is a wily double, able to supplant and replace the genuine through a series of deceptive doublings.

In a sense, this accusation partakes in a degree of truth. Derrida's writing style employs a variety of speech modalities that are integral to his conceptual aims. As Christopher Norris points out, critics of Derrida often fail to recognise the distinction between a statement which simply *cites* a certain style of analytic prose and one which *deploys* it in view of its conceptual efficacy. In other words,


\(^{59}\) qtd. in Derrida, *Points* 420.
many detractors invariably fail to recognise the subtle interplays—supposedly well established within "analytic" philosophy—between the linguistic functions of "use" and "mention." Derrida's style invariably performs, cites, provokes, and parodies at the same time that it analyses and deconstructs: in line with the conceptual vocabulary of J.L. Austin, Derrida's work is a constative philosophical analysis that always turns around to examine the performative implications of its own activities.60

And yet this "playing of roles," this shifting of voices, is anathema to doxastic philosophical orthodoxy. It is certainly contrary to Plato's discourses in the Republic concerning the inappropriateness of "role play" in both the polis and the confines of philosophical discourse. And yet, if Derrida's work is so blatantly "false," why would there be any problem in refuting it, especially when the undersigned of the Cambridge protest letter contains such highly regarded and influential philosophers? Christopher Norris offers a suggestion, somewhat ambiguous in tone, which implies a certain moral standpoint perhaps taken by some towards Derrida's work.

Hence the frequent ... moral outrage—the talk of corrupting influence, of 'nihilism', irrationalism, decadence and so forth—which reached a climax in the recent campaign to prevent Derrida from receiving an honorary doctorate at Cambridge. One may suspect that such opinions very often went along with a determined refusal to read Derrida's work, since to do so would clearly place these parties at risk of succumbing to that virulent contagion.61


61 Norris, "Raising the Tone" 74-5.
Contagion, of course, suggests a violent epidemic that threatens to destroy a community through the spread of some plague or disease. Maintaining Le Doeuff’s contention that philosophy is perennially concerned with its own borders, perhaps the Cambridge protest group—as a result of sensing the "Derrida plague" creep through the interstitial spaces of the academy—saw its professional duty to guard itself from the impurity of this impure theorist, lest the disease ravage the entire philosophical community.

Rampant contagion, as a medical phenomenon, threatens to level hierarchies in society as no-one is spared the threat of the disease. For Antonin Artaud, the plague, like the theatre, is "a crisis resolved either by death or ... drastic purification."62 In Girard’s view, the plague is thus closely associated with the dissolution of differences (mimetic contagion) and therefore the threat of violence and disorder.63 Akin to the epidemic, Plato’s sophist threatens to efface all differences between "real" philosophy and its simulation; it is an effacement that seems to leave no option but for a sacrificial crisis after which hierarchies can be reinstated. In some senses, the sophist, along with dramatic poet and the advocate of writing, have already been philosophy’s sacrificial victims. Their banishment and conceptual lynching are integral to philosophical "purity," a purity which, it seems, was always contingent, never completed, and perhaps never even existed, except as a disciplinary phantasy, the underbelly of which was a dramatic opposition to the drama.

63 Girard, Violence and the Sacred 76.
What might be at issue, then, is an anxiety of epistemological contagion. In *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault's discussion of the discourses of madness in the classical era—some of which are still firmly imprinted in selected areas of contemporary psychopathology—converge around the "health" of reason in the mental patient. The patient, through whatever means, was thought to have a pathological ir/rationality, one that disrupted the order of the Real. Although contemporary medical science regards mental illness as incommunicable in the ordinary sense of microbial transfer, a genuine fear of infection from this "disease of reason" nonetheless appears to exist in contemporary mental institutions.

Denise Jodelet, in *Madness and Social Representations*, details a piece of fieldwork that she undertook while living with a community of mental patients in France. In interviewing the workers in the community, she discovered a number of fears—fears which most of the workers themselves admitted highly irrational—about somehow "catching" madness from one of the lodgers. To this end, one of the common practices amongst foster parents was the separation of water: one lot was for the lodgers and the other lot for the foster parents. Other parents refused to touch their children or allowed other children to touch their foster child. And horror gripped many of the foster parents at the thought that their child might touch the water used to do household duties or wash in the same basin as them. As one relates:

There are some lodgers who frighten us .... One of them frightened us so much that I sent him back. And I think it's because I sent him back that they gave me this lame one who doesn't do a thing. Because you have to have a reason to send them back. He used to frighten me. *When*
Jodelet presents countless examples of these contagion phobias, including fears of saliva, fears of blood, of letting the child do the washing up, and of the necessity to clear away and quickly hide any child who is acting strangely or having an "attack," lest this outburst of unreason be seen by the other children and suddenly "catch." The admittedly irrational behaviour of the foster parents in this contemporary setting seems to give the lie to various accounts of traditional sacrificial rituals of purification that explain such rites in terms of intuitive understandings of infectious disease and the threat of contaminated bodily fluids.\(^6\)

The threat of epistemological contagion—the mimetic doubling that disrupts the peace between wisdom and its claimant—demands a form of continual purgation of rivals in order to ensure the longevity of the romance. Let us remind ourselves that Derrida, although restricting such a comment to a footnote, does not fail to note that the *pharmakon* is linked with the sacrificial scapegoat of ancient Greece, the *pharmakos*, a victim whose function was to purify the community of violence, disease, and disorder. It is at this point that the structural similarities between Derrida's theorisation of writing and Girard's theory of cultural formation appear most striking. Girard himself notes, all too briefly, towards the end of

\(^{64}\) Qtd. in *Madness and Social Representations: Living with the Mad in One French Community*, trans. Tim Pownall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) 238.

\(^{65}\) Girard gives his own reasons against this popular hypothesis, which are equally, if not more, convincing. See *Violence and the Sacred* 27-8.
Violence and the Sacred, the pertinence of Derrida's essay on Plato and his own work:

Although Derrida refuses to do away with all differences or to treat these differences as null and void, he demonstrates that between Socrates and the Sophists, the structure of the opposition belies not the difference that Plato would like to establish but rather the reciprocity that is suggested by the recourse to one and the same word. All difference in doctrines and attitudes is dissolved in violent reciprocity, is secretly undermined by the symmetry of the facts and by the strangely revealing, even somewhat naive use of pharmakon. This use polarises the maleficent violence on a double, who is arbitrarily expelled from the philosophic community.66

Like Derrida, Girard himself discusses the inherent polyvalence of several terms associated with violence and expulsion. He discusses the Greek term katharma, which refers both to an evil object extracted from a sick person's body and also a sacrificial victim whose death purifies the community. The term katharsis—originally taken up in its philosophical form and given overtly theatrical overtones by Aristotle—originally referred to the "mysterious benefits" that were bestowed on a community by the death of the pharmakos or the katharma: "The process is generally seen as a religious purification and takes the form of cleansing or draining away impurities. Shortly before his execution the pharmakos is paraded ceremonially through the streets of the village."67

This "parading" that Girard refers to illustrates the highly ambiguous position of the sacrificial victim; they are both somehow the origin of the chaotic violence and its cure; they are sacralised and slaughtered; they are given privileges and anointed with special

66 Girard, Violence and the Sacred 296.
67 Girard, Violence and the Sacred 287.
balms, and then savagely killed. Although Girard does not give any space in *Violence and the Sacred* to the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, the treatment of the *pharmakos* or the *katharma* bears a striking resemblance to the reception of Jesus Christ riding the ass into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, one week before he was crucified: "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: BLESSED IS THE KING OF ISRAEL THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD."  

The "king for a day" procession that appears to characterise both the ritual sacrifices of the *pharmakos* or *katharma* and the account of Christ's reception into Jerusalem bear ominous resemblances to the fate Socrates has in store for the "mimic," the citizen who suggests that s/he is capable of more than one profession. Socrates suggests that he would inform the interloper that there is no place for such a person in the *polis*, and then "send him elsewhere, after anointing him with myrrh and crowning him with fillets of wool." As was mentioned, the resemblance between Socrates' anointing and banishment of the citizen "role-player" and the rites surrounding the Greek *pharmakos* has been noted in the study by Arne Melberg.

Of course, the "mimic" here could easily be taken to include the sophist, the "actor double" of the true philosopher. There seems to be an anthropological intuition in Plato's writings that indicates extreme anxieties towards mimesis: the double, the twin, the mimic, the actor, writing, and the degraded, empirical world of "copies."

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John 12.12-3.

Above all else, Plato perhaps senses but cannot articulate the tension which generates classical drama: the complicities between mimesis and agon.

In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida's achievement is to locate the neuralgic loci which indicate the radical undecidability of the central philosophemes of the Phaedrus, of their unstable shuttling between contraries which should never meet. On the other hand, Girard also perceives the fluidity of sacrificial logic and its lexicon, but hopes to move one step further by seizing these radical ambiguities in order to construct a theoretical model, an ambitious "unified field theory" of cultural formation and dissolution. And yet Girard's notion of "origins" is highly nuanced, one that is as equally suspicious of the "metaphysics of presence" as Derrida's own analyses.

Thoth, as we have already seen, is the God of writing who is able to mimetically transfigure himself and supplant other mortals and Gods endlessly; his identity is constituted as a non-identity, his "absolute" difference is his utter indifference to difference. In another section of the same essay, Derrida pursues the Platonic figuration of writing in another, albeit homologous way.

In a section of his essay on the Phaedrus entitled "The Heritage of the Pharmakon: Family Scene," Derrida remarks that Plato's "pharmacy" is: "a theater. The theatrical cannot here be summed up in speech: it involves forces, space, law, kinship, the human, the divine, death, play, festivity."70 He argues that the Phaedrus is saturated with a series of conceptual personae that are inherently familial: Plato talks extensively of bastards and legitimate sons, of

70 "Plato's Pharmacy" 142.
fathers, of sterility, and of family inheritances. In some senses then, the *Phaedrus* sets itself as a morality play that strives to educate the reader about the value of writing.

Derrida's concern in this section of his essay is to think the relationship between Socrates' discussion of writing and the "family scene" which it appears to frame and legitimate. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates compares writing to the abandoned child, a child forever cut off from its origin, unable to know the truth about itself:

> once a thing is committed to writing it circulates equally among those who understand the subject and those who have no business with it; a writing cannot distinguish between suitable and unsuitable readers. And if it is ill-treated or unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its rescue; it is quite incapable of defending or helping itself.\(^{71}\)

Derrida attributes the anthropomorphic resonances in the *Phaedrus* to Socrates' discussion of writing: what is written down emanates from an origin, the father; *logos* comes from the living, writing is its orphaned offspring. There is something about writing in Socrates' account that suggests a problematic relationship between a father and a son. And yet, this problematic is not figured by Derrida merely as a relationship which confuses identities, one that is somehow marred by the cloud of death: "Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath."\(^{72}\)

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\(^{72}\) Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 143.
Once again, there seem to be structural similarities between Derrida's characterisation of writing, something which draws close to death, and Girard's notion of the sacrificial scapegoat, itself a "living dead, a reprieved corpse." And yet, the cloud of death does not merely hang over the head of the orphan: writing also symbolises the death of the father. "In any event the son is lost. His impotence is truly that of an orphan as much as that of a justly or unjustly persecuted parricide." Writing, the orphan, has murdered its father and inadvertently taken his place; the hierarchies of the familial structure have been levelled and the fearful symmetry of mimetic doubling threatens to destroy it all together.

Clearly, there are strong Oedipal overtones to both Socrates' and Derrida's discussion of writing. Laius and Jocasta, on hearing the dire news related by Apollo's oracle, leave Oedipus orphaned on a mountain side to die before he even has a name. Like Oedipus, writing is left drifting:

in the streets, he doesn't even know who he is, what his identity—if he has one—might be, what his name is, what his father's name is. He repeats the same thing every time he is questioned on the street corner, but he can no longer repeat his origin.

Oedipus, of course, has neither an "identity"—being nameless—nor does he know the identity of his father. This lack of self-presence and awareness of origins allows Oedipus to commit parricide, killing his father on a lonely road on his way to Thebes, and then answering the riddle of the sphinx, marrying his mother in order to fulfil the prophecy, signaling the end of his own life.

73 Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 145-6.
74 Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 143-4.
In King Oedipus, Girard detects a paradigmatic instance of the sacrificial crisis. The loss of familial hierarchy, the "Thothian" capacity for the son to double as the father, precipitates the violent chaos that descends on a society as mimetic contagion produces symmetries that require violent resolution. In line with the previous discussion, it is the destruction of "purity" which Creon suggests will require a bloody sacrifice:

CREON:
This, then, is the answer, and this the plain command
Of Phoebus our lord. There is an unclean thing,
Born and nursed on our soil, polluting our soil,
Which must be driven away, not kept to destroy us.

OEDIPUS:
What unclean thing? And what purification is required?

CREON:
The banishment of a man, or the payment of blood for blood.
For the shedding of blood is the cause of our city's peril.  

Familial parricide, like regicide in the polis, "strikes at the most fundamental, essential, and inviolable distinction within the group." The murderer becomes, "literally, the slayer of distinctions." The death of the father opens the violent mêlée, which, in the case of Oedipus, presages his own violent demise. Derrida, continuing his discussion of writing, once again draws near to Girard's theorisation of the sacrificial crisis typified by Sophocles' King Oedipus:

In effect, the father's death opens the reign of violence. In choosing violence—and that is what it's all about from the beginning—and violence against the father, the son—or patricidal writing—cannot fail to expose himself, too. All this is done in order to ensure that the dead

75 Sophocles, King Oedipus 28.
76 Girard, Violence and the Sacred 74.
father, first victim and ultimate resource, not be there. Being—there is always a property of paternal speech. And the site of a fatherland.  

Writing, in other words, threatens a destruction of differences. For Girard, the sacred is a collective fantasy maintained by a culture; produced in the wake of a sacrificial crisis, it preserves difference and hierarchy. Although it involves rites which "explain" or "re-tell" the origins of a society or culture, the sacred is a mythology erected to suppress the scapegoat mechanism in which it finds its genesis. To conflate Girard and Derrida, the sacred is a retrogenetic or "supplementary origin," an origin "under erasure." For Derrida, the status of speech in philosophy is also a retrogenetic or supplementary "origin": speech finds its condition of possibility in what it hopes to expel or suppress: writing. It can only make its appearance as a representation. Structurally, the expulsion of writing—and occasionally its advocates or representatives—serve to ground philosophy in the same way that the expulsion of sacrificial victim serve to ground social and cultural order.  

In a similar way to Thoth and Socrates' orphan, both writing and mimetic contagion are dangerous, not because they possess maleficent "identities," but because they work to erode all identities; the threat of the "maleficent identity" can only emerge after both writing and mimetic contagion are expunged. In King Oedipus, the

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77 Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 146.

78 Although Derrida has been characterised as a theorist who eschews any notion of origin, he attempts at several junctures to posit writing—like Girard's scapegoat—as an "originary supplement." See the sections entitled "The Theorem and the Theater" and "The Supplement of (at) the Origin" in Of Grammatology 302-16.
symmetry of gesture between antagonists remains in place until its tragic end:

Laius, taking his cue from the oracle, violently rejects Oedipus out of fear that his son will seize his throne and invade his conjugal bed. Oedipus, taking his cue from the oracle, does away with Laius, violently rebuffs the sphinx, then takes their places—as king as scourge of the city," respectively. Again, Oedipus, taking his cue from the oracle, plots the death of that unknown figure who may be seeking to usurp his own position.79

In the confrontation between Oedipus and Teiresias—the two "chief spiritual leaders" in Thebes—both, in a concerted attempt to differentiate from each other, reproduce each others' agonistic strategies; both begin with compliments on each other's skill; both draw on each other's supposed successes in solving difficulties and then each inquires of the other as to why this particular enigma should evade them; both employ a critique involving a poetics of proximity: they infer that the other is much closer to the place that they think they are furthest from: ignorance.

Philosophy, Mimesis, and Agon: towards a Tentative "Conclusion"

If the infusion of sacrificial structures within philosophy remains a genuine possibility, then it should be possible to detect similar symmetries of gesture within philosophical exchange itself. In Writing and Difference Derrida devotes an essay to the work of phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas. The essay, "Violence and Metaphysics," as well as Levinas' rejoinder, are significant insofar as they deal with one of the central concerns of this chapter: the relationship between violence and philosophy. Although Derrida's

engagement with Levinas' philosophy is ostensibly respectful and complimentary in tone, his criticisms attempt to show that Levinas has failed to comprehend the implications and significance of his own writings. Levinas' work in phenomenology seeks to challenge the doxastic predication of metaphysics on ontology: ontology works by reducing the Other to a mere object of consciousness. This reduction of the Other to the language of the Same ensures for metaphysics an (illusory) comprehension of Being, at the same time radicalising the spontaneity of the individual subject.  

In contrast, Levinas' proposal of "ethics as a first philosophy" problematises this spontaneity by accepting an inherent "strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions ...." For Levinas, this recognition has epistemological significance: it entails the realisation that the Real transcends my own experience of it, it cannot be captured or apprehended by any "totality" (which appears as another face of the logic of the Same). Levinas attempts to surpass a conception of metaphysics that finds its archetypal expression in solipsism. His theorisations work towards a fundamental destabilisation of western philosophy at its origin, an origin in which the logic of the same was installed and has subsequently enjoyed an uncontested priority. From

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80 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987). This "radicalisation of spontaneity" via a depiction of the Other as an object of the contents of consciousness finds perhaps its greatest expression in certain strains of existentialism and humanism; Sartrean existentialism construes the anxiety of Being as the burden of freedom: Being is condemned to a life of almost limitless autonomy.

Aristotelian formal logic (which begins with the "law of identity") to Husserlian phenomenology, Levinas perceives an effacement of the Other.

Derrida takes up Levinas' theses in the essay in *Writing and Difference* by wondering how philosophy might attempt to surpass itself: to murder philosophy is to sustain its very life. And yet philosophy is prompted by this problematic to continually "question itself within itself."\(^{82}\) To this end, Derrida perceives Levinas' project as important, and Levinas himself as profound thinker, someone whose thought can "makes us tremble," a thinker who "summons us to a dislocation of the Greek logos, to a dislocation of our identity, and perhaps of identity in general ..."\(^{83}\) He suggests that Levinas is a philosopher who radicalises empiricism with "an audacity, a profundity, and a resoluteness never before attained."\(^{84}\)

And yet, despite these compliments, Derrida's essay attempts to read Levinas' project against itself. He does not move towards an explicit "refutation" or critique of Levinas, but rather works to animate and carry through those questions "put to us by Levinas";\(^{85}\) they are questions which "already belong to his own interior dialogue ...."\(^{86}\) Derrida's reading is characteristically painstaking in its complexity, and yet its critical force possesses a singular trajectory: the dominant gesture of the essay is to show that Levinas' attempted transgression of ontology—and the philosophies on which

\(^{82}\) Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 80.
\(^{83}\) Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 82.
\(^{84}\) Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 151.
\(^{85}\) Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 84.
\(^{86}\) Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 109.
it is predicated—presupposes the very things that it attempts to surpass.

Like Teiresias and Oedipus, Derrida employs a reading which attempts to problematise Levinas' work through a poetics of proximity: Derrida suggests that Levinas draws closest to those theorists he criticises at the very moment that he claims to have moved away from them. Examples of this strategic move are numerous: rather than opposing him, Levinas "confirms Heidegger in his discourse",87 instead of remaining at the remote distance that he claims for himself, "Levinas and Husserl are quite close";88 despite his anti-Kierkegaardian impostures, Levinas "returns to the themes of Fear and Trembling";89 at the moment that "he speaks against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already."90 By turning Levinas' oppositions on their head, by "inverting"91 his propositions, Derrida attempts to show a structural morphology—a critical symmetry—between Levinas and his supposed antagonists.

For Derrida, Levinas evinces both a breach and a continuity in the history of philosophy: he is enclosed within a tradition even as he speaks against it. Indeed, the very possibility of speaking against it presupposes that the oppositional discourse is already commensurate with its enemy. Derrida argues that philosophy's history supplies a conceptual matrix—a lexicon of intelligibility—that is slippery enough to foil most attempts at disciplinary suicide.

87 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 142.
88 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 125.
89 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 93.
90 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 120.
91 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 102.
Indeed, this "necessity" provides one key to the whole of Derrida's paper: "We are wondering about the meaning of a necessity: the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it."92 And yet perhaps it is the very will-to-destroy its "relative" past and its manifest blindness to its "radical past" that preserves philosophy in its peculiar singularity.

Although Levinas never made any explicit response to "Violence and Metaphysics," his 1973 essay "Tout autrement"93 contains enough clues to suggest that he had read Derrida's essay and, in some way, was attempting to respond. One of the most startling aspects of this essay is the way that Levinas replicates, both in tone and content, Derrida's description of his own work. Where Derrida had claimed that Levinas had summoned a "new" dislocation of the Greek logos, Levinas claims that Derrida's Speech and Phenomena, a "new frisson," which "overthrows logocentric discourse."94 Where Derrida compliments Levinas as a thinker of audacity and profundity, Levinas refers to Derrida as a "true philosopher."95 Where Derrida describes contemporary philosophy as characteristically interstitial, a "threatened community," yet unable to take stock of the challenges that it has laid before itself, Levinas describes a "no-man's land, an in-between that is uncertain even of the uncertainties that flicker everywhere."96 Where a

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92 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 111. Derrida reiterates this problematic at several points in his essay. See pages 80-83; 111-14; 118; 133; 141.
94 Levinas, "Jacques Derrida" 56.
95 Levinas, "Jacques Derrida" 62.
96 Levinas, "Jacques Derrida" 55.
central problematic for Derrida resides in situating Levinas' work somewhere between a severance and a prolongation of the philosophical tradition, Levinas wonders whether Derrida's work constitutes "a line of demarcation running through the development of western thought .... Is this a new break in the history of philosophy?" 97

And if Levinas reproduces Derrida's compliments and his portrait of contemporary philosophy, he also, perhaps more startlingly, mirrors the very critical strategies that Derrida uses to "read" him. For Levinas, Derrida is figured as a theorist whose continuity with the philosophical tradition remains despite, or perhaps because of, his attempts to disrupt it. Levinas suggests that the history of philosophy might very well be "nothing but a growing awareness of the difficulty of thinking." 98 And yet Levinas does not leave his analysis there. Where Derrida had attempted to show that the conditions of possibility for an opening towards the Other relied on a conceptuality grounded in the language of the Same, Levinas' essay evinces a near-identical problematisation of "Violence and Metaphysics." He seizes on the phrase "is it certain?", one which Derrida had previously employed to question Levinas' arguments relating to the primacy of ontology, and sees in it the reemergence of the very logocentrism that had supposedly cast shadows on Levinas' project:

What remains constructed after deconstruction is, to be sure, the stern architecture of the discourse that deconstructs and uses the verb "to be" in the present tense in predicative statements. A discourse in the course of which, amidst the quaking of truth's underpinnings and in

97 Levinas, "Jacques Derrida" 55.
98 Levinas, "Jacques Derrida" 55.
opposition to the self-evidence of the lived presence, which seems to offer presence a last refuge, Derrida still has the strength to utter: "Is this certain?" As if anything could be certain at that point, and as if certainty or uncertainty should still matter.99

Like Derrida's essay, Levinas' rejoinder employs a critique figured around a poetics of proximity: at the moment that Derrida believes himself closest to deconstructing the logocentrism inherent in Levinas' work, Derrida himself is in the fold of that same logocentrism. As a result, Levinas' wonders whether the critical force of Derrida's reading is open to radical questioning.

The exchange between Derrida and Levinas is not only interesting with regard to its treatment of the relationship between philosophy and violence, but also in view of the striking gestural symmetry between the interlocutors. The symmetry of the critiques, the generalised strategy which I've dubbed a "poetics of proximity," seems to betray a peculiar anxiety between the two philosophers. The symmetry is certainly not restricted to the essays mentioned: both theorists are heavily indebted to German phenomenology, and both published their first book on the work of Husserl; both seem heavily preoccupied with the divide which separates Hebraic and Hellenistic thought; both have been suspicious of the traps of dialectical reason and its impetus to reduce all differences to identity; both have been concerned to think through the limits of philosophy, and to analyse its violent aspects; and both see in philosophy a lexicon of intelligibility that veers towards self-presence and totalisation

And yet, surprisingly, the manifest symmetries between their philosophical aims are not conceded by either theorist in the course.

99 Levinas, "Jacques Derrida" 58.
of their respective essays. Derrida's critique, despite the compliments directed towards Levinas, continually infers that perhaps Levinas the philosopher is not who he thinks he is. Needless to say, Levinas returns this critical gesture with almost equal force. And yet this exchange, which figures itself as a means by which the thought of these two thinkers can be differentiated, winds up producing a mimetic relation between them in ways analogous to the gestural symmetries of conflicting parties described in anthropological fieldwork. If it were true that these thinkers shadow each other both in influence and intellectual preoccupations, then it would seem little wonder that their critiques have recourse to notions of proximics.

Perhaps his sustained attempt to render Levinas' analyses to philosophy's past—by figuring him as "close to" Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Husserl—unwittingly implicates Derrida in a kind of sacrificial logic. Henri Hubert, Marcel Mauss, and René Girard have all noted the ambiguous character of the sacrificial victim: "Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed." Philosophy finds its deities amongst the history of its ruins. Plato must be continually overcome, refuted, killed, if he is to survive as the phantasmatic "origin" of the discipline. Derrida himself refers to Levinas' project as calling for a series of "parricides," and yet he too realises that to commit parricide

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100 It should be noted that even acts of ostensible "good will" can be the platform on which rivalries can be played out. "Politeness" and "compliments" can themselves be absorbed into an agonistic framework where each party attempts to outdo their rival with acts of generosity. For an anthropological perspective on this phenomena, see Marcel Mauss, The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies (1923-4), trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).

101 Girard, Violence and the Sacred 1.
in philosophy is always a "hallucinatory murder." It is hallucinatory because the murder sacralises both the philosophical victim and the matrix of intelligibility which gives the murder its legitimacy. Analogous to Creon's call for blood—the sacred violence—that will purify Thebes, Derrida cryptically categorises philosophy thus: "Between original tragedy and messianic triumph there is philosophy, in which violence is returned against violence within knowledge ...." And yet, the notion of Plato or Socrates as philosophy's "origin" is an imposture; it draws a veil over the discipline's "radical past," its dramatic opposition to the epistemological legitimacy of the drama. Derrida remarks that Levinas' attempted "surpassing" of philosophy's Greek "origins" is an impossibility because the murder weapon itself preserves what it attempts to annihilate: "will a non-Greek ever succeed in doing what a Greek in this case could not do, except as disguising himself as a Greek, by speaking Greek, by feigning to speak Greek to get near the king?" It would seem that the very possibility of Levinas' relative "success" in parricide would also entail its failure; it would be very much like the German word Aufhebung, which Hegel explains as denoting both a preservation and a bringing to a close.

The imposture of seeing Plato as an "origin" of philosophy seems to be a constitutive disciplinary amnesia that forgets its "radical origin." Philosophy's "first principle" cannot begin with a positivity, but only a violent agon, only after which its history can be said to properly "begin." This is perhaps why western philosophy

102 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 89.
103 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 131.
104 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 89.
seems perpetually forced to look no further than its relative "origins"; its radical origins are, in a sense, "outside" its history, and almost certainly, outside its capacity to reflect on them: "philosophy ... has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and its wellspring ...."\textsuperscript{105}

Securing philosophical "purity" assists in the construction of the discipline's retrogenetic history; it helps to recount the "origins" of the discipline at the same time that it suppresses the violent genesis that engendered it. In other words, philosophy's indebtedness to dramatic opposition is its "supplementary origin": philosophy's condition of possibility resides in what it hopes to suppress or forget. The conception of drama as the "other" of philosophy could only be envisaged after philosophy had moved from its radical to its relative past. It is precisely the confusion of identities, the vertiginous contagion of mimesis that Plato attempted to secure through the banishment of the drama. And yet the very notion of drama as an epistemologically inferior "other" is predicated on the stabilisation of an identity that could only begin after "the opening of history." Perhaps philosophy's deconstructive wishes are continually thwarted by an anxiety, scarcely articulated, which theorises mimesis by idealising it, by de-corporealising it, through a domestication achieved by tying it to notions of representation, by \textit{forever dissociating it from the agon}. If it still makes sense to suggest that drama has epistemic force, then perhaps it lies not in the presentation of a truth about something which is to be opposed, but rather the "truths" of dramatic opposition itself.

\textsuperscript{105} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference} 79.
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