

**WITHHOLDING 'US':  
IMAGES IN THE SPACE OF APPEARANCE**

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This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

This artistic research project proposes to conceive the space between art and politics as a recuperated and reinvented 'space of appearance'. To do so, it re-turns (to) a vital overturning of Platonic contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) by human action (*vita activa*) that is at the heart of political theorist Hannah Arendt's proposal for a public-political 'space of appearance'.

By placing images in which the ghosts of a 'democratic subject' are *withheld* (as 'those who are no longer or not yet present') into Arendt's space of speech and action, the project revises her rhetorical gesture of overturning with its own, and revivifies contemplation as a form of action in which 'we' can be encountered as radically opaque, inchoate and incommensurable and, at the same time, as new figures of political identity in process.

Utilising a 'democratic' methodology, the research is realised as practice in the thesis/written component and as two key visual projects: *The Regent's Street* and *The Triumph of Crowds*. Responding to, and incorporating, images that include Paul Fusco's 1968 photographic series *RFK Funeral Train*, Gustave Courbet's 1850 painting *The Burial at Ornans* and Nicolas Poussin's painting *The Triumph of David* (1631), the work brings civic, ethical and spectral imaginaries to bear on certain figures of the *demos*.

By remobilising these images as contemporary forms of heterogenous and relational artwork, the research proposes art as an affective space of political pre-enactment situated between art practice, political theory, philosophy, writing, performance and activism.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPONENTS

This PhD (by project) is comprised of three components: the thesis and two practice outputs: an installed video (*The Regent's Street*) and a script for a performance (*The Triumph of Crowds*). All three have been developed in tandem and, even though each is presented as a separate and distinct component, each one is intended to share in the others in different ways and to different degrees.

Both practice outputs are configured in response to particular images as outlined in the abstract. The thesis provides the theoretical, artistic and philosophical argument and methodology for the research project as a whole and grounds the practice components in these discussions. However, the thesis can also be understood as itself responding to a problem around images (and representation) that haunts Hannah Arendt's political theory, and her response to Plato, through the allegory of the cave. Considered in this way, the practice components become imbricated in this philosophical problem and function as potential answers to it in visual/performative form. By turn then, the thesis no longer sits easily to the side of the practice (and vice versa) but is, instead, an internal catalyst within the shared constitution of the artistic research project as a whole and its specific engagement with images in the space of appearance. This dispersed and shared aspect of the relationship between the thesis and practice components is underscored by the hybrid discursive-performative form that is *The Triumph of Crowds* script. As the script is not discussed in detail in the thesis, it functions as its own commentary and, therefore, decentralises the place of analysis, discourse and argumentation in the overall PhD project.

Understood thus, the three components of the project can be approached in any order. For example, while the discussion of the thesis relates mostly to the image content of *The Regent's Street* video, it is not a straightforward commentary on that work. Equally, *The Triumph of Crowds* contains, within its characters' speeches, extensive discursive passages that draw out the ideas of appearance explored in the thesis at the same time as it appropriates Poussin's painting visually and performatively. Finally, in its turn, *The Regent's Street* gestures towards the form of a visual essay by using photographic montage and sound to explore the ideas discussed in both the thesis and *The Triumph of Crowds* script through the staging of a visual encounter between Fusco's photographs, Courbet's painting and original photographs shot on Regent Street in London.

This complex interplay between thesis and practice works to unsettle certain presumed hierarchies embedded within the respective 'knowledges' conventionally associated with each. Such interplay is vital to the research project as it demonstrates how the three components of the project and their interrelationship, are underpinned by a democratic method whereby the principles of axiomatic equality, relational encounter and the inclusion of a necessary, and ever-present excess, are activated.

The associated problem of representation, both aesthetic and political, is also activated and questioned throughout the PhD research in the form of contested and complex appearances of the collective subject of the *demos* or 'the people'. Each component is populated, punctuated and haunted by different figures and voices from a wide range of sources many of whom gesture, echo or call across the

space of the project. In doing so the aesthetic action of appropriation and montage is transformed into a radical political action of *rescue* through which the incommensurable excess of the subject of ‘the people’, that constitutes the very space of appearance, is conjured anew.

This incommensurable figure of ‘the people’ is the ‘image’ to which the research responds in all its different ways and through the particular images which the different components of the research encounter. Each component therefore utilises a different overall form of response, none of which are exclusive. *The Triumph of Crowds* is performative; fabricated through speech, gesture and mediated imagery, it draws out the theatricality of Poussin’s painting and its content as a scene of public assembly. In doing so, it also directly addresses the potential performativity of images in an Arendtian space of appearance characterised by public speech and action. *The Regent’s Street* is, in broad terms, photographic montage as it responds to the caesura of collective grief captured by both Fusco’s photographs and Courbet’s painting and their formal, and still, tone. The thesis is speculative, propositional, discursive. At the same time it is an attempt, in the company of Arendt, to disinter an image of ‘the people’ from Plato’s allegory of the cave. As such, it too is performative: a written overturning. It also situates images taken from Fusco and Courbet in such a way as to have them act like illustrations of this possible and unseen ‘image’ as well as being metonymic connections both to Fusco and Courbet’s works and to *The Regent’s Street* video. To sum up, the academic thesis is animated by performativity and montage. The scripted play *The Triumph of Crowds* expands into discursive speech and the turning over of ideas, and the still images of *The Regent’s Street* pulse with embodied demand and address.

Together, the three components are an assembly of equivalences in which images, and the different formal responses they provoke (thesis, photographic/video, performance script), explicate and model an answer to the questions of the research. The point is to keep them all in play in such a way that we, as viewers, readers and citizens, participate in each one and are, at the same time, drawn to its limits such that we encounter ‘us’ as a necessary excess: imaged, activated and withheld.

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All images are the author's unless otherwise attributed.

Pages, 13, 98, 124: Digital collage extracts from Gustave Courbet's *The Burial at Ornans*.

Pages 25, 50, 71, 87 : Paul Fusco, *RFK Funeral Train* (selected photographs) 1968 © Paul Fusco/Magnum Photos

Pages 31, 37, 40, 83, 109, 115 : Digital collage extracts from Paul Fusco's photographic series, *RFK Funeral Train*.

Page 95 : Gustave Courbet, *Burial at Ornans*, (1849-50) Collection, Musée D'Orsay :924, Paris. © Gustave Courbet / Public domain

## LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

- (1) *The Triumph of Crowds*: script
  
- (2) *The Regent's Street*: Single channel video with sound, 23:50 mins  
<https://vimeo.com/432824558>

*The Regent's Street* is a single-screen video with sound which will be installed on-site for the viva voce examination. A link has been provided here as the work comprises part of the full doctoral research submission however given this is not the work's intended form, the candidate requests that it is not viewed for the first time in this form.

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*This work is dedicated to my mother, Eithne, for the aspiration that she gave me.*



## PREFACE

*APPEARANCE ARISES THROUGH AN IMAGE*, but it is appearance caught somewhere between action and contemplation, lingering, despite the motivation for a pure and relational politics, on ‘the extras’ (‘the people’, ‘the workers’, ‘the citizens’) as embodied subjects and remainders withheld in an image.

Such a remainder is also vital to politics: indeed, for the philosopher Jacques Rancière it is the very appearance of the ‘extras’, the ‘part who have no part’, as a dissensual rupture within the given distribution of roles and regimes, that constitutes politics. (Rancière, 2010) But the ‘extras’ are never a named subject that exists before this dissensual appearance. He writes, ‘Politics cannot be defined on the basis of any pre-existing subject. The “difference” specific to politics, that which makes it possible to think its subject, must be sought in the form of its relation’ (Rancière, 2010, p.28). And he shares with the political theorist Hannah Arendt this commitment to political subjectification as relational and only possible through active partaking; he shares with Arendt, therefore, a deep suspicion of identity-based politics. While for Rancière this relation is supplementary (a relation based on excess) and for Arendt it is contingent (a relation that is inter-subjective), for both it means that a genuine political subject cannot be presupposed. Yet it is possible still to ask, ‘How should one film the *figurants*, the extras?’, as Georges Didi-Huberman does in his essay ‘People Exposed, People as Extras’ – ‘How should one make them appear...?’ (Didi-Huberman, 2009)



**YESTERDAY MY FRIEND MERCEDES** came to see a showing of my video montage 'The Regent's Street in the Royal College of Art end of year show (2019). Mercedes is a keen and committed viewer, and she had much to ask me afterwards about the work. While talking, she mentioned that 'The Regent's Street reminded her of Allan Sekula's work *Waiting for Tear Gas*, and that I should check it out. The work, which consists of eighty-one slides on a loop, is held in the Tate collections and when telling me about it Mercedes also mentioned that in 2016 an 'In Focus' series of five essays on the work by Stephanie Schwartz was commissioned by Tate and can be found on their website.<sup>1</sup> I had never seen this work of Sekula's before, although I am familiar with his work generally and worked with aspects of his project *Fish Story* in the early stages of my research. *Waiting for Tear Gas* is a photographic 'essay', primarily taking the form of a looped slide show but also reproduced in part in book form.<sup>2</sup> As with much of Sekula's work, it operates in relation to and against conventional documentary and journalistic reportage. Using an approach that engages deeply with those to whom he gives his photographic attention, an approach for which in the case of *Waiting for Tear Gas* he coined the neologism 'anti-photojournalism', Sekula's work is highly invested in making the subjects of the political appear at micro rather than macro scales. With a particular focus on labour, his lifelong work has revealed the degree to which people (not only 'the people') constitute politics, at the same time as people (not immaterial labour) convey capital. He has also revealed the degree to which media representations frequently, and often deliberately, occlude the temporal, contingent and unruly reality of what really happened in favour of the clarity of a single, spectacular image. By contrast, Sekula's work favours the sequence and the essay form, where an image is only ever seen in relation to others that precede and succeed it. Montage as an accumulative complexity, rather than a deconstructive rupture, is vital to his work.

In following up on Mercedes' suggestion to look into this work and, as a result of reading Schwartz's essays, I found myself associatively 'Google-drifting' down a number of interesting tributaries from a 2012 post by Nicholas Mirzoeff<sup>3</sup> that led to a long photo-essay from 2011 by China Miéville, 'London's Overthrow'<sup>4</sup> and ended with Cartier-Bresson's

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Schwartz, *In Focus: Waiting for Tear Gas 1999–2000* by Allan Sekula, Tate Research Publication, 2016, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/waiting-for-tear-gas-allan-sekula/streets-and-traffic-in-photographs>, accessed 3 July 2019

<sup>2</sup> Thirty-two of the eighty-one photographs were published in Alexander Cockburn and Jeffery St. Clair, *Five Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond*. London: Verso, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Occupy 2012: a Daily Observation on Occupy*, Nicholas Mirzoeff [online] <http://www.nicholasmirzoeff.com/O2012/category/democracy/page/2/> Accessed 03.07.19

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.londonsoverthrow.org/index.html> Accessed 03.07.19. Miéville's photo-essay is a cross between Iain Sinclair's psychogeographic London wanderings and Patrick Keiller's film 'London'. It is as dense and damning as both. Written following the London riots of 2011 and in the context of Olympics fervour and austerity's fracture, the essay is accompanied by a succession of blurry, seemingly inconsequential photographic 'illustrations'. The images serve to

1937 photographs of King George VI's coronation. Schwartz writes about these photographs at the end of her essay 'Streets and Traffic (In Photographs)', one of the five in the series 'Waiting for Tear Gas'. In the context of a more extensive discussion of the difference between Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' of photography and Sekula's historically conscious approach to, as she puts it, 'the ways in which records are made' (Schwartz, S. 2016), Schwartz refers back to this early series of photographs by Cartier-Bresson. In a way that is similar to Paul Fusco's photos of Kennedy's funeral train, Cartier-Bresson also turned his camera away from the main event itself, the King and his pageant, and focused it instead on the crowds of onlookers. These are very different photographs to Fusco's, however, as they tend towards a sort of tender caricature, like much of Cartier-Bresson's work, and the event itself which these crowds have come to witness is of a wholly different order of political value. Yet Cartier-Bresson was sent to photograph the event by the Parisian Communist daily *Ce Soir*, and so his decision to turn his camera onto the crowds was underscored, no doubt, by the political focus of the newspaper as well as by the fact that *Ce Soir* was not part of the State-legitimised press corps given access to cover the event. (Schwartz, S., 2016) What is revealed in the photographs, then, is not the King but 'his subjects' as participants, in an event of mediation as much as a historical occasion. Indeed, because the crowds were so plentiful, and seeing that the royal procession was so difficult, people had constructed makeshift viewing devices with small compact mirrors tied onto sticks and bits of wood that they used to see over the tops of the heads of the people around them. Reminiscent of contemporary 'selfie sticks', but without the capacity to capture an image, these prosthetic 'eyes', like makeshift periscopes, mediated the coronation procession even to those immediately present at it. When a double-page spread of these photographs was later published in the Communist weekly *Regards*, as Schwartz writes, 'the reader of the daily looked at a crowd, looking for a King and facing a photographer, who looked away from the King and at the public.' Through a succession of ricocheting looks, which could just as easily describe the interplay of seeing and not seeing that conscribes Paul Fusco's 1968 photographic series *RFK Funeral Train*, 'the slippage between the event and its record' is made evident.<sup>5</sup>

Such mediation and remediation is inextricably part of the practice and history of the imaging of events, and Sekula's work, as Schwartz is at pains to emphasise, is deeply engaged in the recognition of this history of representation at work in any documentary or journalistic image. At the same time, however, Sekula's faith that photographs can manifest a political subject remains apparent in all his work. As Schwartz's essays on *Waiting for Tear Gas* bring out, this is partly

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authenticate Miéville as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century flaneur amidst the city as a ruin of an ideal that was itself a ruinous fiction. He writes and takes pictures so that something real might register before everything real disappears.

<sup>5</sup> This idea, 'slippage between the event and its record', Schwartz credits to Terri Weissman.

*because Sekula aligns the photograph and political subjectivity with an act of seeing that will always remain partial, that will always, and of necessity, include that which cannot be seen, or known, that which is omitted but at the same time is, particularly in the 'portraits' of Waiting for Tear Gas, a seeing into the future. This future is not simply what will happen next, either locally or historically, but is more importantly a future of the subject that resists, as Schwartz writes, 'portraying a subject fully formed'. When Didi-Huberman suggested that one should film the 'extras' by giving back to them 'their faces, their gestures', he could have been referring to this series by Sekula, even while many of the faces and bodies remain obscured. But if he were to refer to this work of Sekula's he would also find that the extras are subjectivities waiting with and for each other, even the others that are power in its many forms, waiting quietly, not only to be seen, as part of the contract of appearance, but also to see.*

*In her conversation with me Mercedes kept referring to The Regent's Street as a meditation. Of this she was convinced. And in this one might find a gesture that takes contemplation into thought. What perplexed her, however, was whether it was a meditation on mediation, or a meditation on political subjectivity. But it is both, necessarily, as one is so inherent in the other.*

## **BEFORE BEGINNING**

***THE PROBLEM AND PROMISE OF BEGINNING*** has animated this research project throughout its long duration. As a problem because of the implications of origin that it entailed, and as a promise because of the very opposite of origin: the idea that beginning is only ever a response to something or someone already in play. To identify a beginning in terms of origin is always retrospective, and therefore one might suggest that such originary points of departure are fictions that in their turn support the fiction of teleological knowledge. This is not how this begins. Nor how it began. Rather, if I am to speak of beginnings, which I will do, it will be in terms of response, or more precisely in terms of forms of response that produce something new. This is how political theorist Hannah Arendt conceives of beginnings, and for Arendt the capacity to produce the new (what she calls ‘natality’) through response to another is vital to politics (Arendt, 1998). In this Arendt differs from the political theory of Jacques Rancière in that politics, for her, devolves upon a plurality of individuals acting in relation in/as a space of appearance rather than the axiomatic possibility of the dissensual appearance of the ‘extras’. Yet what both share is their conviction that politics, as such an appearance, occurs *in relation*, and that it is only through relation that the ‘new’, politically speaking, can be born.

We need the ‘new’, we need a new ‘we’. We need, as Maria Hlavajova says, to find ways of ‘being together otherwise’.<sup>6</sup> Yet for Hlavajova (following on from the work of Zygmunt Bauman) we are living in such a time of crisis, a time in which we are ‘out of time’, that we are caught in an *interregnum* (Hlavajova, 2015). This interregnum, she says, quoting Antonio Gramsci, is a time ‘full of a great variety of morbid symptoms’ that ‘consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born’ (ibid.).<sup>7</sup> This is the present, an interstice or caesura, or ‘a moment of transition between the end of

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<sup>6</sup> Many of my references to Maria Hlavajova’s ideas and approaches come from my recent participation in the BAK summer school (July 2019) ‘Art as Politics’ and from my own notes taken during lectures given by Hlavajova during this summer school. Maria Hlavajova is a curator, organizer and educator and director of BAK (basis voor kunst actual), Utrecht. BAK is a radical art organisation and project that aims to manifest the possibility of art *as* politics, or art as a form of ‘non-fascist living’ and to engage in what Hlavajova calls ‘instituting otherwise’, i.e. a radical and propositional critique of the institutions of Western modernity. [bakonline.org] I became aware of BAK’s work at the beginning of my PhD research and their activities have informed and shaped my thinking. I also see the radical position that BAK pursues as the apotheosis of what it might mean to fully address contemporary relations between art and politics, and as such it, and Hlavajova’s ideas, remain both deeply fascinating and challenging to my research and my future life as an artist.

<sup>7</sup> The reference to Antonio Gramsci comes from Antonio Gramsci (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, p.276

modernity (Western) and a new global reality',<sup>8</sup> in which the questions and practices that constitute my research take place. As I will outline in more detail in the writing that follows, these questions, and my engagement with them, arise from my response to a number of different sources or starting points, and as such they are animated and struck through by the imperative of this condition of response-ability. However, they are also animated by other imperatives that have become inescapable in the present of this interregnum. In whatever way one describes the crisis – climate, migrant, economic, democratic, of globalisation – or wherever it is located, the urgent imperative that is asserted again and again is to *act*. In the context, then, of that imperative, in this time in which we are out of time, my research asks broadly, but with genuine intent, what can art do?

For Hlavajova, this time of crisis, both humanitarian and ecological, is defined by a split between politics and power, where politics is about thinking and imagining solutions and power is about implementing those solutions. Because power now lies in the hands of those who are no longer interested in politics – i.e., in solutions to our crisis – this split can be characterised as a kind of 'powerless politics'. The 'new', therefore – the 'otherwise' – requires that we bring politics and power back together, in the hands of those who constitute politics: 'us', whoever and however we might be. For Hlavajova the purpose of art, now, in this interregnum, is to engage in this task of bringing politics and power back together. To do this, politics, or the situation of crisis that we have produced, can no longer be merely a subject of art, or its theme – it must be its methodology. As she puts it, politics and art '[...] must be the same', as art and its institutions have access to power and must persist, therefore, in attempting to redistribute it.<sup>9</sup> Politics, then, according to Hlavajova, must be what art *does*, not what it *represents*. To make politics, or any specific socio-political situation, community or injustice, a subject of art is, for Hlavajova, to do nothing. Art must attempt to make *worlds*, not *works*. To simply engage in critique is to produce nothing but 'weak publics', as Nancy Fraser, quoted by Hlavajova, says.<sup>10</sup> To produce strong publics, to 'institute otherwise', art has to engage in 'critique-as-proposition'.<sup>11</sup> What this means is that art

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<sup>8</sup> Hlavajova is here referring to the work of Arturo Escobar, specifically his 2007 paper *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise*, *Cultural Studies*, 21:2, 179-210

<sup>9</sup> From my own notes on Maria Hlavajova lecture, BAK summer school, July 2019.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

must imagine and propose and, as she puts it, *pre-enact*, the world that we want. A world in which the principle of progress that fuelled the imperial, colonial and capitalist linear programme of Western modernity is replaced by the idea of mere survival, and more than this, by the idea of surviving *well*.

In this model of what art can do, art's role is to take part in the actions of critique-as-proposition (what Rancière would call 'redistribution') and anti-hegemonic struggle and let go of the tenets upon which the practices and understandings of contemporary art have been built, such as those of the autonomy of art and artists, art's 'uselessness', aesthetic value and the passive spectator/viewer/audience.

Hlavajova writes, in collaboration with Ranjit Hoskote,

art in the *former West*<sup>12</sup> continues to be held hostage by the unrelenting monumentalisation of authorship, ownership, expert culture, and spectatorship. As if waging an effort to avoid urgent questions, that which we tend to singularly call the art world continues to take refuge in the addictive performance of its own busy whirl, attempting to uncover its own engagement with the notion of the 'public' without noticing that such endeavours often cater to a world that no longer is.

(Hlavajova and Hoskote, 2015, p.8)

For art to actually intervene in the present it must, and *I* must as an artist, be ready to give up on representation as a modality of art such that it amplifies, rather than seeking to alter, 'the ills of the world'.<sup>13</sup>

It is hard to disagree with this position that Hlavajova takes up, and its radical urgency is both compelling and accessible. But from the outset of my research I had a lingering doubt about the degree to which art is instrumentalised, socially and politically, by this model and the potential for certain aesthetic complexities and contemplative potentialities, brought about especially by art's autonomy, to be lost. More directly I became concerned with what becomes of *images* in this context of 'critique-as-proposition': what is left for *images* to do in the interregnum?

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<sup>12</sup> *Former West* was also the title of an international collaborative research project organized and coordinated by BAK that ran from 2008-2016, that attempted to model a world in which the geo-political West no longer held hegemonic status. See [formerwest.org](http://formerwest.org) and the publication *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, Eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh, MIT Press, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Hlavajova, M., BAK summer school, July 2019.

**WHEN I FIRST SAW PAUL FUSCO'S PHOTOGRAPHS** of Robert Kennedy's funeral train, taken on June 8<sup>th</sup> 1968 but not published until some thirty years later, I could not find words to describe what it was that I was seeing.<sup>14</sup> But I knew, or at least I felt, that something extraordinary was taking place in those images. I also felt that whatever it was, it was not only to do with the historical moment that they captured: the fact that thousands of people came out to the edge of the tracks on that sunny summer's day in 1968 to say goodbye to the assassinated senator in whom they had put their hopes of a fair and 'livable life'.<sup>15</sup> I knew (though it was only really something intuited, and to call it 'knowledge' is precisely to deny it) that the photographs themselves did something that the event, unique and extraordinary as it was, did not entirely contain. In fact, you could say that I 'knew' that the photographs were themselves some kind of event, or that they made apparent the 'slippage between the event and its record', a slippage in which I, sitting on the floor of my sunny flat in England one Sunday morning thirty years later, was participating in. At the time it was enough to participate, to feel, to weigh their effect in my body. The words that I couldn't find (words such as 'advenience', 'be/holding' 'impropriety') were not needed. But now, a further two decades later, I have found that there is a need to articulate – in words and other forms – what it is about these photographs that held me then, and that holds me still.

But this is not about me. Nor indeed is it about 'them', the thousands of Americans who came out from their homes, workplaces, schools and cars (many cars) to wait for the train to pass by. Nor is it even about Fusco himself, who was the only photographer of the many on the train who turned his camera, repeatedly, towards the waiting, watching and waving crowds, though we all, each of us, play a part in the scene, the images and the story that they unfold. No, this is about 'us', and for that reason the need to articulate extends beyond the event of these specific photographs, though they remain its catalyst and one of the examples through which such images of 'us' can be interrogated.

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<sup>14</sup> Initially a commission for *Look* magazine, Fusco's photographs were not actually used, and instead were only first seen thirty years afterwards when published in book form by Magnum. My first encounter with them took place in 1999 through an illustrated article about the Magnum book in the British newspaper the *Independent on Sunday*. The first edition of Paul Fusco's *RFK Funeral Train*, published by Magnum Photos and Umbrage Editions, London, in 1999 had a limited print run of only 350 copies. It included 63 colour illustrations and an essay by Norman Mailer. In 2008, for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bobby Kennedy's assassination Aperture Foundation produced a second edition. This included a tribute by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and essays by Vicki Goldberg, Norman Mailer, and Evan Thomas. It is this edition that I have been using to research the photographs.

In 2018, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination and 50 years after Fusco's photos were shot, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art hosted a large-scale exhibition, 'The Train: RFK's last journey', featuring some of the photographs, along with related work by two other artists, Rein Jelle Terpstra and Philippe Parreno.

<sup>15</sup> See Judith Butler, for example, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2006) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (2009/2016), *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) and forthcoming in 2020, *The Force of Non-Violence*.

*It has taken some time, but where initially there were no words, now there are some, though they are not all there is, nor are they necessarily the most important of the ways in which the articulation is happening. If one of these words is 'us', another is 'appearance'. Yes, they appeared! My God, did they appear! Hundreds upon hundreds of people: adults, children, babies – and dogs! People in swimsuits and uniforms and their 'Sunday best' clothes; people waving, crying, holding each other's hands, saluting, kneeling, standing to attention, holding flags or banners or hastily written signs and placards: 'God Bless Bobby', 'So Long Bobby' 'R.F.K, W.L.Y'; people standing on the bonnets of cars, on train platforms and parked-up goods wagons, on trucks and motorbikes and fence posts. There they were, over and over, maybe not everyone but anyone, over and over, with their families, friends, neighbours and nearby strangers, in civic, military and institutional guises, in clusters and pairs and occasionally, though very rarely, on their own. The train had to slow down to half its usual speed, there were so many people. And the casket that held the senator's body was raised up, so it could be seen through the windows of the observation carriage in which it was situated. So many people came out to see the train, or glimpse the casket as it slowly passed by, that their seeing became a ritual event: a collective rite of passage. No matter that they had to wait so long in the blisteringly hot June sun, or that they could hardly see anything through the windows of the train, or that where they stood was crowded or dangerous. When the train slipped into view, and out again, they put their hands on their hearts, or covered their faces with grief, raised handkerchiefs to their eyes or in the air; some held their loved ones close. This is what Fusco saw: the event of their assembled seeing, in all its tiny and concatenating gestures, in all its particular and momentary sensations, in all its repetitions; and he turned his camera to it, to them, and partook of the enormity and incommensurability of their appearance.*

*The photographs attest to this, as they are themselves uncountable and specific and accumulating, but they do more than prove that it was so; they do more than merely witness. Fusco turned his camera to the people and partook of an encounter in which his own body holding his camera became a living, looking, substitute for Kennedy's dead and unseeable corpse, and in doing so became the people's equivalent, their acknowledgement. Although they came to see that what they knew was gone, and to see (him) going, it's possible, though hard to know for sure, that they also saw the photographer seeing them. Another connection opened up, forcing through the making and partaking of an image. Consequently, although it was 'they' that Fusco captured in the photographs, now – and because of the charge of a certain kind of seeing, the demand of which Fusco accepted – it is 'us' who are withheld.*

*What is this 'certain kind of seeing'? For sure it is not the seeing of certainty. And why is it so charged? It is not my intention here to answer the question, but rather to inhabit it, to partake of it. Still, to do so I need to figure it (out). It*

would seem that it is a seeing occasioned by a turning and by a moving towards, but in resistance to, the force of destination. At least, that is perhaps something of its aspect. Fusco says as much himself, when he talks about his decision to track subjects in order to lessen the effect of the train's motion.<sup>16</sup> In this case, because the photographer was on a moving train, such a tracking means holding to a specific and particular figure in the crowd and turning the camera to keep that hold, as the train pulls the photographer away. Imagining this kind of axle in play, over and over, as the train passes by the endless stream of people, feels like a succession of lifelines – thrown out, caught, turned upon and then let go. Except, as a succession of visual (or photographic) lifelines, in the letting go there isn't death but survival. This is Fusco's seeing, but the seeing was also deeply, and structurally, reciprocal. People came out, turning towards the outside, from all the places that held them in the day-to-day, to reciprocate in their seeing (an outcome of which is the density of their appearance) that they had been seen. Acknowledged. Recognised. Given to sense to make sense of, given to appearance. (Perhaps, in some cases, even named.)

In an interview constructed from various sources for the occasion of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's exhibition 'The Train: RFK's Last Journey', an anniversary exhibition of the RFK assassination, Fusco describes the extraordinary mass of people who assembled in mourning along the side of the tracks ('There were people everywhere') and how he experienced their sudden appearance as the train emerged from the underground tunnels of New York as 'an explosion', such was its enormity and unexpectedness, and yet he says, 'It was solemn and quiet. No yelling'.<sup>17</sup> As such, a quiet solemn 'seeing' concribes not only the fact of the scene but also its emotional temper and the temper of the photographs by which we access it: a quietness that may have something of the contemplative about it, though I am unsure, as yet, what that would mean. So, this certain kind of seeing is perhaps reciprocal, and it turns upon the making and partaking of an image, and it is quiet. Maybe even contemplative. And it cannot be done alone.

But why does this certain kind of seeing contain a charge in the form of a demand? And how is it that 'we' rather than 'they' appear when the demand is met in these photographs? And what is this appearance in which 'we' figure? The demand for reciprocal acknowledgement is a political and an ethical demand. It is also, in the sensory reciprocity it travels along, an aesthetic demand. It would seem, therefore, that it is in this force of demand – political, ethical, aesthetic – that 'they' is transformed into 'we'.

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<sup>16</sup> Looking out of the Train Window: an Excerpted Interview with Paul Fusco. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, <https://www.sfmoma.org/read/looking-out-train-window-interview-paul-fusco/> [Accessed May 2019]

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*How can this be so? How can it be that 'we' appears withheld in a series of photographs taken fifty years ago in a specific place in response to a historic and unprecedented event? And what can it mean to say that 'our' appearance as such is withheld in these images? And, more importantly, what does such a withholding do? These are the questions I have come to, that give words, in the form of questions, to an experience I had a long time ago (and that I continue to have). To articulate and understand, let alone answer, these questions I have had to encounter the experience again and marshal to that encounter ideas, theories, other images, other people, actions, technologies, conversations, objects, music, sounds, buildings, places, journeys, diagrams and many, many books. I have tried to make use of these manifold resources in ways that pay attention to what they offer to the question in their own terms and as qualifications and ruptures upon each other. In this I have been open to the effect of montage at the same time as I have tried to hold to the singularity of such plural forms, voices, forces and embodiments. Something of the life of action and the life of contemplation has been at work, and it has felt at times demanding – ethically, politically and artistically. But the experience itself has not been reduced or destroyed as a result – instead I would say it has been rescued: 'survived' and put to use, becoming perhaps a complex scene of enquiry into the withholding of, and grieving for, 'us', in images, as artworks, for world-building.*



**SHORTLY BEFORE BEGINNING** this research project I read an essay by Dave Beech in which he discusses what he calls a new ‘art of encounter’ (Beech, 2010): forms of post-Cartesian relational art practice in which social engagement and participation substitute for the engagement of viewers with (formalist) art objects/images. Beech’s essay is essentially an argument for a more complex and transformative approach to participatory and collaborative artworks that fully engages with and tests out their potential to act as means of ‘rethinking social relations at large’ (Beech, 2010, p.28). However, along the way Beech identifies the ways in which this kind of work, almost of necessity, *must exclude* a viewing subject, or at least a ‘viewer’, in art-historical terms.<sup>18</sup> While I agree with Beech that much of this kind of work *does* exclude a viewer from its social interactions, I found myself troubled by the idea that it must of necessity do so.

At the same time, I remembered seeing Fusco’s photographs in the *Independent* one Sunday morning some time in 1999. I went back to the photographs having read Beech’s essay and found myself still deeply moved by something in them that I couldn’t quite pin down or explain. It occurred to me that the photographs were an answer or a response to what had troubled me about Beech’s essay. More than that, they were a riposte to its suggestion that the viewer must be excluded from socially engaged artworks, and by implication from the forms of aesthetic-political participation such work engendered. However, I could not at the time explain why I thought this was so. After all, these photographs were essentially examples of photojournalism, and could hardly be considered artworks, and especially not socially engaged art practice as it is commonly understood. But I knew, or I felt I had seen, something in these photographs that exploded the distinction Beech made between ‘viewing’ and ‘acting’. That something, I have come to realise, is *appearance*. By *appearance* I am referring specifically to Hannah Arendt’s idea of ‘the space of appearance’ and the philosophical tradition and range of political theories that circulate around the idea and problem of *appearance* in these terms (Arendt, 1998). However, my proposition entails a particular use and overturning of Arendtian appearance in order to mobilise it in

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<sup>18</sup> The work that Beech is primarily referring to is that produced in the late 1990s turn towards relational or socially-engaged practice by artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Carsten Holler, Andrea Zittel and others connected with Nicolas Bourriaud’s proposition of relational aesthetics. However, he also refers to artists such as Liam Gillick, for whom the visual element of the work operates as a ‘backdrop’ to a scene of social relations.

ways that address what I consider Beech's, and Hlavajova's, premature exclusion of 'the viewer' (and all that that implies) from the political capacity of art: an overturning in which *images* act.

Beech's essay is focused on the turn that took place in contemporary art practice from the late 1990s towards participation, social interaction and relationality and away from an investment in, and emphasis on, the 'Cartesian viewer' – a singular viewer equipped with a 'disembodied eye' whose rightful place was the Modernist 'white-box' art gallery in which (he) could contemplate 'the art object' passively (Beech, 2010). Beech locates this turn as the natural outcome of a Duchampian social ontology that displaced the primacy of the viewer and viewing in the context of Duchamp's famous resistance to, and interrogation of, opticality. This post-Duchampian ontology is also characterised by a loss of artistic autonomy and sovereignty enshrined in the idea of 'the artist's "voice"', namely the notion of artistic originality and style.

Instead, the artist's 'voice' – and by implication the viewer's 'eye' – become 'subordinate to the forces of reproducibility and general social technique', writes Beech, quoting John Roberts (Beech, 2010, p.22) Yet, he writes, "The viewer isn't dead but its hegemony – the reign of "the disembodied eye" – is broken' (ibid.). This state of (artistic) affairs in which art, and the viewer, have become increasingly affected by, and subject to, 'general social technique' has appeared in various guises since Duchamp's gesture of the 'readymade' – 1960s performance art, conceptualism, post-Modernism and, most contemporary to Beech's essay, 'relational art' as configured by Nicolas Bourriaud in his now eponymous work *Relational Aesthetics* (Bourriaud, 1998). According to Beech's analysis, which follows Bourriaud and other theorists of 'the social turn' in art, such as Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Miwon Kwon and, in a slightly different sense, John Roberts, '*there is no viewer of these inter-human relations*' [my italics] (Beech, 2010, p.20).

When first reading Beech's essay it was this line that struck me deeply. I read in it, perhaps wrongly, that not only was there no viewer *of* these inter-human relations; also, by implication, there was no viewer *in* these inter-human relations, by which I took Beech to mean that 'the viewer', as conceived by art history and practice since Cartesian perspectivalism, was axiomatically excluded from social and inter-human relations, at least as they were played out in relational artworks. He underlines this by

writing, 'if there were [a viewer] then this would probably be seen as a troubling social presence that affects the inter-human action that it views' (ibid., p.20).

Furthermore, if there is no viewer then there can be no art object to view. Instead, he writes, 'any objects that are used within these inter-human relational artworks are generally *used* rather than *viewed*' [my italics] (ibid., p20). With reference to the work of Liam Gillick he then identifies in this a form of art which he describes as 'an art not to be looked at'. This form of art displaces the art object as the primary focus of the encounter with art, and this in its turn has forced the 'white-box' gallery to adapt 'by mimicking libraries, cafes and other social spaces' (ibid., p.21).

What Beech describes as taking place in art practice at the turn of millennium is not only an outcome of the trajectory of post-Duchampian art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also a foreshadowing (in perhaps often primarily stylistic ways) of the radical agenda being set out by Hlavajova and other proponents of 'useful' art today. I recognise this kind of work and have, over the span of my own artistic career, been drawn to such ways of working and their mistrust or questioning of the status of the 'artist', 'art object' and 'gallery'. However, I was troubled by the idea that such ways of working must exclude the viewer, even if that viewer is only conceived of in a Cartesian sense.

The idea that on the one hand there is social and relational artistic practice in which relations between people (and therefore *politics*) become the material of the artwork, and on the other that there is formalism, the 'to be viewed' artworks, in which everything that is anti-social about the gesture of high Modernism is sustained, seemed to me to cleave the complex and rich terrain of artistic practice into a problematic division between 'viewing' and 'relating', or, as I was now situating it, between 'contemplation' and 'action'. I wondered, why can't there be a viewer (albeit one transformed from a disembodied Cartesianism and the fixed passivity of a perspectival imaginary) *in* and *of* these inter-human relations? Why can't the 'relational artwork' view, or contain viewing, as an active condition of inter-human relations? Or, indeed, why can't viewing itself, even in the context of art practice, be social and relational – in effect, *political*?

Equally, I ask, why can't an image be relational? Why can't an image act? Why can't an image, or indeed an art object, operate actively within a post-Cartesian social ontology? Or why can't an image *do*, rather than simply *bear*, the political? These questions are slightly different from thinking about the

politics or agency of images in-themselves, which is largely concerned with an image's representational effect either within or outside of artistic contexts. Instead what interests me, and what was triggered by Beech's essay, is a more nuanced question around the capacity certain kinds of images or art objects could have to recuperate, or mobilise, in newly relational and political ways, the *contemplative* aspect of the viewer of art and art to be viewed: in effect, the idea that contemplation (recuperated differently) might also *be* action. Or, not only might viewing be social and participatory: images themselves might also be relational 'actors'.

What this might mean is complex and cuts to the core of current debates around viewing or spectatorship versus *usership* in the context of the infrastructures of contemporary art production, dissemination and reception. Such a 'post-Cartesian' viewer would be one for whom a singular and centralised (or archic) viewing point is no longer possible, nor is the disembodiment implied by such a fixed and rational 'eye'. Not a viewer fixed by an ideal, but rather one (who ceases to be 'one') moved by the real. An individual therefore, somehow, *undone*.

I have also come to realise that this is the viewer I found myself to be when I first saw Fusco's photographs. Therefore, not only were the photographs an answer to Beech's claim: so too was the particular mode of viewing that they produced. For this reason, throughout my research I have drawn on my own viewing experiences (and the viewing experiences of others) to shape both the thinking and practice of this research. Viewing, therefore, in the mode of a reciprocal and ethical response-ability operates as a recuperated and recuperative method in the research. It is, in an Arendtian sense, a beginning.

# **BEGINNING**



**‘PREEMINENTLY THE THEORIST OF BEGINNINGS’** is how Margaret Canovan describes Hannah Arendt in her introduction to Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (Canovan, 1998, p.vii). It is, then, unsurprising that her own story/work begins with a liberation: her self-liberation from the tradition of Western political thought, brought about through her experience of Nazi totalitarianism in the 1930s and ’40s. For Arendt, totalitarianism was political oblivion, the ‘desert’ – as she later describes it in the concluding section of a lecture she gave in 1955 entitled ‘The History of Political Theory’ – which ushered in ‘the modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us’ with a politics of such absolute and unprecedented exclusion (whose ultimate aim had become that of rendering the human superfluous) that to live beyond it required, for her, an entirely new way of thinking about politics (Arendt, 2005, p.201).

This way was to *re-begin* in worldly human plurality, in our explicit and shared differences, a plurality that appears by virtue of our response to one another. To tell the story of human plurality as experienced is to act against oblivion. Yet oblivion and human superfluosness are the greater stories of our times, stories told to keep us safe, stories told to keep us hidden from ourselves, and others. Arendt’s fear was that we might become ‘at home’ in this desert of oblivion and lose the capacity, or courage, to act, to become ‘an active being’ (Arendt, 2005).

The space of appearance could be considered, then, as Arendt’s attempt to rescue politics from past and potential oblivions. On my reading it is, like much of Arendt’s work, performative. By that I mean it is not simply an idea about political action: in itself it acts upon something and changes it. It is also rhetorical in that it stages this performative gesture with attention to its aesthetics in order that it has an impact beyond the merely intellectual or theoretical. In this it is never simply an idea, or even a proposition. It is *real*. It does something.

There is always a double action at play in Arendt’s writing. She ‘describes’ the space of appearance, but she also *enacts* it, in such a way that description, or representation itself, is undermined as that which gives something its form. Instead, the form of appearance is demonstrated in its *performance*, which is in its turn a performance of the ‘defiguring’ of representation. This stages her sense of the political, and indeed of political *sense*. Steve Buckler quotes Arendt as saying, ‘We must avoid reductive ways of thinking that would seek to resolve the phenomenal character of politics into something more

permanent by reference to eternal principles, natural categories or historical teleologies that would insinuate a sense that it is somehow guaranteed. Politics has no “common denominator”; it cannot be indemnified theoretically, only sustained actively’ (Arendt, in Buckler, 2011, p.7). What this means is that politics, and the space of appearance that constitutes it, is always considered as a *practice*: a practice of human plurality. For Arendt this practice also has a *form*, even if the form is irresolute, open, surprising, unruly and ‘noisy’ (or at least in Arendt’s work the desire to locate a form for the practice of appearance is something she repeatedly returns to (Markell, 2006)). One might think of it as a kind of ‘figural’ form, or what Davide Panagia describes as ‘aspectuality’ (Panagia, 2016) and therefore something that is both form and the method of form’s undoing.<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> In this sense, in which the *form* of politics as appearance opens unto an unruly and indeterminate means: it is a profound and anarchic *democratic* practice.

Through my reading of Arendt and the investigations of my research, I propose that this performativity, both in terms of the space of appearance as conceived by Arendt and the manner in which she articulates it in her writings, is a ‘pre-enactment’, as Maria Hlavajova argues, of this radical and anarchic form of democratic, ethico-aesthetic politics. This pre-enactment (its phenomenality) occurs in the work in a range of ways, one of which, I propose, is Arendt’s specific ‘overturning’ of the allegory of Plato’s cave (an overturning that will be discussed in more detail later on in this thesis). In the spirit of Arendtian ‘beginning’ which, according to Patchen Markell’s reading of Arendt (Markell, 2006), arises because of a certain ‘attunement’ in the respondent to the potential of an action to be developed or continued, my research is situated in response to that overturning.

The specificity of Arendt’s performative critique of Plato’s cave allegory is an example of her more general critique of (Platonic) philosophy and its rejection of politics, a rejection that would lead to the profoundly problematic alignment of politics with ruling. In *The Human Condition* she explains how

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<sup>19</sup> The degree to which this apparently contradictory aspect of Arendt’s thinking on politics and its relationship to *ruling* has perplexed many of her readers is brought out in Patchen Markell’s essay ‘The Rule of the People: Arendt, *Arché*, and Democracy’ *American Political Science Review*, 100:1 (2006) A later version of the essay was published in *Politics in Dark Times, Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. My reference to the essay are taken from both sources.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘figural’ which will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis, comes from Lyotard’s idea in *Discourse, Figure*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971

Plato corrupted the idea of *arkhé* from that of *beginning* to that of *ruling*, and in doing so embedded a principle of origin and mastery into the practice of politics.

Plato established what Arendt called his political writings (as opposed to his philosophical writings) in his *Statesman* and *The Republic* (Arendt, 1998, p.14). It is in *Statesman* that he outlines this profound split between ‘thinking and doing’, or between action and making, that was to institute the whole idea of rule, which is for Arendt the end of *politics*, properly speaking. He does this, she writes in *The Human Condition*, by opening up ‘a gulf between the two modes of action, *archein* and *prattein* (“beginning” and “achieving”), which according to Greek understanding were interconnected’ (Arendt, 1998, p.222). She argues that prior to the opening up of this ‘gulf’ within the *polis*, action initiated by a citizen was open to adaptation and response by the plurality of other ‘peers’ within the public arena: an action, which was in itself anyway already a response, was carried forward, ‘achieved’ or continued in collaboration with the help and/or contestation of others. In this sense it was *contingent*, and therefore remained, even as it was carried out, open, uncertain and conditioned by the very plurality in relation to which it took place.

In Arendt’s argument, for Plato this contingency to plurality was precisely the problem, and he sought to identify ways in which a citizen who initiated an action, who Arendt calls ‘*the beginner*’, ‘would remain the complete master of what he had begun’ (Arendt, 1998). This, she explains, could only happen if action was initiated in the form of ‘an idea’ (which later becomes ‘laws’) which is then executed by others as an order that is obeyed. Thus, Arendt argues, the *beginner* becomes a *ruler*, instead of a kind of co-agent of action (a respondent) within a condition of equality and plurality. She quotes Plato, in the *Statesman*, writing that in this way the *beginner* ‘does not have to act at all (*prattein*), but rules (*archein*) over those who are capable of execution’ (Arendt, 1998, p.223). In doing so, she continues, Plato becomes the first ‘to introduce the division between those who know and do not act, and those who act and do not know’ (ibid.) instead of what she describes as ‘the old articulation of action into beginning and achieving’ (ibid.).

Markell takes this analysis of language by which Arendt locates a split between beginning and achieving and develops it further to argue that ‘what threatens “beginning” as Arendt understands it is not the enforcement of regularity (ruling) but the erosion of the contexts in which events call for

responses and, thus, in which it makes sense to act at all' (Markell, 2010, p.79). Further to this, Markell argues that this quality of beginning which occurs through a response to a call relies upon its being conceived as an infinite number of *events* – to which there may or may not be responses, whether individual or collective – rather than as merely a capacity of persons (ibid.). At the same time Markell argues that there is a qualitative aspect to Arendt's idea of response that he calls a certain 'attunement' such that someone would feel called, or moved, to respond. This implies an inherent vulnerability between political actors, and underscores the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of Arendt's politics.

What is interesting about this quality of 'attunement' that Markell identifies in Arendtian 'beginning' or responsiveness is not only its ethical and aesthetic aspects but also that these aspects are manifested in the actualisation of response. It is not simply that someone, or some event, appears (politically speaking), and that this appearance calls forth a response, but more importantly that this response is realised in action. As Linda Zerilli writes in relation to Markell's idea, 'Beginning may be "a feature of all events" but it is more in the way of a potential that must be actualised by democratic citizens than a substance that inheres in all events. What makes one occurrence count as an event that calls for our response is how citizens take it up' (Zerilli, 2016).

Markell goes on in his essay to outline in great detail the degree to which 'responding' is essential to Arendt's notion of 'beginning', and therefore to her idea of action. But this capacity for beginning, brought about through response, crucially does not produce new and better 'subjects'. Although it occurs *intersubjectively*, it does not reveal or contribute to the identity, or 'self', of any one person within the plural space of appearance, nor to an identity of the *polis* itself. Though Arendt refers to the appearance of this quality of response as the 'latent self', according to Markell 'what Arendt calls the latent self is not an *identity*, real or illusory; instead, it is action's point of departure, the constellation of circumstances, events and forces to which each new act is a response.' (Markell, 2010, p.75)

'Attunement' is the recognition of this potential for action (for beginning) that turns a response from passive to active. It is a quality of participation in the space of appearance that, while not exactly subjective, resides in the open, vulnerable and embodied response of political participants. In the framework of Arendt's thinking, Markell's 'attunement' (Arendt's 'beginning') can never be an aspect of contemplation, as contemplation is not responsive to human action, only to abstract thought.

Contemplation therefore remains passive. However, the cultural theorist Davide Panagia (following Rancière's expanded idea of appearance as the realm of the sensible) offers a different model of the space of appearance which is populated not solely by human speech and action, but also by images and other cultural forms and practices. (Panagia, 2009, 2016). And in this model he describes the reciprocal action of appearance 'as it strikes one's sensorium' (Panagia, 2016, p. 1) in terms of its 'advenience'. He takes the term 'advenience' from Roland Barthes, who, in *Camera Lucida*, writes about how certain photographs 'advene' upon him and others don't, how some draw him into their 'adventure' as opposed to others. (Panagia, 2016, p.3) In this Panagia ascribes the challenge and potential of appearance – politically, ethically and aesthetically – to *images*, and thereby admits to Arendt's space of political beginnings the very scene within which she had located its demise.

In the context of my research, 'attunement' and 'advenience' become terms that can describe the reciprocal actions of an art of encounter in which images act in a space of appearance. But images of what?



**REGENT STREET** is a majestic street in the centre of a major world capital city. The King's new street cut through the people's city. It is summer, and a day of heat and light, strong shadows; open, though eclipsed, sky. The high buildings on either side of the street form a deep cleft which, on this section of the Sovereign's breach, known historically as 'the Quadrant', curve round dramatically, creating a tapering view at one end, as if 'The Ideal City of Urbino was pinched and rolled, such that its colonnaded church was pulled right out of view and its classical architecture expressively curled.

Regent Street has always been a shopping street. Forged once but built twice, it is an entrenching declaration of the city's disavowal of its civic purpose (unless that civic purpose is solely reduced to the culture of consumption). And today this status is celebrated by closing its central road to traffic and hosting a festival - for shoppers, tourists, Sunday wanderers and browsing passers-by. People spill off the pavements onto the road, and despite the occasional aberrant swirl of music from a nearby band, the atmosphere is unusually quiet - still, even.

At either end of the street's main sweep, there are two 'circuses': Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Circus. These forms of circular crossroads are relatively common here in this city that is uniquely lacking in large public 'squares', or spaces specifically created for public assembly - an absence no doubt attributable to the lack of any successful popular uprising within this sovereign state. No republic successfully erupted here, no space cleared for and by the citizens' appearing; the streets remain, as yet, un-reclaimed. Instead these circuses, like ceaseless cogs, help to shuttle the city's inhabitants perfectly along the streets' acceding gullies, delimiting a flow that must not rest lest it be arrested for daring to appear outside of the circles of production and consumption that delimit the city's primary public force.

In the middle of this curving, bounded, traffic-less street, there is a track: an elliptical rail track. 22" gauge, made from wood and aluminium. Seven metres across on the major axis, four and a half metres on the minor. The track could hold a small train, of the sort you see in pleasure gardens or amusement parks, but instead it hosts a camera on a dolly, of the sort you see on movie sets. But in both respects the track and camera do not conform to type; no train of this scale would follow such a tiny circumnavigation, and no filmmaker would require such a peculiarly shaped and elaborate reconstruction to run their camera along. And anyway, today the camera is shooting stills. But the invocation of the cinematic and the railways is not an accident. Nor is the incursion of both onto this sovereign boulevard of consumer culture.

Surrounding the elliptical track are nine metal safety barriers forming a crude cage, open at just one point to allow access to and from the tracking area. The safety 'cage' imposed by the street's festival event organisers is designed to keep the 'general public' out, to stop them from tripping up on the track (hurting themselves and suing the council). The barriers are very familiar public order 'furniture'. One associates them with the corralling of crowds, at celebrations or demonstrations.

*Each one, a temporary, free-standing structure, can be hooked onto another one on either side, thereby creating a fence. Or a pen, if a line of them is joined end to end. In this case the pen separates the bodies of the public from the bodies of those operating the camera, but it does not impede the line of sight between them. The camera on its rolling tripod (the dolly) can see, and be seen, over the top of this barrier. But the camera is also trapped in its specific, and eccentric, orbit. Its lens is fixed at a particular focal length and the focus set. While it can survey from its fixed trajectory, it cannot penetrate, follow beyond the scope of its fixed focal length or extract a detail. Equally, shots are taken randomly using a shutter release, so the images recorded (of which there are thousands) could not even in the end be described as having been 'taken', so non-specific, unseen and almost accidental was the framing and the moment of the 'shot'. It might be more accurate to describe the photographs as having been partaken. And the images they become as gestures of, or gestures in, this partaking.*



**HANNAH ARENDT'S 'SPACE OF APPEARANCE'** is a complex proposition for renewed public-political space modelled on her account of the freedom, plurality, agonism and subsequent narrativisation of the ancient Greek *polis*. It is a space in which human equality and distinctness prevail, and 'appear' through forms of speech and action that are not separated from thought and judgement. As a proposition for how politics *should* appear, 'the space of appearance' has much to offer our current circumstances, as it is a collective space figured by radical plurality, contingency, publicness and agonism. It is a space (of people) in which political subjectification devolves upon the individual as an intersubjective, inter-relational 'part' of the scene of politics. Consequently, political appearance is an interplay of assertion and acknowledgement, of avowal and reception, of call and response, and one in which such interplays modify and reconfigure what is exchanged. It is therefore a space in which a certain kind of 'beholding' takes place – 'I appear to others as others appear to me' (Arendt, 1998, p.198). This beholding purposely substitutes for the eternal and abstract practice of *contemplation* the worldly and contingent process of *action*. Therefore appearance, for Arendt, is not to be understood in visual terms, but rather philosophically as that which is neither being nor truth.<sup>21</sup>

Following her post-war work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which Arendt sought to understand the processes that had led to the horrors of Nazi totalitarianism, she turned her thoughts back to the philosophical tradition that was her own professional grounding and turned against it. Her book *The Human Condition*, that articulates this turn (and after which she would describe herself as a political theorist and not a philosopher), sought to re-evaluate the potential of human action beyond philosophy's insistence on individual *being* and the search for truth, and instead in terms that were resolutely reliant on the inherently collective condition of humanity.<sup>22</sup> Her rejection of philosophy and its political instrumentalisation was partly informed by her own biography and her immense disappointment with the support for National Socialism that she witnessed amongst her academic colleagues at Freiburg University in the 1930s, in particular her mentor and lover Martin Heidegger. She was appalled at the

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<sup>21</sup> In the context of Arendt's repudiation of philosophy, it is more accurate to understand her use of 'appearance' as anti-philosophical, as it is a gesture in which appearance, as the framework within which political action occurs, comes to replace entirely the philosophical realm of contemplation. However, I situate it here in its negative relation to philosophy simply in order to distinguish her use of appearance from a more straightforwardly visual use.

<sup>22</sup> *The Human Condition* has been published by the University of Chicago Press three times. First in 1958, followed by a second edition in 1998 with an introduction by Margaret Canovan. The second edition was republished in 2018 to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the book with a new foreword by Danielle S. Allen.

retreat into philosophical rationalism that Heidegger used as a basis for his support of the Nazis. Equally, she could see in his thinking a dangerous investment in a belief in the pure being of a people produced by historical destiny. Such a purity and singularity of being (whether in the individual or in a collective political form that presents itself as coherent and absolute) is precisely what Arendt worked against by her insistence on the plurality of appearance in the life of action. As she writes on the very first page of *The Human Condition*, ‘men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world’ (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). Arendt stages her argument for the ‘life of action’ through an overturning of what was, for her, a problematic hierarchy between the ‘*vita contemplativa*’ and the ‘*vita activa*’ in the Modern era whereby the ‘life of contemplation’ comes to acquire greater value and significance over the ‘life of action’ (Arendt, 1998).

The ‘space of appearance’ is the term she uses to describe this newly revitalised space of political action and the supposed superficiality of appearance: its surface condition is precisely its value to Arendt, as it constitutes a reality that has no beyond, that is utterly against metaphysics, and that cannot be thought of in the abstract, only experienced, thoughtfully, in the particular. Appearance is crucial to Arendt precisely because it is not ideal – it is the *merely* human made vital to the practice of politics because it is through this relational appearance, in speech and action, of one to each other that politics occurs. As such, there is no space of the political that pre-exists this appearance.

The intention of Arendt’s historical analysis in *The Human Condition* is to work against what she describes as ‘modern world alienation’, which she identifies as being constituted by ‘a twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self’ (Arendt, 1998, p.6). Such flights, and the questioning of them, are even more pertinent to our current times, when the earth is in catastrophic danger and the imperatives of the ‘self’, fuelled by the imperatives of capitalism and its exploitation of individual agency, have threatened to eclipse our sense of collective responsibility, both to each other (in global terms) and to this very earth. For Arendt, working *with* rather than against appearance is the mechanism, or the process, by which these alienations are countered, precisely because by accepting appearance as an absolute human condition (and by extension a condition that includes the non-human), one of our most instrumental and foundational hierarchies is undone.

Appearance is therefore a fundamentally and profoundly relational and public space, a space between people that cannot be conceived of abstractly or according to any specific rules of behaviour;

rather, it can only be enacted. In these terms the space of appearance is a powerful realisation of *politics* beyond the imperatives or operations of ruling.<sup>23</sup> As Emma Ingala writes, this public ‘in-between’ ‘is host to three particular phenomena: the expression of plurality and of relationality, the creation of novelty, and the appearing of one to each other’. (Ingala, 2018, p.37) These are valuable ideas that resist the reductive homogenisation of certain political or civic identities and that celebrate the human capacity to produce ‘the new’, to ‘begin’, and so therefore understand the imperatives of co-action in a public space of appearance as being about life and worldliness rather than a means of defeating individual mortality. These are also ideas that do away with a philosophical distinction between ‘true’ being and ‘mere’ appearance, instead acknowledging that appearance is all there is, and therefore how we operate together in and as the relations that constitute it is all that we need to ‘be’ who we are – individually, in relation to each other and collectively, as political subjects in process.<sup>24</sup>

However, Arendt’s space of appearance, for all that it offers, is also problematic on a number of levels, primarily because of what seems to be a number of incongruous exclusions and divisions according to which Arendt determines appearance in ways that even she would seem to be arguing against. The first of these, and the most controversial for many critics, is her exclusion of the private and social realm from politics as the public space of appearance. This problem has been particularly addressed by feminist criticism that has rightly viewed Arendt’s proposition for politics as excluding that which is usually associated with women and other marginalised identities; the home, the body and the management of ‘necessity’.<sup>25</sup> Other critics have identified other omissions from, or limits to, her ideas of

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<sup>23</sup> I am using ‘politics’ rather than ‘the political’ because it is the preferred term used by both Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière, key thinkers for my work, to discuss their radical propositions for how we might live together *otherwise*. It is not, therefore, a term that refers to the formal institutions of government.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt’s proposition for appearance must not be confused with a postmodern idea of ‘simulacra’, as it is far from nihilistic and is not premised on some notion of meaningless relativism. More importantly, it is not other to the real. In fact, as Kimberly Curtis’s work in particular brings out, it intensifies the real, producing what Curtis calls ‘densities’ that give to relationality an unavoidable opacity and contingency. Thinking about appearance in this way, in this contemporary context, after the 2008 global banking crash and facing a climate emergency and unprecedented levels of displaced people, is primarily then about thinking about a collective condition in which there is no beyond, from which there is no ‘flight’ possible. All that is possible is to respond; to *begin*.

<sup>25</sup> Emma Ingala details some of these critiques by feminist theorists such as Mary O’Brien, Adrienne Rich and Wendy Brown, and in particular draws attention to Bonnie Honig’s edited collection of essays *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (1995). In this she identifies a more recent turn within feminist criticism that re-evaluates Arendt’s work in terms of its commitment to non-identitarian-based politics. In my own readings Bonnie Honig’s continued engagement with Arendt is important to this move, as is recent scholarship on Arendt by Adriano Cavarero, Kimberly Curtis, Linda Zerilli and Judith Butler, whose own use of Arendtian thinking in relation to her work on precarity and vulnerability is the subject of Ingala’s essay referred to here. From my own readings of Arendt I have found that while these criticisms of her divisions and

appearance, and have sought to correct these through careful extension or rearticulation of her arguments. These include Ariella Azoulay's inclusion of 'the gaze' (through her concept of 'the civil gaze') as a parallel to Arendtian action, Brandon LaBelle's activation of sound and its micro-political potential to produce 'appearances' that resist the macro scales of surveillance and hyper-presence that we increasingly live within, and Judith Butler's recent work on precarious bodies, which, according to Emma Ingala, relies on Arendtian ideas of appearance to enable Butler to bring together, as an ethico-political critique, her earlier work on performativity with her more recent work on precarity. (Ingala, 2018) My own research operates in the context of these revisions and reuses of Arendtian appearance and adds to their thinking a specific focus on the action of *images* and *viewing* understood as modalities of appearance in these terms.

In my own analysis of Arendt's writing I was struck again and again by three things: the work's performativity; its consistent and insistent return to *appearance*, and, despite its philosophical thinking and tone, its embeddedness in the realities of the everyday world. Through these emerge Arendt's deep suspicion of abstract thinking, of identitarian politics, and of politics as the imposition of ruling. But equally, it is through these qualities that appearance's tractability to development in artistic terms also emerges. In this regard it is not only deeply relevant politically to our own 'dark times', but also uniquely helpful to the task of finding ways for artistic practice and aesthetics to *act*, without abandoning what is particular and distinct about art – its capacity to engender reflection and contemplation, or, as T J Demos writes in *The Migrant Image* in the context of a discussion on the relationship between art and political activism, 'art's formal creativity, theoretical complexity, indeterminate and potentially contradictory meanings and contemplative possibilities.' (Demos, 2013, p.91)

Perhaps because I am an artist and image-maker, I find that these qualities mentioned above are underlined by Arendt's profound and continuous performative encounter with Plato's allegory of the cave. In this allegory prisoners are sitting shackled in a cave, unable to leave or move, staring at a wall in front of them. Behind them there is a fire, in front of which passes a continual procession of people carrying everyday objects. Because of the fire, these figures are projected onto the wall of the cave in front of the shackled prisoners. As the prisoners know no other life, and these shadows are all they see,

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exclusions are valid, when her writing is considered in more performative and contextual terms, it seems to me to be operating according to a more subtle politics through which 'identity' is profoundly questioned as a means by which the condition of human relationality can be fully realised and participated in.

they come to imagine that these images are real. Until one day one of them gets free and climbs out of the cave to eventually discover the light of ‘truth’, which is the life of contemplation, which for Plato is a life of ‘correct’ seeing, not the seeing of the illusions on the wall of the cave. However, in a turn that would seem to echo for Plato the sentencing to death of his friend and mentor Socrates by the Athenian polis, when the ‘philosopher’ who left the cave returns to tell the prisoners of the truth he has now seen, they won’t believe him, and in the end they kill him.

Arendt returns to the cave allegory a number of times in her work. In addition to these direct discussions of the allegory, its effect on Arendt, and her constant need to overturn its premise, can be felt throughout her writing in her use of language, her continual metaphorical movement between ‘light’ and ‘dark’, and the insistence of her humanism. It is there right at the beginning of *The Human Condition*, in Chapter 1, where Arendt refers to the parable to argue for Plato’s need to distinguish the life of the philosopher from the life of the citizen, and in particular to point out how the life of the philosopher – the contemplative life – is one of singularity rather than collective responsibility; she states that ‘the philosopher, having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect “singularity”, as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others’ (Arendt, 1998 p.20). Politically speaking, however, she continues to argue that such a pursuit of the eternal through contemplation is actually a kind of death.<sup>26</sup> For Arendt, therefore, the ‘life of contemplation’ is no life at all but a dead and *worldless* thing.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Arendt poses the ‘life of action’ (*vita activa*) and its three essential characteristics; labour, work and action. She does this, effectively, by *rescuing* the prisoners from Plato’s cave. The appearances by which they were entranced and ‘deluded’ become the reality of appearance in all its contingent human plurality. And yet it is through this particular encounter that I have observed a further omission on her part, one that for my interests, intellectually and artistically, mobilises the political capacity of appearance in a new way, because Arendt, although she rescues the prisoners, leaves the shadows they contemplated on the wall behind, and by inference she leaves their ‘incorrect

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<sup>26</sup> This point is informed by Adriano Cavarero’s discussion of Arendt’s use of Plato’s cave allegory in her essay ‘Regarding the Cave’ (*Que Parle*, 10: 1, (Fall/Winter 1996).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Worldliness’ is an important concept for Arendt, as it describes a commitment to staying with the realities of human action rather than attempting to escape them through modes of abstraction, one of which, especially in writing in *The Human Condition*, is contemplation. (Arendt, 1998).

seeing' behind, too. In effect it would seem to me that she omits *images*, and a viewer/viewers of them, from the space of appearance.

My interest in this omission, and its contemporary relevance, is because of what those images are of, and how they are manifest. Which is to say, they are of 'us', flickering; the shadowy and shackled *demos*. In this sense one might say that what is omitted from the space of appearance, in Arendt's terms, is *the subjects of the political*: political identities, identity politics; political subjects whom Jacques Rancière lists as, for example, 'the workers', 'the people', 'the citizens', appearing in insubstantial, contingent and elusive guises (Rancière, J. 2007). Even in these guises it is no wonder that Arendt would choose to leave them behind on the cave wall, for they are, in a sense, the opposite of plurality. They are the named 'we', collectives that have become a unified subject. Traditionally and historically these are subjects of a different kind of politics, founded in a different kind of world, and yet 'they' continue to hold many of us entranced.

Even though new forms of the political subject are emerging in the context of, for example, intersectional feminism, decolonial politics, post-humanist and cosmopolitical thinking that includes the non-human animal, not to mention in the manifest assemblies of people from the Arab Spring to the Youth Climate Strikes, at the same time identitarian and populist politics is on the rise. The attraction (at least within the academy) of philosophies of 'speculative realism' or 'object-oriented ontology' and 'new materialism',<sup>28</sup> that themselves build on the nomadological thinking of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and feminists such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, is strong because in this thinking a radically devolved anti-humanist subject puts the whole premise of 'the subject' itself into question in ways that are liberating and increasingly apposite to the paradigm shift required to address, among other crises, our global climate emergency.

Yet the problem of the political subject seems still to prevail. The need *to belong*, whether to a nation, class or other form of collective identity, or to an ideology, has not left 'us' yet. Bruno Bosteels gives the name 'people' to this process, but 'people' as, he writes, 'one name among others – for the political process that produces its own subject, while reminding us that without an element of

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see the work of Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Jane Bennett, Melissa Orlie, Elizabeth Grosz, Sara Ahmed and Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, among others.

subjectivization there can be no politics' (Bosteels, 2016, p.20). Therefore the question 'How do we appear?' is not only a question of method, tactics or strategy (how), but also one of collective subjectivity: 'Who do we appear?' Which is to say, when we appear, who is it that we make manifest, that we constitute? There is a need to try to find ways to figure and make appear a more complex, transversal, contingent *and resistant* political subject. My proposition, realised through this doctoral project, is that by extending Arendt's gesture of overturning, in relation to Plato's cave, with another overturning, such a complex subject might be conjured from the images of the *demos* that she left behind. We might call this subject 'the people', but only in the sense that Rancière describes it as a subject internally divided from itself; an inherently resistant or dissensual subject. In *Disagreement: Philosophy and Politics*, Rancière puts it like this: 'There is politics from the moment there exists the sphere of appearance of a subject, *the people*, whose particular attribute is to be different from itself, internally divided' (Rancière, 1999, p.87). He continues, 'Wherever the part of those who have no part is inscribed, however fragile and fleeting these inscriptions may be, a sphere of appearance of the *demos* is created, an element of the *kratos*, the power of the people, exists. The problem is to extend the sphere of appearance, to maximize this potential' (Rancière, 1999, p.88).<sup>29</sup>

The challenge of *extending the sphere of appearance* is what this research project engages in, but in terms of appearance characterised by *both* dissensual rupture (Rancière) *and* ethical assembly (Arendt). And at the same time, an appearance in which the shadowy images left behind in Plato's cave and our captivated viewing of them are recuperated and put to use. These are the shadows (and viewers) of both a political subject in the way that 'we' might traditionally have been constituted and a *possible* 'us'; a flickering, mobile and indeterminate political subject that withholds, but does not entirely dispense with, the power of naming and identifying. I propose to term this spectral and indeterminate, yet historic and revolutionary subject, the *democratic subject*.

What I mean by 'democratic' is not a political regime or mode of governance, in whatever form that might take (representative, parliamentary, deliberative, direct or radical, for example) but rather a radical proposition for equality, in and as politics, that draws on both Arendt's and Rancière's conception

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<sup>29</sup> This section from Rancière's *Disagreement* is quoted by Bruno Bosteels in his introductory essay 'The People Which Is Not One' in the book of essays *What is A People?* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

of the political subject. In Rancière's thinking democracy *is* radical political equality because it is the rule (or appearance) of 'the people', who are those without specific entitlement to rule (and are therefore 'the extras'). (Rancière: 2014, 2009). He bases this thinking on his analysis of ancient Athenian democracy, in which 'democracy' is distinguished from 'aristocracy' (rule by nobles and men of property), 'monarchy' (rule by kings), and 'oligarchy' (rule by the few) as being a form of ruling by those chosen by lot, i.e. those with no inherent legitimacy to rule. (Rancière, 2014) In an interview in 2017 with Julius Gavroche, Rancière says, 'The people, they are not the mass of the population; the people is a construction. It does not exist, it is built by discourses and acts. Occupy, the Arab Spring, the Indignants, Syntagma Square in Athens, the movements of the undocumented, all of these construct a certain anonymous people. *And this people is that of democracy: a people who manifests the power of anybody*' [my italics] (Rancière, 2017) <sup>30</sup>.

Rancière's conflation of politics with democracy, understood as the radical inclusion of the structurally excluded 'people', is anarchic. Indeed, Gavroche's interview referred to above is titled 'Jacques Rancière: The Anarchy of Democracy'. Anarchy is also fundamental to Arendt's concept of politics, as politics is for her the very refusal of rule (*arkhè*), or at least the refusal of a hierarchy that would assume that there are those who are capable of ruling (through abstract principles and ideas) and those who are ruled. The importance of this an-archic position in Arendt's thinking cannot be overstated, as it defines the conditional, contingent and relational inter-subjectivity of (her) politics, and therefore of appearance. While Arendt does not directly describe this position as 'democratic', there is one key moment in *The Human Condition* in which she appears to do so. In an important section of the chapter on 'Action', in which Arendt discusses the ways in which 'men of action' and 'men of thought' (Arendt, 1998, p.220) attempt to find ways to escape the unpredictability and haphazardness of action, she draws a parallel with action, democracy and what she calls 'the essentials of politics' (ibid.). She writes: 'This attempt to replace acting with making is manifest in the whole body of argument against "democracy", which, the more consistently and better reasoned it is, will turn into an argument against the essentials of politics'. (ibid.)

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<sup>30</sup> Jacques Rancière: *The Anarchy of Democracy*, an interview with Jules Gavroche, *Autonomies*, May 2017 <https://autonomies.org/2017/05/jacques-ranciere-the-anarchy-of-democracy/> [Accessed March 2019]

It is these two specific understandings of the democratic, combined with a methodological approach given by Isobel Armstrong, that I propose to bring together in my use of the term ‘the democratic subject’, and I propose to do so in order that ‘we’, as such a democratic subject, might remain an appearance that can be encountered, partaken of, grieved, and then, through such public and collective actions of contemplation, fought for.<sup>31</sup>

It is not possible to enact this overturning without the use of images. It cannot simply be written. The projections on the wall must be seen. For this reason, the work that comprises this research is figured around particular ‘images’ of each of these democratic subjects, images partaken from other images and from the street; images of the people, the workers, the citizens, the crowd. But in each case, the work is asking that these ghostly democratic subjects be contemplated *incorrectly*. In doing this, and thereby revising Arendt’s assertive rejection of contemplation, much as she herself began to do towards the end of her life,<sup>32</sup> the thinking-doing that she called for is brought into play with another kind of seeing (contemplation).

Appearance, in these terms, becomes the means, perhaps more than the space, by which new images of democratic subjects might be conjured: images that resist closure, stasis and normativity but that do not completely atomise political subjectivity; images in which the democratic, the power to organise and the rupture of encounter – as ghosts and as reality - is withheld.<sup>33</sup> The purpose of this withholding is that in its duration and attention it might become a be/holding, to use Davide Panagia’s

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<sup>31</sup> In a later section of this thesis I discuss the image of this ‘democratic subject’ in relation to Georges Didi-Huberman’s writing on Pasolini and images in his book *Survival of the Fireflies* (Didi-Huberman, 2018). This is also informed by Howard Caygill’s discussion of Pasolini’s essay in his book *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (Caygill, 2013). In the context of this relation it might therefore be possible to think of ‘the democratic subject’ as a ‘firefly subject’ but I have chosen not to name it thus, as I do not want to lose the term ‘democratic’ at this point.

<sup>32</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Harcourt, 1977/78). ‘The Life of Mind’ was first published as a series of three long essays in *The New Yorker* in 1977. Reading those essays in their magazine format, surrounded by advertisements and *New Yorker* cartoons, gives a particular flavour to the ‘worldliness’ she was committed to. It is also fascinating to see how her early preoccupations with appearance in *The Human Condition* (1958) continue even at this stage of her life, shortly before she died. However, it is here that she begins, by connecting ‘thinking’ with ‘contemplation’, to give value to a mode of contemplative ‘seeing’ that she had previously rejected.

<sup>33</sup> In *The Political Life of Sensation*, Davide Panagia discusses Rancière’s critique of Deleuzian ‘indistinction’ in terms of its implied atomism. He quotes Rancière writing in *The Flesh of Words*, with reference to Deleuze, that ‘no other fraternity is normally formed, only atoms and groups of atoms, accidents and their incessant modifications’. Panagia then continues ‘The atomistic nature of indistinction, in other words, takes from us the power to organize.’ (Panagia, 2009, p.43)

term: a form of staying-with the dead and the disappeared of appearance in order that politics and power might be reconnected.



**HOW**

## *Democratic*

There are many words that I could use to describe the methods that mobilise this research project and its concern to develop a new art of encounter with images within the space of appearance: relationality, montage, response-ability, turning, encounter, equality, gesture, recuperation, withholding, ellipticality... Many of these words would also bring with them particular histories, practices and discourses from art, political theory, philosophy, film theory and even science, some of which I explore explicitly in other parts of this text.

Equally, I could talk about methodology in terms of particular approaches to images that I am utilising or invoking – whether through my actual work with images or in a more theoretical or philosophical sense – such as my engagement with the ‘civil imagination of photography’ proposed by visual theorist Ariella Azoulay (Azoulay, 2008, 2015) or Georges Didi-Huberman’s idea, itself revived from the work of art historian Aby Warburg, of the ‘surviving image’ (Didi-Huberman, 2018), or Jean-Luc Nancy’s arguments for the image as ‘distinct’ (Nancy, 2005). However, what haunts all of these descriptions would be a term more often used in relation to formal politics than artistic research methods: the *democratic*.<sup>34</sup> Democracy, then, as a methodology, haunts this project as its imaginary, in the same way that a democratic subject haunts it in images.

To speak about the *democratic* in terms of methodology is to situate it not only as that which underpins how this research is done, but also, given the corruption of democracy that passes for democratic politics today, it is to speak of this *method* itself as an aim or ambition of the project. To speak of it as a haunting is because, as Derrida wrote in relation to Marx and Marxism in 1993, it is the spectre, the ghost, that our contemporary global present fears the most,<sup>35</sup> and therefore is the ghost we must

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<sup>34</sup> Is this a wildly audacious and possibly foolish thing to say? Perhaps. But I think it is the best term that I can find to encompass the formal and political words for the method used already, along with the activation of non-representational agency with regard to images outlined above. And, furthermore, I think it is a term that needs recuperating. In this I share the instincts and imperatives of literary critic Isobel Armstrong, who writes in her recent book *Novel Politics: Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* that although ‘when uncoupled from its strict political meaning, the achievements of a universal franchise, the semantics of “democratic” are unspecific. It is nevertheless the best word I can find’ (Armstrong, 2016, p.6).

<sup>35</sup> This fear has a history which can be framed as the history of modern Western democracy itself, as it begins with the resurgence of democratic ideas and principles that followed in the wake of the American Revolution of 1776.

conjure, in order that the future might be possible.<sup>36</sup> This *apparition* in appearance is, in the context of this enquiry, how the *image* figures and what it figures as, but it is no mere insubstantiality, no trick of the light or the hand, it is the democratic acting in and through that and those who are no longer, or who are not yet here.

There is a premise at work here: in order to understand the democratic in the way that I am suggesting, one must first accept (if only for the purposes of this research) that the democratic is no longer *with us*. Like so many other extinctions, it has become the past, or perhaps even the always unrealised future, of our contemporary present. The democratic is no longer *with us* – indeed, in many ways and in many contexts, it is very violently *against us*.<sup>37</sup> Yet, of course, the democratic is, as it must be, *us*. Even as a method it is peopled. Plural. And in the context of a cosmopolitical and multi-species present the ‘persons’ of the demos might just as easily be a river or a corporation as you or me.<sup>38</sup> The question is also *how*, as well as *who*. A question that asks, in its repeated reappearance, not only ‘Who (are) we?’ but ‘How (are) we?’ In doing so, it operates according to subtle, but utterly transformational, recalibrations of agency. It realises forms and affects, in changing manifestations, through a play of interacting heterogenous elements that are always specific, particular and *real*. Therefore it does more than intervene in the present: it constitutes it.

As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, the democratic is *more than* a political form and is instead understood as ‘a power of imagining, of invention, without subject, mastery and even identity in a given form’ (Raffoul, 2015, p.89). Aesthetic action and sensation, therefore, are powerfully at work in the democratic. For Nancy this becomes a way of thinking democracy as an event: ‘the event of co-existence’. (Raffoul, 2015, p.91) According to Francois Raffoul and his writing on Nancy, this event is characterised by its excess, in that democracy is a kind of ‘truth’ that goes beyond the political. In a similar argument to that

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<sup>36</sup> See Derrida, J. *Specters of Marx*

<sup>37</sup> Note here to the ‘War on Terror’ in the name of democracy, the cooption of democratic politics to the needs/profits of neoliberal capitalism and the broader ecological waste being laid to the earth in the name of ‘democratic’ freedoms.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Corporate personhood’ is a legal status that gives to corporations many of the same rights as those given to human beings. While this is an example of the lengths to which neoliberal economics will go in order to protect the unfettered freedoms of market capitalism, it nonetheless provides a precedent for a way of conceiving of ‘non-human’ persons. A more just and positive example is that of the Whanganui river in New Zealand which has recently been given human rights, or the legal status of personhood, to protect it against pollution and decimation.

of Rancière, the democratic in Nancy's terms is a principle of sharing (of sense) that always and necessarily includes its own excess, which means that democracy is always an incomplete form, or an event constantly in a process of formation and deformation that 'cannot be, by essence, determined or defined' (Raffoul, 2015). In this way the democratic, understood as the truth of an event in excess of formal politics, is not simply 'rule by the people', but more the sovereign power of people as they are 'with' one another and *against* rule per se. A power that comes through the action of 'with' defined not by a coherence or unity of togetherness or by some sort of wholeness, but rather by the constant and continual recalibration of 'being-with' brought about by *including* the excess of democracy but not foreclosing its possibility. This is what Rancière refers to as *dissensus*, which he describes as a 'demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself' (Rancière, 2010 p. 38).

In this a quality of anarchy underpins the democratic, or what Isobel Armstrong identifies, in relation to her radical rereading of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel, as a quality of the 'anti-hegemonic' (Armstrong, 2016). For Armstrong this quality is thematised in these novels by the appearance of illegitimacy, at both narrative and aesthetic levels (Armstrong, 2016, p. 7). For Rancière as well, the democratic (which is also *politics* in his terms), is a matter of litigation. What matters to Rancière, Armstrong and Nancy (among others) is that the inclusion of 'the part who have no part', which characterises the democratic, is not given *by right* but is an axiom of equality that asserts itself when, in any specific situation, the illegitimate appear as the (litigating) *extras* that must be acknowledged as equal and ever present.

In doing so 'their' appearance reveals the extent to which such equality is delegitimised by the existing ordering of the sensible. For Armstrong, in the context of 19<sup>th</sup>-century society this order is played out particularly through the hegemony of genealogy and its exclusionary principles. She writes: 'Why Genealogy? Because it is about the law of exclusion. It is committed to hierarchy. It turns on the law. It is governed by the status of biological descent rigidly defined, by roots. Genealogy is established through the law of the father and implicitly on the transmission not only of biological identity but also of property, frequently designated as ownership of land' (Armstrong, 2016, p. 8).

Drawing on Armstrong, then, one could think of the democratic as the inclusion of the

*illegitimate* in the hegemonic genealogy of the Proper (name).<sup>39</sup> The proper here refers to forms of identity and property, premised on exclusion. The democratic therefore becomes a method of radical and aesthetic (or indeed in Armstrong's more polemical terms, *radical aesthetic*)<sup>40</sup> inclusion, or from Rancière's perspective the staging and revelation of the exclusion that limits this potential.

When the democratic is 'twisted free' from formal politics it becomes a much broader tool that reveals how power is allocated or distributed across the full scope of the sensible world. This implies, Armstrong argues, that the democratic shares certain meanings that 'on their own would be insufficient' meanings, such as 'egalitarian, radical, a life in common, comprehending an inclusive species being' (Armstrong, 2016, p.7). Further to this, the negative connotations of the democratic are just as useful to its recuperation as an aesthetic-political praxis: 'refusal of hierarchy and authoritarianism, repudiation of [...] the deficit subject, the subject that falls outside accounts of the fully human, consigned to bare life' (Armstrong, 2016, p.7).

For Armstrong, '*reading for*' this democratic imagination (in her case in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel) requires a critical attention to both thematics *and* poetics, content *and* form, which in turn requires an attention to what she calls 'the radical aesthetic' (Armstrong, 2000). Most interestingly from the perspective of this research, Armstrong claims that the democratic imagination is identifiable in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel by the novel's 'capacity to *image* states and conditions'. It is not something that is discussed or defined by the novel's narrative, but is rather something that appears through the aesthetic play of the novel's form and method, and 'image' becomes her term for this praxis that, whether it is located in words or pictures, moves the representational into the real.

If 'the democratic' in this sense then can be 'read for', it follows that it must therefore be possible to *write, or* from the perspective of other art forms or the operation of artistic research, it must be possible to engage the democratic as an aesthetic method that produces certain kinds of forms and, by implication, certain kinds of (aesthetic) politics. This suggests a method (that produces a form, motivated by a

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<sup>39</sup> See Isobel Armstrong's discussion in her book *Novel Politics: Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* of Irene Tucker's idea that *illegitimacy* underwrites the realism of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel. (Armstrong, 2016)

<sup>40</sup> See also Isobel Armstrong (2000) *The Radical Aesthetic*. Oxford; Blackwell.

content) which demands not only the appearance of illegitimacy, but also participation in it.

Throughout my research I have encountered these ‘illegitimacies’ (‘the extras’, ‘the democratic subject’) populating, occupying and haunting photographs, objects, abandoned buildings and the streets of busy cities. They take the form of mediated images, traces, metonymic connections or potentials that have yet to fully appear. As a consequence, my theoretical or philosophical research into Arendtian appearance has been struck through with the constant reminder of those who can no longer appear, or who have not yet appeared. Encountering them with, and as, ‘us’ is the possibility provided by the image: it is the image’s role in this method, and as such it means that the image partakes of people and sensation, of *politics*, on equal terms that is more than mere mimesis.<sup>41</sup>

Raffoul writes: ‘It [democracy] is a power [of the people] that presupposes not a dispersion held under the authority of a principle or of a gathering force, but the dis-position of juxta-position’ (Raffoul, 2015). Profoundly relational then – irreducible to form or regime. Indeed, for Raffoul, drawing on Nancy, democracy is ‘an anthropological and metaphysical mutation, and a genuine revolution in the being of humanity’ (Raffoul, 2015). To suggest that such ‘a genuine revolution’ might be employed as a method is perhaps rash, and yet it feels to me that it is the method that has offered itself as a consequence of my encounter with its spectres. Not because of the encounter in a causal sense but because through the encounter something began, an encounter with the *apparition* in appearance, ‘witness’ itself and its demand.

What this means is that the research practises a ‘dis-position of juxta-position’ between the fields of fine art practice, political theory, philosophy and activism. Through its openness to encounter and aesthetic relations it realises its enquiry as a series of differentiated gestures that hold onto this condition of ‘between’ rather than pursuing a positivist or teleological argument. The dis-positions of ‘juxta-position’ have changing characters, and occur between and with different parts of the components of the research. At times these juxta-positions have the shock of montage; at others they test out the capacity of

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<sup>41</sup> In this, this method shares with Marsha Meskimmon ‘a commitment to articulating works of art beyond the logic of representation’ and agrees with her that ‘visualisation and materialization are active and forceful modes in the production of the real’ (see Meskimmon, 2011, p. 6).

adjacency and simultaneity. At still other times they knit together, or fade into one another. They are an imbricated pattern of connections at micro and macro scales. They may be juxta-positions of time, or voice, or visual ephemera, or bodies, or any and all of these things, amongst others. What the project attempts is to allow each to appear in its own terms – in this time of the *interregnum* – but still as part of a broader field of equal relations that strive towards some kind of meaning and do not exist merely as a game of collage and appropriation. The meaning *is* this democratic method, however, as much as it is each specific and particular relation, and the aesthetic, ethical and political demands it poses.

### ***Encounter***

The ‘art of encounter’ referred to in Dave Beech’s essay is grouped around three different tempers or structures of social engagement: the convivial, the antagonistic and the dialogic. Each describes a particular mode of participation, and each is championed by a particular theorist: Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop and Grant Kester respectively. These distinctions are helpful in that they particularise not only certain types of social modus operandi utilised by artists in their engagement with communities and public groups, but also because they invoke different political strategies: consensus, agonism and dialogue. Yet in both artistic and socio-political terms these particular practices of encounter run the risk of remaining, at the level of political subjectivisation, non-transformatory. As Beech himself notes, artworks that operate in these modes engage with existing social conditions, but at some deep level those conditions remain unchanged. Something is missing.

It is my contention in this research that that ‘something’ is the affective and radically responsive forces of ‘attunement’ and ‘advenience’ that characterise appearance, along with, or occasioned by, the presence of ‘a democratic subject’ that cannot be disavowed. Which is to say it is the feeling of political belonging, its hope and its loss. Thus my contention is that we therefore need to engage in a much more profound and radical practice of ‘encounter’, not only with each other (however each other is conceived), but also with *ourselves as such*. This would suggest a form of encounter with ourselves (with ‘us’), that is disruptive and challenging to our existing images of who ‘we’ think ‘we’ are: a form of encounter that

occurs therefore *beyond representation* and is not reliant on reconfirming strategies of recognition.<sup>42</sup> This entails the production of images and imaginaries of ‘us’ that we do not yet know, incommensurable images, not fixed by a pre-existing order that already ordains who is recognised, and how, and as what.

Simon O’Sullivan points out how Deleuze takes this idea further and argues for a form of encounter ‘that forces us to think’. (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.1). But to think how? Deleuze writes, ‘Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but a fundamental encounter’ (ibid.). Certainly, this is not a thinking that strives towards abstract truths and certainty, nor even in terms of epistemological values at all. Nor is it a thinking that departs from the body, the world, matter and reality. But it is a thinking all the same. A thinking, I might suggest, that operates in the full diversity and contingency of appearance.

Simon O’ Sullivan engages deeply with this idea of encounter in relation to art; indeed, for O’Sullivan ‘art’ *is* this encounter: ‘art is this complex event that brings about the possibility of something new’ (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.2), and he writes that such an idea of encounter produces ‘a cut, a crack’ which is also, however, ‘a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently’ (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.1). In Deleuze’s writing and in his work with Félix Guattari, ‘encounter’ is a means of producing a new image of thought: ways of thinking that resist closure or the search for truths, and are instead ways of thinking – of ‘encountering’ – in which, as O’Sullivan writes, ‘process and becoming, invention and creativity, are privileged over stasis, identity and recognition’ (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.2). In this sense encounter is distinguished from recognition, because to be recognised or to engage with an object of recognition is merely to reconfirm what one already knows or believes to be the case, to *represent* the world as it already is. A more radical understanding of encounter, however, gives up on the imperatives of recognition and instead opens one up to that which is unknown and incommensurable. ‘Encounter’ in this sense cannot partake, therefore, of a politics of identity, it cannot establish community. Rather, it is always some kind of undoing, in order to see and do things *otherwise*.

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Patchen Markell (2003) *Bound by Recognition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, in which Markell argues for ‘acknowledgement’ rather than ‘recognition’ in our political encounters with one another, in order that we can avoid the temptation to fall back on existing identities and presuppositions.

O'Sullivan takes Deleuze's, and Deleuze and Guattari's, action of thinking (what might more conventionally be known as their philosophical project) and makes use of it as a way of approaching particular artworks, and art more generally, beyond signifiatory or representational frameworks. He uses it to, as he says, put 'adventures into motion' (O'Sullivan, 2005, p.5). These 'adventures' are speculative rather than positivist, and move according to an anti-logic of adjacency or 'withness'. They produce, he writes, 'compatibilities and alliances' rather than some kind of definitive image of the world. This is an affective, material and a-signifying kind of thinking in which encounter is a jolting shock that breaks with the existing order of things, and at the same time is the creative impulse of a new conjunction.

As a philosophical or theoretical project, this approach to thinking in terms of encounter or becoming is perhaps familiar; however, what interests me is the degree to which this idea of encounter as a mode of 'figural' thinking, or of *montage*, can be utilised in terms of a recalibration of the relationship between action and contemplation in a renewed 'space of appearance'. Is it possible to reimagine the space of appearance in terms of this kind of non-representational, a-signifying, responsive, thinking-doing-seeing, and thereby enable images (of 'us') to act within it; to partake in a *montage* of appearance?

However, my use of Hannah Arendt's writing on the space of appearance is complicated in terms of its relationship to the development of a practice-based research enquiry in Fine Art practice. As will become clear from what follows, it is not my intention to analyse my own work, or the work of other artists, in terms of how well, or not, it produces a renewed space of appearance. Nor is it my intention to offer a scholarly position on Hannah Arendt's work from the perspective of political theory or philosophy. Arendt's work should not be seen as the *subject* of my research. Rather, I see Arendt's omission of images from the space of appearance (and the reasons for this which will be discussed in more detail below) as initiating, or beginning, a parallel *answer* to the *answer* that is Paul Fusco's RFK photos. By this I mean that what I read in Arendt's work, and particularly in her performative engagement with Plato's parable of the cave, offers, in an inverted sense, the same opportunity to answer the question '*How should one film the figurants, the extras? How should one make them appear...?*', as Fusco's photographs do.

The visual and material work that attempts to understand Fusco's images in *those* terms is itself paralleled in this written exploration by attempting to understand Arendt's omission in *its* terms. At the

same time, however, by operating according to a method of adjacency, simultaneity and *responsivity* (democratic method) all the written and visual *forms* that are manifested are considered equal parts of the overall experiment in appearance that is this research project in toto.

### ***Survival / Gesture***

Key to this aesthetic, ethical and political encounter is its investment in the relational action of appearance, and as such in the particular rather than the universal and the an-archic rather than the original. It is fitting, therefore, that this project begins in response to an image, or a series of photographs, that already exist and acts in response to their ‘advenience’. I think of these images as what Georges Didi-Huberman calls *surviving images*. He writes: ‘a surviving image is an image that, having lost its original use value and meaning, nonetheless comes back, like a ghost, at a particular historical moment: a moment of “crisis”, a moment when it demonstrates its latency, its tenacity, its vivacity, and its “*anthropological adhesion*”, so to speak’ (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.xxii).

Didi-Huberman takes the idea of the surviving image from the art historian Aby Warburg, whose approach to art history was iconological, recognising and putting into dynamic connection visual gestures or images of movement that for him pertained across time and despite differences of culture, discipline or frames of reference. Warburg also expanded and extended the use of iconology by art historians through a passion for metaphor and metonymy, for the capacity of images to absorb a certain ‘motility’ or ‘gesture’ through visual similitude set within the distance of metaphor (Johnson, 2012). Warburg restaged these connections, and consequently activated them, through what could be described as a ‘recognition of the similar’. He called the exposure of these metaphorical chains of expression his ‘pathos formula’, identifying in the swirling hair and flowing clothes of the nymphs in Botticelli’s *Primavera*, for example, the survival (not only a revival) of the expression, passion, movement and emotion of antiquity: in effect the survival of the ‘non-classical’ in the neoclassical.<sup>43</sup>

Warburg was especially curious about why Renaissance artists and poets, such as Botticelli,

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<sup>43</sup> See Willibald Sauerländer, ‘Rescuing the Past’ book review of *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* by E.H. Gombrich, 1988 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1988/03/03/rescuing-the-past/> Willibald Sauerländer

informed by the order and rationality of a neoclassical education, nonetheless ‘rescued’ from antiquity forms of movement, gesture and life that exceeded the tenets of such education. In doing so he also engaged in an act of ‘rescue’, interjecting into staid late Victorian moralism a quality of freedom and incommensurability that he saw as also a contingent part of the reality of the classical antiquity of Greece and Rome. (One might wonder if he saw in these gestures something similar to the *means* of politics that Hannah Arendt locates in the ancient Athenian *polis* prior to its co-option by Plato.)

Radically distinct from a chronological or iconographic historicism that sought to pin images to their time and to a specific readability, Warburg’s approach exploded the propriety and conservatism of such an understanding of images, and instead proposed a ‘confrontation’ with images that was attentive to, and indeed conditioned by, what Didi-Huberman describes as the danger of the image’s *pharmakon*:

I mean the danger posed by the image to those whose profession it is to know it. How can we know an image if the image is the very thing [...] that imperils – through its power to take hold of us, which is to say its call to imagine – the positive or “objective” exercise of knowledge? If the image is what makes us imagine, and if the (sensible) imagination is an obstacle to (intelligible) knowledge, how then can one know an image?

(Didi-Huberman, 2005, p. xvii)

Didi-Huberman’s question, or the problem that he faces, is the problem of the art historian, and he makes clear that Warburg sidestepped this problem by remaining an artist: ‘uneasy, implicative, ever in search of questions’ (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.xxiv). The problem of knowing that he attributes to the historian in relation to images has broader implications, and finds its expression in other disciplines and realms of experience. And it might be described in other terms, such as the problem of ‘rule’, or the problem of ‘reason’. Either way, what Didi-Huberman releases, via Warburg, is the capacity of images to ‘call to imagine’ beyond signification (their own and signification in general), or even beyond the intention of those who have produced them. In effect, what he releases is the image’s capacity for *gesture*, which to go back to O’Sullivan might equally be understood as the image’s capacity for *encounter*, which is to say the non-productive, non-teleological capacity of images to act. This is so because the gesture, despite its quality of interpellation, is not a sign, nor any action driven by the supposition of an end. Rather, the gesture is an inclination to the outside, to something indeterminate, perhaps even to a commonality that shares in this very indeterminacy. The gesture holds open the possibility of a public realm that is shared

and transitional but does not proscribe it. It is 'pure means' in action.<sup>44</sup> But more than this, it is a holding of this condition of potential without closing it off into end points, goals, moral reasoning or ambitions of immortality.

Giorgio Agamben writes, 'What characterises gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper sphere of that which is human' (Agamben, 2000, p. 57). To think of images in this way, then, is to call 'for the liberation of images into gesture' (Agamben, 2000, p.56) which is in a sense to see an image not only as an 'act' but also as a part of that which goes on, which continues, through and despite the momentary caesura of every image. *Ethos*, a way of life. But also, *politics* – ethos shared, which is, as Agamben writes, 'the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings' (Agamben, 2000, p. 60)

A 'surviving image', then, is also in these terms a 'surviving gesture' (or a surviving encounter) in that it holds open the possibility and potential of the continuity of public appearance, across time and regardless of space. It is perhaps then easier to understand Didi-Huberman's answer to his question 'How should one film the *figurants*, the extras?': by 'giving back to the figurants (who are to cinema what the people are to history) their faces, their gestures, their words and their capacity to act [...]' (Didi-Huberman, 2009). It would seem that he does not only mean by giving back to each person their singular appearance but also by returning to their gestures, giving back to them their capacity to appear *in relation*; as ethos, as politics, as democratic.

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<sup>44</sup> See Yve Lomax, *Pure Means*. London: Copy Press. At the end of Lomax's book, in her 'Gloss and Glossary' on 'Image' she refers to Agamben's book *Nudities* in which, as Lomax writes, 'he will paraphrase Master Eckhart as saying that the image is something that lives ('a life'): 'it is the trembling of the thing in the medium of its knowability; it is the quivering in which the image allows itself to be known.'

## **OVERTURNING**

**AT THE HEART OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC** is the famous parable of the cave. As a deep interior of human capture, it becomes for Hannah Arendt a key story, or scene, that must be retold. Her retelling reveals the performativity of her work and the gesture of rescue that underlies it. Plato's parable tells the story of the philosopher's education, away from the unpredictability and illusion of the human senses, towards the abstract truth of ideas. As a purely philosophical (or indeed religious) endeavour, such a progression moves only in the one (ascending/transcending) direction, but in the parable Plato's novice philosopher returns to the cave from which he has arduously ascended and attempts to use his new-found 'truth' to change the experience of those still captured below. In doing so, his philosophical attainments become political. His 'ideas' become 'rules'.

This, for Arendt, has been the core of the problem of the political since Plato. And it turns upon an image: an image of what appears to be 'us'. Or rather, it is an image of that which is 'like us' (Plato, 1968, p.193): human beings, watching 'us' as we appear fabricated and in images.<sup>45</sup> More than that it turns upon a complex interment of images, in which each one is buried in another. Plato's parable, itself an image of a cave which is underground, buries within it an image of human beings, watching a projected image of fabricated artefacts of humans (men) and animals. Along with these images, appearance itself is buried in the darkness of a scene of illusion in which human beings are shackled prisoners, subject only to projections. Their condition consists of a meaningless exchange of opinions, an attempt to demonstrate to one another what little 'truth' can be seen on the wall in front of them. Of each other they see nothing, as their heads are fixed to face in one direction only. All they see are the visual projections of fabricated projections – images of images, of what they have come to believe is the reality of themselves and their world. As they watch they name what they see, but the sounds echo round their cave so it appears that the images speak their own names and present themselves to the prisoners as the world that they, the prisoners, are also part of.

The parable, then, turns away from the dark, from the underground, from the illusory world of appearances in the cave, to the bright light of truth which is not the world itself beyond the cave, although journeying there is a necessary stage in the philosopher's education; rather, it is the 'bright sky of

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<sup>45</sup> The cave parable is Book VII of Plato's *Republic*. The translation into English that I am using throughout this thesis is Allan Bloom's translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), Harper Collins, 1968.

ideas' (Arendt, 1998, p.226): an abstract world of truth, beautiful and beyond judgement, which no reality, human or otherwise, can counter. Plato believed that beyond the imperfect, physical, human world, there was a perfect non-physical world of 'forms' (or ideas) which was true and permanent, unlike the illusory and unreliable world of *appearances* (the shadows on the wall) that the physical world consisted of. This world of forms, of ideas, was more real than the physical world, and to be able to see it, and know it, was the highest task of philosophy. To attain this knowledge required a difficult education, and only a very few 'great' men were capable of climbing out of the dark cave of *appearances* into the bright sky of ideas.

According to Arendt, until the death of Socrates, which caused Plato to tire of the *polis* and its practices of persuasion and debate in which any citizen could take part, being able to see and know the ideas, the true forms, and educating others to do so, was the ultimate task of philosophy and of the human. Following Socrates' execution, however, Plato set about devising a new system of 'governance' for Athens, one in which the ideas became abstract principles used for measurement and rule, laws that the citizens (the people) would be forced to obey. 'Plato himself', she writes, 'was the first to use the ideas for political purposes, that is, to introduce absolute standards into the realm of human affairs where, without such transcending standards, everything remains relative' (Arendt, 1961). As only a philosopher could see the ideas, the forms, it followed that it would be a philosopher who would rule the city, in the form of the 'philosopher-king'.

This is a gradual move in Plato's writings, from the largely philosophic ideals described in the *Republic* – in which Plato's disillusionment with attempts by the Athenian aristocracy of the time to assert oligarchic rule within the *polis* is still palpable as an underlying reason for his retreat into philosophy, and in which his thinking about politics is primarily a 'thought experiment', not a blueprint or model – to the *Laws*, which operate as a kind of imitation in political form of the philosophical ideals of the *Republic* (Meiksins Wood, 2008). The *Statesman*, Meiksins Wood claims, functions as a conceptual bridge between the two, elaborating the ideals of the *Republic* into forms of constitution and institution such that they can be further developed in the *Laws* into Plato's revolutionary blueprint for a new form of *polis* (of politics), governed effectively by the 'philosopher-king' in the form of the rule of Law (Meiksins Wood, 2008, p.74/75).

The key progression towards Plato's ideal form of rule, and ruler, is that of an education away from the unreliable and 'vice'-ridden world of *appearances* (that which is only known through the senses and not the mind), 'upwards' to a knowledge of 'goodness itself', a 'higher reason', only knowable through the pure intellectual forms of mathematics and cognition (Meiksins Wood, 2008). To know the ideas in this way is a kind of mystical experience brought about through *contemplation*: an exacting process of intellectual study, an ascension from the sensible, and the visible, into the rational. *Appearances* then, are left behind in the dark cave of human 'conditions', to flicker insubstantially with their foolish counterparts, humanity ('the demos') itself.

According to Plato, the lowest form of cognition tied to appearances is imagining, of which images are its object. Next is belief or opinion, an appearance still concerned with visible things although held in the mind, but without the higher reason informed by knowledge of 'the good' (Meiksins Wood, 2008). To achieve the higher reason which is for Plato the ultimate task of the human (enabled by philosophy), one must leave behind the world of the visible and of the sensible – the world, effectively, of the (human) body, so that one can *see correctly*. This whole education consists in an 'art of turning around' Plato writes, that 'takes as given that sight is there but not rightly turned nor looking at what it ought to look at' (Plato, 1968, p.197).

For Arendt there is another turning already taking place in Plato's dialogue. According to her, in his non-political writings, such as the *Symposium* (or the *Phaedrus*, or the *Phaedo*), Plato refers to the ideas as 'what shines forth most', and therefore as 'variations of the beautiful' (Arendt, 1998, p.225). It is only when he attempts to constitute an ideal state through the dialogues in the *Republic* and other political writings (such as the *Statesman*, and most concretely in the *Laws*) that the ideas come to be talked about in terms of *the good*, rather than the beautiful. This turning away from the 'beautiful' to the 'good', from seeing the ideas as essential, non-instrumental abstractions to 'seeing' them as virtues, as effectively moral, and, more problematically, political guidelines becomes a turn that for Arendt heralds the end of politics and all that is promised by it (Arendt, 1998).

This turning is literally figured in the story as an injunction to turn away that Socrates places on his narrated 'philosopher'. He who has been released from the dark cave of human affairs (the city) and struggled his way upward and out into the bright light of ideas must now turn around and go back down

into the cave in order that the just 'truth' he has been fortunate to 'see', the 'Justice' he now knows, can be put to use. This, Socrates (Plato) says, 'is the concern of law[...] And it produces such men in the city not in order to let them turn whichever way each wants, but in order that it may use them in binding the city together' (Plato, 1968, p.198). Thus philosophy is instrumentalised politically by Plato, and the political, the Athenian *polis* such as had existed for three centuries, ceases to appear.

Here is where Arendt's story begins, or begins again, which Miguel Abensour also describes as a turning, 'the *turning* that she invites us to take' in order that we may 'open the more or less explored realm of a political philosophy that, far from the cave allegory, would have as its task to describe the articulation of the human condition, and at the same time, its reinforcement' (Abensour, 2007, p.979/980).

Additionally, to enable such a progression the body *and* the soul must be freed from material necessity, a necessity which is figuratively drawn in Plato's cave allegory as a shackle chained around the necks of his human prisoners. Necessity, in this sense, not only sustains the prisoners' capture, but also restricts their capacity to turn their heads, to look away from the shadows on the wall in front of them. It therefore traps them into a sensory condition, one governed by seeing (an *incorrect* seeing, according to Plato): looking at *images* and hearing sounds that make those *images* appear as *real*.

The space of appearance is, then, for Arendt a space produced by relations between people in public through which they appear to one another in speech and action. And while it requires individual responsibility (response) and therefore carries within its political condition an ethical component, it is not conceived of as a space of individual liberty. Arendt describes it as being a space of freedom, but not freedom *from* the world; rather it is freedom *for* the world, in which freedom and action are intrinsically connected (Arendt, 1961).

This freedom that she describes as 'worldliness' is what substitutes for the capture of the prisoners in Plato's cave. *Worldliness* is also for Arendt, however, a freedom for the world that substitutes for the gradual detachment and isolation from the world that is implied by *contemplation* in Plato's allegory, a detachment that is explicitly figured in Plato's story by the role of a particular kind of otherworldly and solitary 'seeing'. For Arendt, as a result of the cave parable 'seeing' is something that becomes the dominant condition through which the '*philosopher-king*' rules and, as such, 'seeing' is expropriated into a

realm that exists outside of the realm of the human: the realm of speech and action (and by implication the realm of the body). In her essay 'What is Authority', she writes,

And the rule of the philosopher-king, that is, the domination of human affairs by something outside its own realm, is justified not only by an absolute priority of seeing over doing, of contemplation over speaking and acting, but also by the assumption that what makes men human is the urge to see. (Arendt, 1957, p.114/115)

The 'urge to see' is figured in Plato's parable by the shackled, inactive and disengaged (with each other) prisoners staring endlessly at the images on the screen, a condition which, although it involves the wrong kind of seeing (that which is subject to the illusion of images and appearances), is still an enraptured and fixated *seeing*. Although the prisoners can talk about what they see, they cannot turn their heads, so it is as if they are talking to themselves, as they cannot face one another or engage in anything approaching dialogue. When educated properly in the philosophical way, this seeing will become increasingly *contemplative* (the right kind of seeing) 'until finally those who want to see truth itself must leave the common world of the cave altogether and embark upon their new adventure all by themselves' (Arendt, 1957, p.114).

The problem, then, for Arendt is firstly the alignment that Plato makes between 'seeing' and the human, an alignment that effectively excludes speech and action from the realm of human affairs, and then the gradual expropriation of this seeing of images, itself still conditioned by bodies and illusions, out of the body into the abstract 'truth' of contemplation. 'Hence', Arendt writes,

the interest of the philosopher and the interest of man qua man coincide; both demand that human affairs, the results of speech and action, must not acquire a dignity of their own but be subjected to the domination of something outside their realm.

(Arendt, 1957, p.115)

To be clear, then, it is not that Arendt excludes from the space of appearance the capacity to see one another and then to address oneself to another accordingly in speech and action. Nor is it a rejection of the kind of seeing that Plato associates with the prisoner's shackled looking at the illusions on the cave wall (though there is a bodily aspect to this that she does seem to reject). Rather it is the *correct seeing* that results from the philosopher's education; a seeing that is a form of contemplation that aims at truth, at the ideal, at abstractions, and departs from the reality of the world of human relations, figured in the cave allegory as the *incorrect* seeing of the captured 'demos' of the illusions on the cave wall. To enact her overturning, then, Arendt chooses to leave all this seeing and its images behind in the darkness. To invert

the hierarchy Plato gives to contemplation over action, to the *'vita contemplativa'* over the *'vita activa'*, Arendt leaves contemplation below in the cave, taking only human speech and action into the space of appearance in the bright light of the public realm.

Through my research I draw a parallel between Arendt's rejection (if it can be called that) of images and (contemplative) seeing from the space of appearance with contemporary propositions around the relationship between art and politics that value art's capacity for instrumentalisation – socially, politically, institutionally, economically – over its *merely* aesthetic, reflective, even representative capacities. As Beech's essay states, and the radical agenda of Maria Hlavajova and BAK propose, the reign of the 'viewer of art and art to be viewed' is over (Beech, 2010). As a critical (pro)position and even as a political stance I have no argument with this. However, as an artist, and a viewer of art, I cannot entirely take up this (pro)position. Instead I propose to, as Miguel Abensour suggests Arendt invited us to, participate in her overturning (Abensour, 2007) with a further overturning that asks, might it not be possible to rescue images and contemplation from this status of passivity and depoliticisation and reimagine them as an action: an action that contributes to the life of the world, to world-building, to politics in its most contingent and plural reality? Surely it is possible for contemplation in this sense to partake in the space of appearance?

What this means, I have come to realise, is negotiating and working against the primacy that appearance, in Arendt's terms, gives to literal, physical presence. To appear, politically, as a subject either individually or collectively in the terms that Arendt sets out requires that one 'is there', that one appears in a co-extensive and simultaneous place and time to another. But it seems to me that it is no longer possible to think the political only in these terms. Instead, we have to think appearance in *cosmopolitical* terms, which means allowing it to include the disappeared, the displaced and the dead – both human and non-human (Meskimmon, 2011) – and to do so according to the terms of life and beginning, relationality, responsiveness and freedom that Arendt espouses. In effect, to do so in such a way that we can, as Kimberley Curtis puts it, 'feel pleasure in the perspectival density of our shared world' (Curtis, 1999, p.17).

This means carefully renegotiating how 'relationality' and 'representation' can operate together in a space of appearance in which the potential closures of representational thought and action are also kept

at bay. This is not an attempt to include images so that we can remember, at a nihilistic level, what is ‘not here’, ‘not now’, and thereby criticise the exclusions of politics (of our world) – although this is an aspect of its gesture – but rather it is to use images to include ‘we’ who are not here and not now as a vital part of the here and now in order that such exclusions become part of the imbricated and shared distances inherent to the task of relational appearance (“the people” different from itself). In effect it is to include ‘the extras’ *as* ‘the extras’. Arendt herself, I would argue, provides the methods or ethos by which this might be done, but she does not address the image, even the very image which so profoundly configures her work.



## **ACTION AND THE CIVIL GAZE**

## SPECTATORS IN THE WORLD

Situating images in a space of appearance, configured as a new art of encounter, requires a deft reconfiguration of what images are, or what they do. Primarily this is because it is not only *plurality* but also *equality* that is axiomatic to the space of appearance. Images therefore have to operate on equal terms with the participants of these ethico-political and aesthetic encounters. However, the responsiveness that animates the space of appearance indicates a temporal and spatial simultaneity that assumes that appearance manifests as a kind of plenitude, even one that exists in the ‘in-between’. In this way the fullness of *presence* (despite its open-endedness and contingency) and the contemporaneousness of the *present* (despite its potentially temporary occurrence) delimit the time and space in which action, as a space of appearance, takes place.

Conceived solely as ‘representations’ of the subjects of the political, images (of people) are restricted to a space of the *not real*, which can only anticipate or record action and cannot participate in it. At the same time, however, an image’s capacity for representation – its artifice – also opens it up to a spatial and temporal *beyond* (what Jean-Luc Nancy would describe as every image’s *sacred* quality)<sup>46</sup> that enables those who are not present here and now to be present. As such, an image can operate as a conduit or portal to a vastly expanded temporality of appearance in which action itself is also expanded to include the distinct action of images.

Activating such a form of visual participation in the context of the kind of political space offered by Arendt is also the concern of the Israeli visual theorist Ariella Azoulay.<sup>47</sup> For Azoulay it is specifically photography that manifests the kinds of images by which such participation can be actioned. What concerns Azoulay is not that one photograph as opposed to another can be considered political, or can, as she puts it, be the ‘bearer of the political’ (Azoulay, 2015, p.40), but rather that photography as a history and a practice produces a particular event of encounter between people that can be characterised in the terms by which Hannah Arendt characterises action, or the ‘*vita activa*’. Azoulay writes, ‘In contradistinction to the assumption that ‘the political’ is an attribute that may characterise one image and may be absent from another, I use the term ‘political’ to describe a space of relations between people who

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<sup>46</sup> Nancy, 2005

<sup>47</sup> See Ariella Azoulay (2012) *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Winchester: Zone Books, and (2015) *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, London: Verso.

are exposed to one another in public, and I analyse photography, rather than the individual photograph, as one of the manifestations of this space' (Azoulay, 2015, p. 52).

Azoulay's analysis of photography has the qualities of a kind of rescue, similar to Arendt's rescue of appearance from Plato's cave of illusions. In Azoulay's gesture, photography is rescued from the discourse of art that would place the 'art object' (in this case the photographic image) as the central focus of the gaze of the participant in art, whether spectator, artist or critic. 'The artistic object', she writes, 'supposedly constitutes the point of departure and point of summation for all discourse and action in the field of art' (Azoulay, 2015, p. 55). This centralising of the art object results in 'the closure of discourse and action' that does not conform to the hierarchical frameworks through which art operates (ibid.). In her argument, any person or event that appears in an artwork becomes subject only to interpretation, analysis or reception within the terms governed by art and its histories. There is no possibility of what she calls 'interpretative deviation' (ibid.). Equally, 'the political' is held by the artwork in its representational action and becomes simply 'a metaphorical claim' around what the artwork "does" (ibid., p.56). It becomes part of a criterion of judgement that determines whether an artwork is, or is not, political. 'The political' is therefore held in the meaning of the work of art. For Azoulay, what is excluded from this action is the broader relations of exchange between participants that surround any photographic image and the inherently political qualities of that exchange.

In opposition to this, Azoulay proposes the field of visual culture as a paradigm within which the image is only one of a number of active elements, none of which can be isolated as being the primary or foundational locus of meaning. In this context, 'the image is never sufficient in and of itself [...] the image is always the point of departure for a voyage whose route – the route of utterances ramifying off from the image – is never known in advance' (ibid.).

Azoulay's argument has a deconstructive, or poststructural, feel to it, even though she is not writing from within those discourses or traditions. Her insistence on letting go of the hierarchy of authorial control (or the assumption that such a thing even exists), along with her displacing of the image from a structure of engagement that assumes it to be ultimately a transparent conduit to an interiorised or essential meaning (as would be the purpose of a contemplative gaze), places her critique clearly within the modes of certain deconstructivist ideas. However, rather than turning to Derrida or Barthes to be her ally,

Azoulay turns to Arendt. The reason for this is that in her reactivation of the agency of the spectator (which is in some ways similar to Barthes' or Derrida's reactivation of 'the reader') Azoulay firmly situates that spectator in the world: a world that is comprised of a plurality of spectators and subjects, each of whom encounter one another, via the event of photography, within, and *as*, a field of relations that is radically non-sovereign. It is this 'worldliness' of the photographic event that links her thinking to that of Arendt. Unlike Arendt, however, Azoulay very determinedly makes space for the image, or the photographic image, when it is understood within a paradigm of visual culture, not art, to operate in and as action in the space of appearance.

### LABOUR, WORK, ACTION AND THE GAZE

In the context of my research Azoulay's argument provides an exciting kind of paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of Arendtian appearance (or 'action', to be more specific to Azoulay's discussion) and cleaves open a possibility for images within such a space of politics that was hitherto denied to it. Also, her argument provides a new context of production and reception (visual culture) that releases the image from its consideration in solely artistic terms. In effect she opens up 'art' to the 'civil gaze' knowing full well that such an opening puts the status of art in jeopardy. It is necessary to tease out the implications of this jeopardy because it hinges yet again on the role of contemplation and 'judgement' in relation to how images act and are received in this field of the political relations of encounter.

The premise of Azoulay's argument in relation to Arendt is to contest 'the evacuation of the gaze from the realm of action and its consignment to the world of contemplation' (Azoulay, 2015, p. 67). She does this by identifying the degree to which 'the gaze' is already operative within the three categories that Arendt gives to the '*vita activa*'. These three categories are *labour*, *work* and *action*, and in her political theory, particularly in *The Human Condition*, Arendt narrates the specificity and vitality of these three categories of the '*vita activa*' in order that she can assert the importance and role of 'action' in the life of the (human) world, as a counterbalance to the importance given to 'contemplation'. In *The Human Condition* a very clear distinction is set up by Arendt between the '*vita contemplativa*' and the '*vita activa*'; however, at its root is an ongoing suspicion that Arendt has for forms of abstract thinking in general and

the degree to which such thinking (and the modes of action that ensue from it) remove one from the worldly condition of living together (*politics*, in her terms).

Following Arendt, Azoulay too draws attention to this distinction between the '*vita contemplativa*' and the '*vita activa*', and she identifies within the '*vita contemplativa*' a special province allocated to 'the observing gaze'. She describes this gaze as 'an absorbed, surprised, astonished gaze; one that tarries aimlessly in the face of a particular landscape or figure but always seeks passage through the veil of the visible to the essence of things' (ibid. p.66). She notes how, in the history of Western culture since Greek antiquity, this gaze has been aligned with abstract thought through 'the metaphorization of this gaze: theory, speculation, scrutiny, things that people understand or imagine in their mind's eye' (ibid.).

However, Azoulay argues that the gaze is already 'an integral part of the world of action', and that there are versions of the gaze that 'do not belong within the world of observation' (ibid., p.67). To make this argument, Azoulay draws on the different categories of the life of action as Arendt sets it out – *labour*, *work* and *action*, and their particular characteristics, and identifies the forms of gaze that already operate within those aspects of 'action'.

Within the '*vita activa*', *labour*, for Arendt, is the realm of necessity. It is the aspect of human action that attends to the basic needs of the body and survival. It does not produce anything that lasts; as Arendt writes, 'it leaves no permanent trace' (Arendt, 1998, p.40), but instead is a means by which the cycle of human life is sustained. Arendt distinguishes labour from work in order that she can, in effect, hold on to the force of its bodily necessity, a force that roots the human in nature and the world.

*Work*, alternatively, is the human activity that produces durable things, things that are not consumed in the action of necessity but instead function as the means by which we build and fabricate a world that endures. Works of art fall into this category, as do tools, objects of use that are not exhausted by being used and other things required to enable us to live in the world. Arendt distinguishes between 'the *work* of our *hands*' and 'the *labour* of our *bodies*' (Arendt, 1998, p.136). While in the modern era labour and work have become conflated, for Arendt distinguishing between them and resisting this conflation (though not thereby suggesting that they are exclusive realms of activity) allows her to give renewed valency to their particular contributions to the life of action.

Finally, *action*, as the third category of the '*vita activa*', is the sphere of human activity most pertinent to politics. While labour and work exist in complex and varied relationships to the private and public realms, and to conditions of property, ownership, value and use, action is resolutely shared and in public. Indeed, according to Arendt action constitutes the public insofar as that public is itself constituted by the plurality of human relations.

## THE EVENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Arendt's separating out of these three categories of the life of action allows her to give special attention to the category of 'action' itself as the source of the political. Azoulay's focus, too, is on this third category. First, however, Azoulay outlines how the gaze, understood as what she terms 'the practical gaze', can also be organised into categories that accord with those of Arendt's labour, work and action. The first gaze which is aligned with 'labour' is the necessary gaze that identifies and orientates and enables the observer to situate herself in her surroundings, to appraise them and act accordingly. Azoulay calls this 'the orienting gaze'. The second gaze is what she calls 'the deliberate gaze'. This gaze, identified with Arendt's category of 'work', is the gaze of the professional and, as she writes, it 'allows the viewer to organise the visible world and to control it by means of knowledge that is accumulated in an evolving and continuing fashion' (ibid., p.68). She then claims that until the invention of photography it was difficult to find a gaze that paralleled the category of 'action' in Arendtian terms. 'With the invention of photography', however, she writes, 'a new relation toward the visible came into being' (ibid., p.68).

The principal difference that this new relation generated by photography produced was the capacity to share a 'certain' space with others without having to be present with them in the same place at the same time. This relation is, she writes, a new relation to 'the visual dimension of existence' (ibid.). It came into being, according to Azoulay, through the democratisation of the image and the gaze occasioned by the technology, production, dissemination and reception of photography.<sup>48</sup>

Azoulay's interest in photography, and her concern to promote a 'political ontology of photography' (ibid., p.18), is underpinned by what she sees as photography's absolute 'non-sovereignty'.

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<sup>48</sup> Azoulay acknowledges that this may have happened prior to photography but, she writes, 'not in precisely the same fashion or with the same frequency' (Azoulay, 2015)

She writes that photography produces a ‘special form of encounter between participants where none of them possesses a sovereign status’ (ibid.). Such an encounter in turn produces ‘a visual protocol immune to the complete domination of any one of the participants’ (ibid.). This encounter is what Azoulay describes as ‘the event of photography’, and it pre-exists and supersedes any particular photographed event, or any particular photographic image. It exists as a potential of relations between viewer, viewed and the technology of ‘capture’ that cannot be reduced to any single meaning, nor is it subject to an act of judgement.<sup>49</sup>

To fully understand Azoulay’s position with regard to photography it is necessary to go back to the specific context from which her theoretical journey began, and from which it still finds its strongest momentum. Azoulay is an Israeli theorist writing from the context of the Occupied Territories. She was five years old and living with her family in the Israeli city of Netanya when the Six-Day War happened, and Israel first began the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. In the introduction to her book *The Civil Contract of Photography* she narrates a series of moments from her childhood that in hindsight revealed to her the upholding of division and the support for the occupation that was ingrained in her family’s attitude to the Palestinians (Azoulay, 2014).

Azoulay recalls her mother not allowing her to go to the beach on Fridays, as that was when ‘the Arabs go’. Her mother described the Arab women going into the sea ‘with their clothes on’ and without ever having seen this event directly she relates how she carried around this image of the Arab women ‘submerged in the middle of the sea, struggling to get up, with the weight of their wet clothes pulling them down’ (ibid., p10). This was an image planted in her brain by her mother as the only image she had of Palestinians until she was much older, and as she puts it, ‘this phantom picture was replaced by real photographs with Palestinian faces looking out at me’ (ibid.).

This was during the first Intifada, so sometime after 1987 and into the early ’90s. As a young woman in her mid-twenties these images struck her deeply, not only because of the atrocities, injustice, and in some cases resistance, that they revealed, but also because within them she ‘saw’ people she had never been allowed to see before because their ‘being there’ was a reality to be actively and violently denounced. Yet in the photographs the people are there announcing themselves or being announced by

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Event’ in Azoulay’s terms is also not the ‘event’ of radical rupture that philosophers such as Alain Badiou have theorized.

others (those who take the photograph) not only as subjects of a photograph, but as *people*, subjects, in the world, *still there*, no matter where or when the photograph is being viewed.

For Azoulay this relation of remote presence, between people, occasioned by a photograph, is a political relation. More than this, in the context of her situated experience, and the history and politics of the Middle East, it is a relation between those who are ‘citizens’ and those who are deemed to be ‘non-citizens’ or ‘stateless persons’. For Azoulay the photographic encounter between photographer, photographed person, spectator and camera is an event that marks this possible relation between ‘citizen’ and ‘stateless person’ with a new kind of equality, as each is part of a shared condition of being governed, but one in which ‘the governed’ exercise their political duty to one another rather than to the ruling power, or ‘sovereign’. (Azoulay, 2014, p17).

At the same time, this shared condition, as it is revealed through the photographic event, is itself ‘non-sovereign’, in that no one person can claim ownership of a photograph’s meaning or interpretation, because, as she writes in relation to a specific photograph of a Palestinian woman (Mrs Abu-Zohir) who was shot by rubber bullets by the Israeli defence corps and wanted her wounds to be photographed, ‘the photo, existing in the public space, will not end, nor will she alone dictate its course. This photo, from which her silent gaze looks out at you and me, will not let go. Nothing has concluded, though the hour of photography has passed’ (ibid., p150).

Azoulay sees the photographic event as a ‘civil’ event shared between what she comes to describe as the ‘citenry of photography’. Understood thus, the photograph can no longer be approached in merely aesthetic terms, or as an image whose meaning is conscribed by the photographer, spectator or photographed person, or indeed by particular discourses of art that would seek to fix and stabilise its readings. Rather, every photograph – of people (particularly in the context of catastrophe) – stages a demand put to the spectator to engage with this civil responsibility, ‘to anchor spectatorship in civic duty toward the photographed persons who haven’t stopped being “there”, toward dispossessed citizens who, in turn, enable the rethinking of the concept and practice of citizenship’ (ibid., p10).

The photograph produces a capacity to *travel* imaginatively, and with ‘civic skill’, to the situation of injury, and to participate in it. Azoulay argues that this be considered a kind of *contract* (a civil contract),

and that we should ‘shed terms such as “empathy”, “shame”, “pity”, or “compassion” as organisers of this gaze’ (ibid., p.17).

As the number of cameras in the world proliferate, and the mass of images produced become uncountable, the potential of the photographic event, and the ‘civil gaze’ that results from it, is there even when there is no camera present, ‘by virtue of the doubt that exists with respect to its overt or covert presence, its capacities for inscription and surveillance’ (Azoulay, 2015, p. 19). In this sense, then, any single photograph is only incidental to, or a visual incident of, the larger and ongoing event of photography in which it is implicated.

How this happens, she argues, is by ‘watching’ the image rather than simply looking at it. This she writes, ‘becomes a civic skill not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation’ (ibid., p.14).

What she means by this is attending more actively and ethically to the situation – the time and place – of the photographed person through gazes or modes of watching (which implies a durational experience) that she describes in terms of a more active, or civil, contemplation. This kind of seeing, that arises with the invention of photography, occurs in a shared and public space of plurality such as Arendt’s space of appearance, in contexts ‘within which every participant not only contemplates what can be seen but is also, herself, exposed and visible’ (ibid., p.96).

Azoulay’s argument opens up a radically new political potential for the photographic image, conceived as part of a broader ‘event of photography’, which in itself is conscribed as a deep relationship of civil responsibility between people who share the fact of ‘being governed’ despite the inequities of citizenship such governance seeks to perpetuate. The relationships she describes then operate across a horizontality, or a transversality, rather than in any vertical relation to power. To situate photography along this horizontal continuum is to actively mitigate photography from many of the structures of power, surveillance and classification with which it has also been implicated historically and in contemporary terms.

Azoulay does this principally by liberating the spectator from their role as passive addressee to that of an active respondent and potential producer of images; and not merely a respondent/producer at an individual level but crucially at a collective level in the context of a vitally non-sovereign concept of citizenship. In this, Azoulay’s viewer *participates through* the photograph and the event of photography, in

the world-making capacity of citizenship as it *acts* via the gaze, speech and action, in the political ‘life of action’. This potential exists not only in a separate domain of the political, but also in any situation in which people are brought into relation with one another. One might see in this, then, echoes of what Nicholas Mirzoeff describes as ‘the right to look’; the political capacity to resist being merely seen or a subject of surveillance, and instead to ‘look’ into and against systems of ‘visuality’ that fix and sustain hierarchies of power (Mirzoeff, 2011). Equally, the capacity of a photograph to call forth a civil gaze in the terms that Azoulay outlines is akin to what Davide Panagia calls the ‘advenience’ of an image – its potential to draw us in to it and not to look away. (Panagia, 2016): in a sense, the image’s potential to call the viewer to participate in its ‘adventure’, however catastrophic and remote it may be.

However, because Azoulay’s gesture requires that the photograph also be ‘liberated’ from the discourses of art – effectively, discourses that deploy the ‘judgement of taste’ (with reference to Arendt and her investment in Kantian ideas of ‘judgement’) in order to determine whether an image is/is not ‘political’ – there remains in her project a strong sense of the image as a mere *facilitator* of a certain kind of gaze (albeit a renewed, politicised, ‘civil’ and non-Cartesian gaze). At times she refers to the photograph as a ‘platform’ or ‘junction’, thereby underscoring its functional aspect as a means, rather than a site, of connection. (Azoulay, 2015, p.118) Therefore, while the photograph is implicated in this action and in some cases warrants a particular measure of attention or analysis, it does not, in itself, *figure*.

By this I mean that in the terms by which Azoulay situates it, the photograph would seem to offer no resistance, or have no differentiated condition, with regard to the broader reality in which it ‘participates’. This would seem to discount the many instances of artistic recuperation performed upon photographs in order that their action within the political, within the many scenes of ‘visuality’ in which they are implicated, might be remobilised.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, while Azoulay’s argument provides an important step towards how images might act in a space of appearance conceived as ‘a new art of encounter’, for my purposes she goes too far, in that the material resistance and opacity of the image itself, in effect its important and ongoing tussle with aesthetics and representation within its very surface,

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<sup>50</sup> For example, the Pictures generation; (postmodernism); Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine (race, gender and sexuality); Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson, Robert Mapplethorpe, to Martha Rosler and Peter Kennard (montage) and many, many contemporary artists... Of course Azoulay’s position is precisely to situate photography outside these kinds of artistic practices.

becomes elided in favour of the image's capacity to elicit a new kind of spectator, within a new field of response.

This may be why Azoulay never refers directly to 'the space of appearance' in her discussion of Arendt, but only to the '*vita activa*', or life of action. So while the photographic event is given a new valency and presence within Arendtian 'action', and the gaze is indeed rescued from 'passive contemplation', certain properties of that contemplative gaze such as its qualities of 'lingering', 'absorption' or 'astonishment' – its 'tarrying', as she puts it – are revoked in favour of an urgency that seeks to cross the 'abyss' that John Berger (quoted by Azoulay) describes 'between the moment recorded and the present moment of looking at the photograph' (Azoulay, 2015, p.86). For Azoulay this means 'not giving up on the urgency of restoring and re-establishing as many links as possible between the photograph and the situation in which it was taken' (ibid.).

My research, however, has concluded that in this formulation that Azoulay sets out, the photograph, despite its new agency within the life of action, is, in effect, called upon to *disappear* through the action of being contemplated. Although this amounts to a greater mobilisation of photography in civil and political terms, it nonetheless means that those with whom we share this civil contract potentially remain caught in a dynamic of recognition within which the possibility of new and unknown formations of the political subject is foreclosed.

My research embraces Azoulay's reconfiguring of Arendtian action (the space of appearance) and its challenge of civil responsibility, in which photography plays a vital role, but within this context I also allow a role for aesthetics and for the material and representational *resistance* of the photographic image. I locate this resistance in the condition of vulnerability (our openness and exposure to others) in which Azoulay has situated the event of photography and equally in the temporality of *tarrying*, by which she sees contemplation withdraw from such an event. To put the two together is to combine the political with the ethical, much as Judith Butler has come to do through her idea of our shared precariousness. (Butler, 2004, 2009, 2015). It is precisely in the action of potential grief that subtends this precariousness that I see this resistance of the image (photographic and otherwise) being seen.



***IN THE WINTER OF 2010/2011** the Serpentine Gallery in London hosted the first UK solo exhibition in a public institution of artist Philippe Parreno's work. The exhibition included Parreno's 70mm film June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968, which was produced in 2010. The film is a loose re-enactment of the RFK funeral train and draws on a number of visual sources, including Fusco's photographs and CBS TV footage shot at the time. As the catalogue to the exhibition notes, the exhibition was 'conceived as a scripted space in which a series of events unfolds'.<sup>51</sup> These events were orchestrated around a number of Parreno's film works which were distributed throughout the gallery space. The viewing experience was highly choreographed, with viewers being encouraged to move between spaces as projections turned on and off and window blinds automatically opened or closed. As such, it had the feeling of a cinematic experience in transit, with movement and a kind of temporal and spatial porosity functioning as an underlying principle that animated and structured the exhibition.*

*Nicolas Bourriaud, in his catalogue essay for the exhibition, writes how Parreno described the exhibition as a 'film without a camera' (Bourriaud, 2011, p. 41) in that the viewer themselves becomes a mechanism that produces the 'reverse-shot' as part of the broader montage of the exhibition/viewing experience. In a sense, then, the entire space is conceived as a montage-film in which the viewer is an actor-participant-camera. Bourriaud allies this quality, that he also describes as a reality, with democracy. He writes, 'Democracy is not a simple piling up of individual voices; it is (or should be) a montage and a "giving shape"'. And he continues, 'No "political" art could exist without this distinction or it risks being reduced to bad activist imagery'. (Bourriaud, 2010, p.41) While Parreno does not situate his work overtly in political terms, coming as he does from the broader context of 'relational aesthetics' much of his formal approach and his interrogation of images is orientated around socio-political questions and through modes of collaboration by which the primacy of distinct and individuated subjects breaks down.<sup>52</sup> One could say, therefore, that there is a kind of implicit democratic aesthetic at work in his practice.*

*June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968 was a major part of the exhibition, installed as a vast wall-to-wall projection that met viewers at a scale of 1:1. When I went to see the exhibition some time over that winter, this work by Parreno was the first and only work by another artist that I had come across that addressed the extraordinary event of that day and the images through*

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<sup>51</sup> Director's Foreword, catalogue *Philippe Parreno Films 1987-2010*, Serpentine Gallery, London, November 2010 - February 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Along with artists already mentioned such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Carsten Holler, Philippe Parreno was part of a group of artists (that also included Pierre Huyghe and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster) championed by Nicolas Bourriaud under the mantle of relational aesthetics.

which it was recorded.<sup>53</sup> In an interview with Clément Chéroux on the occasion of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's exhibition 'The Train: RFK's Last Journey' in 2018,<sup>54</sup> when asked why he had chosen to make this work Parreno said that he was interested in the fact that the images (Fusco's) 'represent death's point of view'. 'We're not watching the event', he says, 'it's the event that's watching us' (Parreno, 2018). This inversion of the viewing subject position, and the evacuation of that position from the temporality of the present, produces a strange kind of ghostly experience, what Parreno describes as a sort of phantasmagoria to which the work of art attempts to give form (Parreno, 2018). In the case of Parreno's work, this phantasmagoric form primarily occurs not through the images per se, but rather through their material luminosity, brought about as a result of Parreno's use of 70mm film. Thus, what is staged in the work is akin to a séance, in that the work appears to channel, via light, the event which, like many events, has become a montage of actual occurrences and the images taken of them. It is perhaps for this reason that the fact that Parreno ended up shooting his film on the west coast, rather than on the same coastal journey that RFK's train had travelled, does not detract from the work's power, as it is not his intention to recreate the event or its images (how could he?) but rather to forge/form a link with something real that pertains within them. The work's re-enactment, then, is not simply a matter of the reconstruction of a series of images, but rather the staging of an encounter with images through which some sort of ineffable quality of the event itself, and its peculiar effect on both spectators and spectatorship, can be re-experienced. An effect, one might suggest, in which appearance defeats time. When the first edition of Fusco's photographs was published in 1999, he wrote of that day, 'the blow was monumental. Hope-on-the-rise had been shattered and those in most need of hope crowded the tracks of Bobby's last train stunned into disbelief and watched that hope trapped in a coffin pass and disappear from their lives' (Fusco, 2018). Yes. But in doing so, they appeared. Such is the ghost.

I share with Parreno a fascination with this phantasmagoria, but to me the ghost that watches us is not death, but 'us', as the hope of the democratic. It's no accident that Bourriaud should talk about Parreno's exhibition in terms of democracy, as his use of montage and staging carries a hope of connectivity played out across a dissembling and assembling field of the possible real. But what amounts to form in Parreno's thinking is something more complex than this, something incommensurable to which the democratic must stay true, but also something – I will call it from here on, appearance – as Parreno seems to know, in which images, of necessity, partake.

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<sup>53</sup> It was not until the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibition in 2018 that I found out about Rein Jelle Terpstra's work that literally set out to stage the other view of the event, that of the spectator.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Train: RFK's Last Journey', San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, March 17 – Sept 23 2018. An exhibition of works by Paul Fusco, Philippe Parreno and Rein Jelle Terpstra. <https://www.sfmoma.org/exhibition/train/>

*And this is no mean task, because appearance, already a recuperative and performative proposition, is suspicious of images and their captivating illusions. So, I began by putting Fusco's photographs to use and finding ways of inhabiting the viewing experience of them. I had to know them by doing what they did, both with and against their representational and temporal specificity. And somehow I had to find ways to view and act that dismantled the primacy of my own individual experience. I had to meet them without myself.*

*Through doing this I have also come to realise that this capacity for 'meeting them without myself' is already an outcome of the ways in which appearance in these photographs acts upon a viewer. My research has found that the photographs perform a kind of undoing of the (neoliberal) individual at a deeply relational and intersubjective level, and at the same time they make manifest (make appear) a democratic form of political subject. Which is to say they both act and image, they are both the force of an event and the form of an 'outline' that could be strived for, or assumed, but never fixed.<sup>55</sup> (They are both nomad and nomos.)<sup>56</sup> But more than this, what matters about these photographs and the riposte they perform is that they do so now at a time when such a genuine democratic subject is, like many other vitalities, nearing extinction. Treated this way they are then 'surviving images' in which a dybbuk adheres.<sup>57</sup> But they are also acts of 'civil imagination' in which the profound non-sovereignty of the photographic event coheres (Azoulay, 2015). So what appears and acts, what is withheld in these images, is a kind of ghost, a haunting, that returns to remind us of what we are in danger of losing completely and to conjure for 'us' what 'we' could be.*

*This research project, then, contemplates the ghosts that adhere in these images, and in others that have come to find company with them, and finds itself grieving. This is no simple act of mourning, though it borrows some of its rituals and customs; rather, it is an encounter with the ghosts, an encounter that seeks to stay the imperative of action, for a time, for now, and be/ hold and be-with what is withheld in these images, then turn again to partake in the world thus.*

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<sup>55</sup> This reference to 'the form of an outline' comes from an earlier essay written during my research project exploring the idea of *inoperativity* and the *inoperative community*, from Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben. A key reference for this essay was John Paul Ricco's book *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (2014). In the introduction to the book Ricco discusses Nancy's questioning as to whether or not community that is always in the process of becoming, can, as he put it, 'do without a figure, and, as a result, without an identification' (Ricco, 2014, p.7). According to Ricco this question is a key aspect of Nancy's writing at this time and he also quotes Nancy from *Le Sens du Monde* (1993) writing ...'Of being-in-common, it would operate a transitivity, not a substantiality. But still there would remain something of the "figure", something of the outline' (Ricco, 2014, p.7).

<sup>56</sup> See Rosi Braidotti (2011) *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>57</sup> See Georges Didi-Huberman in his Preface to *Confronting Images* (p.xvii – xxvi) using the figure of the 'dybbuk', taken from a well-known Jewish parable, to talk about the unknowable quality of images, the aspect of an image that is not interpretable but holds a magical or mystical aspect, that resists reason, the part of an image that fascinated and concerned the art historian Aby Warburg and that he felt had the power both to *adhere* in other images, and to rise again.



**WHO**

## THE PROBLEM OF 'WE, THE IMAGE'

Ariella Azoulay's liberation of the terms of relation between the photographer, viewer, subject and camera returns to the photograph (both image and event) its rightful non-sovereignty (which is to say the fact that no image can be the sole property of any of its participants), and this non-sovereignty is aligned with Arendtian ideas of responsiveness and equality in the *'vita activa'*. By bringing photography and the gaze so fully into the space of Arendtian politics (rethought), Azoulay also allows the presence and participation of those who are *not* present. But the degree to which her argument devolves upon a radical idea of citizenship would suggest that those non-present presences are not 'the extras' (the *figurants*) in Didi-Huberman's sense (Didi-Huberman, 2009), nor are they 'the part who has no part', who Rancière would describe as the necessary excess of democratic politics (Rancière, 2010). Rather they are the deictic potential of a (civil) relationship between an 'I' and a 'you'. As such the photograph/photographic event, as conceived by Azoulay, dispenses completely with the problem of 'political identities' in favour of the action, via photography, of 'subjects' in and as civil respondents.

This is laudable and exciting, but it seems to me that the problem of 'we' still remains. And in some senses the problem of 'we' is always an 'image' problem, or a problem of representation, at least when such images present the illusion of full presence and disclosure of an exclusive and fixed collective political subject. While it is certainly the case that Plato was not imagining such a representational unity to be the illusory image that played out across the wall of his cave, the captive conditions through which it was viewed, and the imperatives of naming and identifying that accompanied such 'capture', suggest that what the prisoners contemplated (in their 'incorrect' seeing) was a desire not for freedom but for *representation*, for 'us'. Through the manner in which Arendt responds to the cave allegory, it is my feeling that she too could sense the problematic bind at play in the image (of the people themselves), and chose, therefore, in her gesture of rescue, to leave it behind on the wall of Plato's cave.

This is also what Azoulay does on some level, despite her immense mobilisation, politically, of photography. It would seem, therefore, that there is still an 'image' that haunts both Arendt's and Azoulay's proposition for such a profoundly relational and contingent space of action, and this 'image' is that of the political subject, a subject such as 'the people' or 'the workers' or any form of political 'identity' that asserts itself, and the forces of political subjectivisation that draw any one person to align

themselves with such an identity. It is interesting in this regard that Azoulay draws specifically on the figure of ‘the governed’ (citizen/non-citizen) to situate her recuperation of political agency, as it is difficult to conjure an image of ‘the citizens’. Yet political subjects, cohering as an image in the form of an identity, do prevail and continue to hold us entranced; indeed, one could argue that it is often only through the emotive, affective and unconscious allegiances of political subjectivities that ‘action’ in a contemporary context takes place at all.

In this research project, what I propose is that images (in an art to be looked at, a new art of encounter), if they are to have any political use at all in the present that is this *interregnum*, are uniquely well placed to hold and contemplate this figure of ‘the political subject’. I have come to this position because of seeing these subjects in ‘surviving images’ – haunted, as I have already said, by the ghosts of a ‘democratic subject’. This democratic subject is not the evident, or depicted, subject of these images. Those subjects are people grieving and saying goodbye to an assassinated senator, or a community assembling around a graveside. In my own photographs they are shoppers, tourists and passers-by on a busy city street. But as images contemplated in the vulnerable openness of a space of appearance, they become the figure, the ‘outline’, of ‘the people’ and at the same time ‘the people’s disfiguring and as such a democratic subject moves through them.

The political theorist Chantal Mouffe, in her most recent book *For A Left Populism*, argues that in our current condition of post-politics the only way in which the left might re-establish itself as a force that can counter the growing power of right-wing populism is to forge a new kind of ‘left populism’. (Mouffe, 2018) This is a populism in which the democratic values of equality and popular sovereignty are embedded within a very different image of the people than that which had always sustained left-wing politics, namely ‘the proletariat’ or ‘the working class’. Instead, she argues, ‘the people’ must be constituted as a political frontier that opposes the politics of oligarchy by becoming a *transversal* frontier which she describes as ‘a chain of equivalence among the manifold struggles against subordination’ (which include those against environmental disaster, sexism, racism, xenophobia, etc.) (Mouffe, 2018, p.63) Her argument rests on the idea that populism, and its image in ‘the people’ is not dead but is rather the form through which politics currently operates, but as a bastardisation of politics proper which takes

the form of increasing authoritarianism and politics as the mere facilitation of neoliberal corporate interests (Mouffe, 2018, p.6/7).

At the heart of Mouffe's argument, one which is informed by her ongoing work with Ernesto Laclau and his own important work on populism, is the idea that it is impossible to conceive of the political without the construction of political identities (Mouffe, 2018, p. 72). In effect the idea that the process of subjectivisation (at individual and collective levels) cannot be excluded from the operation of politics. This would suggest that 'the people', for example, whether in the form of a political logic such as populism more generally, or in the form of a manifest subject (assembled, enunciated, imaged) – even if only temporary – continue to have a hold on our political imaginaries.

Yet the danger of 'the people' as a staging for collective power, as Mouffe points out, is its propensity to homogeneity (or in the worst case, totalitarianism) and the over-determination of its collective will. (Mouffe, 2018, p.62) The triumph of this danger was what led Hannah Arendt to replace any homogenous image of the people with a condition of plurality in which responsive action with others supplements for will – or in her terms, for rule. What Mouffe argues for, however, is a strategy of *left* populism in which 'the people' is a multiplicitous and heterogenous staging for a range of different (radically democratic) demands that together, as a chain of equivalences, identify themselves – i.e. 'us' 'the people' – through the identification of an adversary. In this way a distance or separation is created, a counter-hegemonic force, from existing non-democratic actions and identities of the State without the existence of the State itself being put into dispute. (For Mouffe this is very specifically the nation-state, as she sees the 'nation' as the primary form of democracy in modern times).

Further to this, what is vital to this counter-hegemonic 'subject' is the role of *affects* or 'libidinal energy' (what I think of as the desire for *belonging*) in the construction of such a 'people'. (Mouffe, 2018, p.72,73) In this sense 'the people' becomes not an outcome of politics but an adversarial or agonistic means by which it is produced. Or, as Rancière might put it, 'the people' is *dissensus*. Without recognising this combination in politics of the need for subjectivisation (identity) and the affective dimension of that need, any attempt to reconfigure the political remains dangerously abstract or conceptual.

There are alternative propositions, of course, in which the people become ‘the multitude’, configured as a universal and immanent, biopolitical force of constituent power.<sup>58</sup> In this configuration all existing political infrastructures (state, nation, government, etc.), and the hierarchical and representative (vertical) structures by which they operate, are resisted and replaced by autonomous, non-sovereign horizontalities of self-directed democratic praxis.

It was, then, ‘the multitude’ and not ‘the people’ that appeared in the assemblies of the Occupy movement and the ‘Movement of the Squares’. However, some critics argue (and amongst them some leaders of the movements themselves)<sup>59</sup> that it was this very absence of political identification that resulted in their failure, what Slavoj Žižek described as their ‘fatal weakness’: ‘they express an authentic rage that remains unable to transform itself into even a minimal positive program for socio-political change’ (Žižek, 2012, p.78). On the other hand, others see the lack of specific political demands as a strength that enables their/our appearance as ‘the multitude’, less available for capture and therefore for disappearance.<sup>60</sup>

Still other propositions exist in which the dichotomy ‘people’ versus ‘multitude’ is avoided, such as Giorgio Agamben’s idea of ‘permanent civil war’ in which ‘the people’ is already divided between the idea of the sovereign political ‘People’ and the people as (the class of) those who are *de facto* excluded from politics. In Agamben’s configuration, then, ‘the people’ contains within itself an inherent fracture between ‘the bare-life (‘Zoe’) of the excluded people and the political existence (‘bios’) of the included People’ (Kiopkiolis, 2016). According to Agamben, without recognising this fracture that comes about through the modern emergence of *biopolitics* in which (biological) ‘life’ itself (simple necessity) becomes subject to the mechanisms of political control, we will not be able ‘to bring politics out of its concealment and, at the same time, return thought to its practical calling’ (Agamben, 1998, p. 5).

The increasing intensification of Foucauldian biopolitical control in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been described by Achille Mbembe as giving to politics the power to decree who lives and who dies, and has

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<sup>58</sup> See the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Micah White (2016) *The End of Protest: a New Playbook for Revolution*. London: Penguin/Random House and The Invisible Committee (2014) *To Our Friends*. (Invisible Committee, 2014)

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Giorgio Agamben writing on the students of Tiananmen Square in *The Coming Community*, 1993 (Agamben, 1993)

become therefore not simply biopolitical but necropolitical. (Mbembe, 2003) In this context, the distinction between bare life and political life, or, as Arendt described it, the life of necessity (the social and politics, becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, and is why, perhaps, for Judith Butler ‘the people’ is configured more evidently in assemblies of precarious and vulnerable *resisting* bodies (Butler, 2015). Such embodiment is both performative and enunciative: the living assembly of diverse people (minorities ‘deemed disposable’) who share a demand for justice and whose existing precarity (in the face of the law, the State or society) draws them together such that they then declare themselves ‘We, the people!’ (Butler, 2016). The alliance of such bodies, defined by their different experiences of precarity and their calls for recognition and justice, is similar in many ways to Mouffe’s *left* populism and the ‘chain of equivalences’ which establishes it. But for Butler there is no real need to ‘identify’ within that assembly, as neither their specific demands for justice, nor the manifest body of the assembly, is exhaustible. She writes,

For when bodies gather as they do to express their indignation and to enact their plural existence in public space, they are also making broader demands: they are demanding to be recognized, to be valued, they are exercising a right to appear, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life.

(Butler, 2015 p.26)

A ‘livable life’ requires the engagement of *subject* relations, but it also requires that we negotiate the forces of recognition at play in determining who gets to live a ‘livable life’ and who doesn’t. This is a political issue, as power regulates, controls and manipulates *affect* as much as it does reason (Butler, 2009). But it is also an ethical and aesthetic issue, as such forces of recognition move through bodies – human and non-human – and are borne by them. In the context of this research this embodied reality that Butler introduces into Arendtian appearance also therefore opens up the question of how ‘we’, as embodied lives, encounter ‘we’ as images.

What Mouffe effectively is arguing for, it seems, is a *remontaging* of ‘the people’ with their/our radical democratic values of genuine pluralist equality evidenced through agonistic engagement and forms of sovereignty that operate through the many rather than the one. Such a ‘populism’ must therefore resist any singular representation or identity, because failing to do so will confer upon the ‘image’ of ‘the people’ a dead frame in which no real democratic action, or contemplation, is possible. And yet an image

of such a left-populism, or the democratic that haunts 'us', must be imagined in order that it can appear as a frontier or horizon towards which we might move.

To situate such an image of 'us' into the space of appearance, staged as a new 'art of encounter', is to set sovereignty into play with non-sovereignty, or, as it might be argued, to set the political into play with the ethical (notwithstanding the degree to which both Arendt and Azoulay argue for politics as non-sovereign). However, by staging such a play through an encounter with (spectral) images *and* one another is to bring to this political-ethical play an *aesthetics* of heterogeneity, a-temporality, opacity, embodiment and luminosity. Which is to say a kind of material force (in form) that actively resists representation (and recognition) but does not entirely give representation up.



**TOWARDS THE END** of John Berger's short essay portrait of Gustave Courbet, Berger writes about how in a relatively brief period between 1848 and 1856 Courbet managed to 'capture' painting and alter its address (Berger, 2017, p.234). The nature of this altering, according to Berger, occurred through Courbet's radical readjustment of the function of appearances within his paintings. Rather than use art to moderate appearances, and in doing so give to art the purpose of 'ennobling the visible', Courbet instead reimagined, and reimaged, appearances in art as direct experience 'relatively unmediated by convention, and for that reason astounding and unpredictable' (Berger, 2017, p.234). Yet this directness is achieved through a careful, knowing, and in some cases aggressive fabrication of painterly compositions. Most striking of all of these, and the most infamous, is Courbet's Burial at Ornans. Huge, 'cinematic' (almost seven metres long) and yet resolutely undramatic, the painting shocked and appalled its bourgeois Parisian viewers when it was first shown in the Paris Salon of 1850-51. The reasons for this intensely critical response to the painting have been the subject of art-historical analysis continually since the work was first exhibited. Notable modern studies of the painting (and of Courbet's work more generally) include those by T.J. Clark, Linda Nochlin and Michael Fried. Yet it is Berger's description that is, for me, the most telling. Following a brief but crucial discussion of the pervasive dark that crosses the entire breadth of the painting, a darkness (a blackness) that provides the ground, which is never a background, out of which emerges 'every apparent part as equally valuable', Berger writes that instead of an ennobling, genre-compliant translation of everyday life, what Courbet had painted 'life-size, on twenty-one square metres of canvas, [was] an assembly of figures at a graveside, which announced nothing except: This is how we appear' (Berger, 2017, p.235).

*This is how we appear.*

*It is an exquisite assertion, this this. And one that, when confronted with Courbet's painting (seen alongside Paul Fusco's photographs of the RFK funeral train), I take as instructive. To 'I' and to 'us'. To the viewer of 'art' and to the participant in 'politics'. And not simply instructive, but also performatively inviting and demanding in turn. It is an exquisite assertion, because although appearance has been extracted from any number of darkneses it nonetheless performs a play of equivalences presented in and as the massive opacity of black paint that is as striking now as it was when it was first seen.*

We see black men plastered on top of black women, and behind, beadles and gravediggers with ignoble faces, and four black pallbearers sporting démoc-soc beards, Montagnard turnouts and hats à la Caussidière, Voilà!

(Clark, 1973, p. 141)

*A black-painted darkness, a materiality, that resolutely withholds representation as a straightforward and transparent*

*possibility, 'signalling', as the art theorist and activist T J Demos writes of a very different image and its visual anomalies, 'an excess of potentiality that haunts the image's present and renders it available for future redemption' (Demos, 2013, p. 68). While it may seem that for Berger what matters is the emergence out of darkness of a subject that verges on the political through the appearance of their own image as a community, at a scale previously reserved for the heroes of history, myth or religion, his identification of the blackness as a ground that is never a background reveals a more subtle and contingent quality to the conditions of such an emergence. A condition that is peculiar perhaps to the aesthetic or figural quotient of all images and that becomes in certain images of the people a means by which 'the people' can be realised as an aesthetic encounter, and furthermore, as such, as a political and ethical encounter.*



## **THE ACTION OF IMAGES**

## DISTINCTION

It is the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy who has written about images as a *force*; a force that he opposes to form. '[...] a force is precisely not a form. It is what does not show itself but rather gathers itself into itself, the taut force on this side of forms or beyond them, but not as another obscure form: rather as the other of forms' (Nancy, 2005, p2/3). He is one of many for whom the ontology (if it can be called that) of images consists not simply of their affective potency but also in their double nature as something of appearance and disappearance, that shows and resists showing, that belongs to the realms of illusion and reality at the same time. In Nancy, the politics of 'being-with' that runs through his work is also there in his understanding of this force because it is a force, precisely in its condition as *the other of form*, that inclines to the outside, a force he elsewhere calls the *clinamen* (Nancy, 1991). It is a physical force, almost even demonic, and it shows itself in the order of the monster; *monstrance*, 'a prodigious sign', a warning; 'the manifestation of presence' (Nancy, 2005, p.22) This presence is material; matter. Though it is other to form it is not an insubstantiality, nor is it an essence; rather, Nancy writes, the image 'is the matter of the distinct, its mass and density, its weight, its edges and its brilliance, its timbre and its spectre, its pace and step, its gold' (ibid.).

In this force, then, the image is not only the other of form but an *other* manifesting in the matter of the same. 'The image is the non-linguistic saying or the showing of the thing in its sameness: but this sameness is not only not said, or "said" otherwise, it is an *other sameness*' (ibid., p.9). This comes about in Nancy's thinking through the fulfilment of a distance, a shared separation as an active agent in 'being-with'. Images already partake of this distance through what he calls their 'sacredness'. He writes that 'The image is always sacred', and 'the sacred is what, of itself, remains set apart, at a distance' (Nancy, 2005, p.1). In order that there should be no confusion between sacredness and the religious, he calls this quality of an image 'the distinct'.

'The distinct', Nancy writes, 'is at a distance, it is the opposite of what is near' (ibid.) And also in its condition as an image, 'the distinct', with its etymological link to 'stigma', is what is separated by marks: therefore, what is *withdrawn*. Through its condition as withdrawn, 'the distinct' of the image is set apart both in terms of contact and identity (Nancy, 2005, p.2). It can neither be touched nor named. And yet, as Nancy goes on to detail, the distinct 'crosses the distance of the withdrawal even while maintaining

it through its mark as an image' (ibid., p.3). The image is the intimate force of the distinct: 'It activates it, draws it and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it, and it is with this force that the image touches us' (ibid.). But it does this without establishing a continuity. The separateness of the image remains separate even while its force and passion 'distinct from all representation' lean outwards towards the world of availability from which it is withdrawn.

One might see in this idea of 'distinction', then, the capacity of an image to elicit an encounter with otherness, with alterity, through the aesthetic force of the image. This is also a relation with what Nancy goes on to describe as the *heterogeneity* of 'the distinct' – 'the unbound – the unbindable' – 'which no proximity can pacify and which thus remains at a distance' (Nancy, 2005, p.3). In the very distance of its withdrawal it produces 'an attraction'. By being separate, not near, the image becomes desirable. Without engendering this desire, Nancy writes, the image 'is not an image' (ibid. p.6). When it crosses the distance (when the image as such a 'distinction' is viewed) it is not that the distance disappears, or that the image becomes any less separate and distinct; rather, it comes as a shock, 'a confrontation, *tête-à-tête*, or embrace'. 'It is less a transport', he writes, 'than a *rappor*t, or relation' (ibid.).

The image therefore remains an *other* (to form), the force of which produces a relation. And this relation is characterised by its encounter with the strikingly sensory 'artifice' of an image. The 'artifice' itself is experienced in a sense (in the senses) as the marvellous frisson of what Nancy calls the 'distinct', but what he also calls 'partage', *division* as both sharing and dividing. What is important to this research project in Nancy's use of 'partage' in this instance is how he links it to the figure of a threshold, into 'a world that we enter while remaining before it'. The threshold that is 'partage', then, that is the image, *withholds a world*, which is to say, he writes, 'an indefinite totality of meaning' (ibid., p.13).

It is hard not to see in Nancy's characterisation of images the boundlessness and relationality of Arendtian appearance. And although Nancy asserts the *presence* and *unity* of images over their *appearance*, he does so within a mode of anti-foundationalist thinking that actively resists the grounding of truths. His is an engagement with images that, while it plays with opposites, is resolutely non-metaphysical – as was Arendt's engagement with philosophy: what became her theory of politics. In this sense Nancy's evocation of the image as 'distinct', as a force and a withdrawal, brings to the possibility of the image

acting in a space of appearance simply another *other*. The image in Nancy's figuring partakes, then, of a plurality of which it is already a 'distinct' part.

However, perhaps there is also something more than this at work. To imagine the image as Nancy proposes it, active within a space of appearance, is to nonetheless imagine a kind of withdrawal within, or from, appearance itself. On a level that is very subtle and always groundless, this would seem to be, if Nancy's thinking is followed closely, a withdrawal into *truth*, because, as he writes in relation to images for which he substitutes the term 'art', 'art must touch on truth' in order that we are not, as Nietzsche famously wrote, 'sunk to the depths by truth' (*ibid.*, p.13). Art, the image, is this vital artifice that keeps truth, and its modes of capture, at bay yet at the same time it toys with truth as the ground in which its presence matters.

Could it be that through this doubling which the image possesses, and which is both a passage of withdrawal and of relation, 'contemplation' might be rescued from the bright sky of ideas and truth and brought back to the 'sky' of images (*ibid.*, p.5/6)? Rather than search for truth through abstract 'seeing', contemplation might be transformed into what Nancy describes as 'the *jouissance* of meaning'. This *jouissance* is a touching, and an experience of viewing 'the image' that partakes of its material force, in such a way that 'contemplation' can become a bodily and worldly engagement with images, through a viewing that touches on truth as a groundless meaning, or, as it were, on images as 'the distinctive mark of a threshold beyond which meaning (truth) goes absent' (*ibid.*, p.13). By inference, then, if images are imagined within the space of appearance as 'distinct' in this sense, then contemplation can come to play a role in the world-making action of appearance.

## THE FIGURAL

This incursion of the image into the space of speech and action – a space which nonetheless contains the qualities of relation and responsiveness that make it receptive to such an incursion – is also akin to what Jean-François Lyotard calls 'the figural'. *The figural* is that quotient of the non-linguistic in language, that which is associated with seeing and images, that pushes through discourse, and expresses itself in a sensory disturbance that cannot be reduced to any semiotic interpretation or framework. Yet it remains co-implicated with language, with discourse. Lyotard, too, calls this quality 'art', and he allies it with the

visual, with the eye. 'It too appeals to the eye; it too is energetic' (Lyotard, 1971, p. 9). It is also a force, not a passive abstraction or absence interred within signification; rather, Lyotard writes, 'it has enough movement and power to overthrow the table of significations with a quake that produces the meaning' (ibid.) Here again meaning surfaces as a complex of sensory, emotional and psychic energies that consist within the given structures of signification, but do not necessarily conform to them, and cannot be reduced to such structures. Art is a vital means by which this meaning appears, and in Lyotard's terms it is comprised both of 'deception' and 'truth'. This 'truth' is like Nancy's 'distinct', the effects of which 'unleash monsters of meaning in the midst of discourse, within the very rule of signification' (ibid., p. 12). This is what attending to the visual, to seeing in the 'midst of discourse' can do, according to Lyotard: it can access and encounter 'art' (what Nancy terms 'the image') and thereby expand the gaze, as Lyotard writes, 'to allow it to see the invisible' (ibid., p. 12).

#### INDISTINCTION AND SENSATION

These phenomenological arguments displace the primacy of language and structuralist conceptions of the world and the self, but they also, in different ways, displace the human as the primary locus and foundation of meaning. Lyotard was explicitly anti-humanist, and Nancy's contingent and dis-integrative ideas of being and bodies open up the capacity of 'world-making', as Arendt would put it, to a more complex and disunified field or life of *sensation*, of which 'the human' is merely another part, and not even a part that is itself necessarily integral and unified.

Taking this disintegration of the primacy of the rational human even further, Gilles Deleuze subsumes the possibility of 'the distinct' and of the 'figure' into what Davide Panagia describes as 'the infrafacial domain of sensation' (Panagia, 2009, p.39). A plane of intensities, sensations and effects existing below the surface of representations, this plane of 'indistinction' (or immanence) is, according to Panagia, essential to Deleuze's 'descendental ethics' and to his politics of vitalist resistance in which any attempt to 'figure' will always find itself subject to existing, dominant regimes of perception and reference. By 'preferring not to', Deleuze declines 'narration, figuration and the need to describe' (ibid.). In doing so, Panagia details, Deleuze draws an alignment between a political shift 'from nomos to nomad' and an aesthetic shift from 'sense to sensation'. 'Disfiguration', then, in Deleuzian terms, though similar to

Lyotard's 'figural' and Nancy's 'distinct', remains operative beneath or beyond representation (the human as unified and rational being), and resists ever being captured by it. For Rancière, however, as Panagia draws out, the problem with Deleuze's descendent ethics is its 'implicit atomism', and as a result of this, Panagia writes, 'indistinction [...] takes from us the power to organize' (Panagia, 2016, p.43).

This is the quandary that the research faces, over and over, again and again. In my opinion, it is a quandary of 'our times'. How to appear, in and as an 'us' that needs no name but is, always and at the same time, 'us' appearing.

#### THE BE/HOLDING ACTION OF CONTEMPLATION

'We' might return, therefore, to the action of contemplation. Or, to put it differently, 'we' might be returned to contemplation's action: might, in effect, be that which (at least in part) resituates such action in the lingering, absorbed, astonished, *tarrying* condition of contemplation: 'we' thus imaged and imagined. This image of 'we' would not be an image of a represented unity, but rather a 'we' in the sense that Jean-Luc Nancy draws out, as never immediately or instantaneously constituted. 'We' understood, therefore, as more inchoate and less certain than the deictic enunciations of 'I' or 'you' that are 'distinguished without remainder', a 'we' that in performative terms, unlike 'I' or 'you', is always 'in the process of being formed' (Nancy, 2005, p.103). As Nancy writes, 'we' has to 'construct its alterity' (*ibid.*, p.102). This image of 'we' has to draw the sign of itself as a remainder and at the same time as an identity.

This drawing is also a *withdrawing* because in order for 'we' to remain active within a space of appearance constituted by radical responsiveness and equality, it must resist the closure of an image of 'us' that pertains to any kind of fixed identity. 'We' cannot be named. In Nancy's writing on community he refers to Maurice Blanchot's idea of 'inoperativity' or 'unworking' to describe how a community (us) can resist the presuppositions of unity that often constrict it/us. He writes that 'Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called "unworking", referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension' (Nancy, 1991). *Withdrawal* then is not a retreat, nor a condition of passivity; rather, it is an active refusal to operate according to existing terms whereby, as Michel Serres puts it, 'we shove multiplicities under unities' (Serres, 1995).

In this sense, 'we' is always an illegitimate appearance that marks itself out as different, partial and incommensurable. To encounter such an appearance is to engage in the 'advenience' and 'aspectuality' of appearance, in terms of both images and other objects of our sensorium (Panagia, 2018). Panagia's thinking gives to the construction of political subjectivities/subjects a deeply aesthetic and sensory quotient. In this he allies himself with the absolute incommensurability of politics that also underpins Rancière's thinking. There is no criteria for judgement against which politics can be measured.

In their rejection of judgement, Panagia, Rancière (and in slightly different ways, Azoulay too) depart from Hannah Arendt's use of (reconfigured) Kantian judgement as a means by which the openendedness and 'unruliness' of politics can be contained. Even though for Arendt such judgement is never subject to pre-existing (rational) criteria but is a 'response' to the particular (both sensory and intellectual) in any given political interaction, it remains problematic for Panagia, Rancière and Azoulay, as it suggests that there may be those who are fit to judge and those who are not. Judgement, therefore, in their terms, cannot be a part of genuine democratic sensibility, action and appearance. In Arendtian terms, judgement is the capacity to make meaning in politics, not to determine and police its limits. It is what allows 'actors' within the space of appearance to contribute to what Arendt calls 'world-building'. In Azoulay's work such a capacity is given to the action of civil imagination relieved of the imperatives of the judgement of taste, and for Panagia it becomes that which follows in the wake of appearance and its immediacy and incommensurability.

This resistance to the epistemic that Panagia strikingly argues for, in language that is so highly self-determined it forms its own version of that resistance, requires certain conditions of engagement in order that we might stay the difficult task of be/holding. (Panagia, 2016, p.7-11). Be/holding, though it draws on certain aspects of absorption, is not a passive spectatorship; it is rather an active contemplation, a means by which we handle the call, the 'advenience' of appearances. 'Advenience' is a term that Panagia takes from Roland Barthes. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes used the term 'advenience' to describe what draws him to certain photographs and not others. 'This picture *advenes*, that one doesn't' (ibid., p.3). Panagia notes how Barthes links 'advenience' to 'adventure' as if the convenience of a photograph is its capacity to affect a viewer such that she might partake of its *adventure*. For Barthes, the term is short-lived and replaced ultimately by his more famous 'punctum', but for Panagia it is a term that usefully describes 'the

pure fact of appearance' (ibid.): this fact, that appearance touches us but it does so in ways that cannot, at least in the first instance or in the instance of the advenience, be 'classified or categorised according to established criteria' (ibid.). An advenience cannot be judged politically. (Panagia, 2016) Therefore, according to Panagia, 'the advenience of an appearance thus emerges in the interstice between sensation and reference' (ibid., p.3).

However, the adventure of an image, what calls us to pause over it, is often difficult and demanding, and we have been culturally and politically encouraged to resist it, because we are, *I am*, undone by it. This is its possibility that 'disarticulates our subjectivities from the structures of interest that conduct our habits of sense making' (Panagia, 2016, p.1/2). As such, it is a responsivity that stays with the destabilisation that appearances produce. 'We might conclude that we cannot hold an advenience', Panagia writes, 'and yet, we be/hold it, we attend to it' (ibid., p. 9). In staying with appearances actively in this way, in *being* holding what is improper and unpossessable about appearance, and for which 'there is no mode of subjectivity appropriate' (ibid.), we experience, via this aesthetic 'life', the democratic.

Such is Panagia's audacious, and quite beautiful, claim. At the heart of it is a fundamental call to resist instrumentalising this aesthetic (and political) force, to resist productivity and instead to stay with, as he puts it, 'the unusability of aesthetic value in the face of its intensity and inexhaustibility' (ibid. p.53). In doing so, by staying thus, it is not that nothing happens; far from it, what happens is that we might 'unleash the intensity of the otherwise' (ibid. p.53).

**IMAGINE, THEN, A SCENE OF ENCOUNTER**, one in which whiteness strikes like the blackness in Courbet's Burial; the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman standing in the Dominican cells of the monastery of San Marco in Florence. In front of him Fra Angelico's fresco of the Annunciation. He invites us (readers/viewers) to pose our gaze to the image. This he does, and describes the tiny whitewashed cell in which a 15<sup>th</sup>-century monk would have withdrawn 'to contemplate scripture, to sleep, to dream, or even perhaps', he writes, 'to die' (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.11). The art historian then goes on to describe the effect of the light in the cell and the curious way in which the fresco seems to be painted 'against' the light, which causes a sensation of 'luminous obfuscation', making it difficult, even when one's eyes have adjusted to the play of light and image, to see the painting. This confusion is exacerbated by the very subtle use of colour in the painting itself such that the white wall of the picture is only barely a shade away from the whitewashed wall of the cell itself. 'Thus', he writes, 'where natural light besieged our gaze – and almost blinded us – there is henceforth white, the pigmentary white of the background, which comes to possess us' (Didi-Huberman, 2005 p.11).

From Didi-Huberman's description of the intensity of such a possession it would seem to be a deliberate effect of the fresco and its action within the contemplative site of the cell, and yet, he writes in the very next sentence, 'we are predisposed to resist this sensation' (ibid.). Because, as he will go on to argue throughout the rest of the book and in many of his other writings, it is in the fresco's representational details that it fully reveals itself, or tells its story. (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.13). Such a 'telling' is what the conventional art historian, or 'budding iconographer' as he puts it, is 'looking' for – the picture's legibility – and it is a 'telling' that escapes the real visual action of the image and one's experience of looking at it. In this scene of encounter, therefore, the art historian protests such speed of consumption and says, 'let's stay a moment longer, face to face with the image'. From here he details the growing disappointment the viewer/historian will have with this particular painting's depiction of the story of the annunciation. Lacking in any of the wide array of details, illusions, spatial constructions and playful references common to quattrocento Annunciations, Fra Angelico's fresco will become increasingly frustrating to an avid 'historical' eye, and instead emerge as a painting in which very little has been worked up and the rest is 'but strange lacunae' (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.15).

In encountering such a painting then, a viewer is faced with an epistemic choice between 'the visible, the legible and the invisible'. Which is to say either grasping and 'understanding' the painting, or not grasping it and therefore being in the region of a metaphysical invisibility. However, 'there is an alternative to this incomplete semiology', he writes (ibid., p.16). The alternative is Didi-Huberman's proposition that the efficacy of images is not due solely to knowledge. Or the idea that he takes from Jean-Paul Sartre that the image is an act, not a thing: an act, therefore, in which we can participate (Didi-

Huberman, 2012, p.11). What he proposes instead is an engagement or encounter with images that suspends the desire to reach conclusions, a condition of viewing that the cultural theorist Peggy Phelan has described as a kind of falling into the work. It is, as he goes on to describe, a risky 'letting-go of knowledge' (what Arendt, in an echo of these sentiments though with reference to the mind, would call a thinking 'without banisters'), which is also therefore a dialectical moment 'unthinkable in positivist terms' (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.16). Such a phenomenology of the gaze becomes, then, a call to see images differently: to see otherwise.

In Didi-Huberman's encounter with this otherwise of seeing the white wall in, and of, Fra Angelico's fresco is the luminous locus of indeterminacy through which the transformation from the visible (as the presupposition of an image) to the visual (as its real condition) is enacted. 'It is not an articulated sign', he writes, 'it is not legible as such. It just offers itself: a pure "appearance of something" that puts us in the presence of the [chalky] color, long before it tells us what this color "fills" or qualifies. All that appears then, is the quality of the figurable – terribly concrete, illegible, presented. Massive and deployed' (ibid. p.18).

*This is how we appear.*

'The figurable – terribly concrete, illegible, presented' – what 'the people' could become when presented as such an image in a space of appearance in which the visual can act. The people would come, however, from the cave wall with our darkneses and shadows, our massiveness congealing in resistance to the overbearing light. We would bring with us our flickering, our densities and fabricated semblance. The people would move constantly along the horizontal plane of our own image, constituting and disrupting it. We would quake and shudder amidst the significations that gave us ground. Yet still we would appear, visual and paradigmatic; a limit inclined to beyond.



**TOGETHER**

IN PAUL FUSCO'S PHOTOGRAPHS of the Robert Kennedy funeral train and Gustave Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* there are two axes powerfully at work: the horizontal and the perpendicular. The force of these axes pushing against the frames of the image, and imaging itself, produces an effect of both profound and almost frightening inclusion, and at the same time a display of distance and difference, such as that which one would get from the spectacle of walking along a giant frieze. The lateral succession of Fusco's photographs, an inevitable outcome of his position on the moving train, is rhythmic and repetitious, like the shuttling forward movement of the train and of celluloid film itself.

This temporality becomes embedded in the fabric of the visual experience of the work. As a result, each image, each photograph, participates in the one before and the one after, and in all the other photographs, in a way that becomes gradually less and less narrative and more and more affective. While one can see that there is a succession from the densely packed environments of the inner city to the city's industrial fringes, then through leafy suburbs and sparse rural farmlands, the overall effect is not that of a journeying through places, but rather a kind of temporary disinhabiting, as if place, and all the identities configured by it, had become for a brief moment an irrelevance, or at least a matter of background concern. People have left the world of interiors and come to the outside. Behind them there are houses, apartments, factories, shops and vehicles of all kinds (especially cars, lots of cars). Everyone is outside as close to the edge (of the tracks) as it is possible to get.

Something similar is at work in Courbet's painting, as Michael Fried in particular has brought out (Fried, 1990). The community of Ornans, Courbet's own 'people' from the town he grew up in, have come to the edge of a graveside, along a serpentine route that has taken them, if not literally then at least figuratively, up the valley of Ornans to this crowded site at the open mouth of a grave. They are shuffling along still as we encounter them seemingly oblivious to the arbitrary frame of 'imaging' that has been put upon them. As attendees at a funeral, their amassing in public is not unusual, but there is something in the way in which 'their place' is set behind them, as that which they are not in (if only for now) that feels important.

This is the perpendicular axis pushing through from 'them' and 'theirs' to 'us' and 'ours'. Not simply to the space of the 'viewer' as in the gaze of modernity's knowing collapse, such as one encounters in Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, for instance, but rather it is a more subtle sense of gathering towards a

Limit, the edge of which is identity (self) itself. Community, then, as an enframing condition encounters collectivity as the very undoing of such a frame.

One might think of this as a moment, or incident, of 'montage', and it is figured in Courbet's painting by the abyssal grave, and in the Fusco photographs by the fraying, crumbling or precipitous edge of the trackside, often blurred and constantly destabilised by the amassing people. Even the constant striation of the train tracks themselves across the foreground of Fusco's photos does not amplify the boundary line it inevitably is, but instead simply seems to desist in authority as it is repeatedly transgressed. The fact that this edge is made palpable diminishes the suggestion of an unbreachable gap, and instead activates the gap as a time and space (that some might describe as a becoming) that has begun *to cohere*.

When Courbet's painting shocked and horrified its Parisian audience, it did so perhaps because of the audacity and challenge of such a coherence. *This is how we appear*, with you, as 'us'. And for this to take place something needs to die. Not just a literal separation, but also the idea of separation required by hierarchy. In T J Clark's writing about the painting he draws out the fact that the rural community of Ornans are shown to be other than the Parisian idea of what a rural community was. Not peasants, but the bourgeoisie in the countryside, precisely, as Clark puts it, 'where [he] should not be' (Clark, 1973, p.140). This is underlined, he argues, by the very fact that the scene depicted is that of a burial.

In mid-19th century Paris, having a burial of such singularity was increasingly uncommon, as almost 80 per cent of Parisians between 1839 and 1847 had to be buried in common graves, 'unable to afford the dignity of a grave of their own' (ibid., p.127/128). Burials of this sort had become a highly demonstrable aspect of bourgeois Parisian life, or, as Clark writes, 'a central bourgeois institution' (ibid.). The increasing unavailability of such forms of burial to the working poor was a source of anger, and Clark notes how there is plenty of evidence from popular sources of the time that the working class resented the way in which burial, a rite of great social importance, had become 'a bourgeois privilege' (ibid.).

In Michael Fried's analysis of the painting the open mouth of the grave, which extends from the exact centre of the picture's foreground, would, were its visual logic to be followed, cause the viewer (or the 'beholder' as he conceives of them) to fall directly into the darkness of its gaping pit. To avoid such

an interment the viewer is invited to move to the left, in front of what Fried describes as the painting's only incident. This is a subtle little moment where one of the altar boys has knocked a pallbearer's hat askew with his tall candle. The incident triggers an exchange of looks between the two which is in turn noticed by the gravedigger to their right who looks over at them from his central position kneeling in front of the grave. These ricocheting looks draws the now repositioned 'viewer' to notice the somewhat unsettling gaze of the priest carrying a tall crucifix (one of the few lines of verticality in the whole composition). The angling of all these looks back and forth returns you to the moment of incident with renewed attention, and draws you to the child's candle and the source of all this disturbance in the first place. The candle's vertical line leads up beyond the pallbearer's hat to point out the face of Courbet's great friend Max Bouchon, poet, translator and Socialist revolutionary (Fried, 1990).

In Fried's analysis, which is just one of many in his ongoing 'treatise' on the play of absorption and theatricality in art since the 17th century, this shifting site of *beholding* is for Fried a shift from the site/sight of the beholder *tout court* to that of the 'painter-beholder', the effect of which is not only to separate and then reconcile two separate points of view, but also to place Courbet (the painter-beholder) corporeally into the funeral procession, via his identification with his friend Bouchon. Bouchon becomes Courbet becomes Bouchon. The overall effect of this, according to Fried, is to produce a painting of immense 'anti-theatricality' that is utterly disinterested in the spectator *tout court*. In a strangely grandiose tone Fried describes this as 'the heavy urgency of the painter-beholder's determination to achieve union with the painting before him' (Fried, 1990, p.141).

Yet if one takes both Clark's social reading of the painting and Fried's compositional reading together, it is perhaps possible to see the painting not as a hubristic act of absorption on the part of the 'painter-beholder' (Courbet), but rather a recalibration of existing hierarchies of 'beholding' in terms not only of who appears and how, but also in terms of who occupies the site of looking; who determines what is seen and from where. In Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* the centralising of a spectatorial gaze and therefore the privileging of only one point of view is radically shifted and spread out across the horizontal plane of the image. But it is also, if we are to take Fried's compositional reading on, embedded in the procession itself compelled by the figure of the revolutionary, figuring as the painter, figuring as the revolutionary. In this play of both social and spectatorial movement, the painting, despite its subject

matter (or perhaps as a result of it), revivifies the agency of viewing, of seeing, as a political and phenomenological act, just as Paul Fusco's photographs, across the chasm of lost hope figured by the passing (and invisible) train, stage the *visual* seeing of one another as a vital encounter by which 'we', as a democratic subject, might be rescued.



***IN THE SUMMER OF 2013**, shortly before beginning my PhD study, I made a special one-day trip to Amsterdam to see Aernaut Mik's survey exhibition *Communitas* at the Stedelijk Museum. I felt this work was going to be important to my research project. I had seen Aernaut Mik's work for the first time at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and I remember on seeing the work *Training Ground*, which was installed as a two-screen projection with the projections on screens that rested directly on the floor so one watched the video sitting on a mat on the ground, that I really didn't know what it was that I was looking at.*

*The experience was both fascinating and perplexing. It reminded me of my first experience of seeing Paul Fusco's RFK photographs, as there was something about the actual experience of viewing that profoundly destabilised my sense of time, of knowledge and of subject relations. This is not because they are the same: Fusco's photos are wholly documentary, while Mik's videos purposely turn media-type imagery, whether news footage, documentary or forms of surveillance such as CCTV, into mediations of performative scenarios in which differences between reality and fiction are undermined. Or, as it might be more accurate to say, in which the already undermined distinction between reality and fiction is staged. Mik's works are highly constructed, however much they are also reliant on improvisation and direct participation by the 'actors' who appear in the videos, and Fusco's photographs ostensibly simply record what was already there anyway.*

*Beyond these apparent differences, the works share something by virtue of what they do to a viewer, and to viewing, in political, aesthetic and even ethical terms. The social and collective scenarios that Mik stages appear familiar as images we have seen before, from news footage or documentary journalism, of detention centres, court rooms, disaster zones, airport security checks, border crossings, traffic accidents, stock market trading floors or the improvised assemblies of camps, festivals, occupations and sit-ins. Yet however familiar they are, it is clear after a short while of viewing that a complex artifice is at work and that these scenarios are tropes of the social, political, legislative and civic organisation of human societies in which the question of how we live together is asked repeatedly. Each scenario takes place in a very specific 'set', which itself restages a particular spatial context and draws attention to the degree to which spaces orchestrate specific patterns of behaviour. Artifice, therefore, is itself a trope, of the artifice (or what Foucault would perhaps call the 'apparatus') that organises, administrates, and activates all 'collective' situations. In this way, in Mik's work, people are never separable from the places in which their coming together is formed or staged. And, by extension, reality is never separable from construction, composition and the performative.*

*This aspect of the work is enhanced by the way in which Mik creates very particular environments for viewing his videos, often extending the 'set' of the video into the viewing space itself. In some cases he also stages performers/people in the*

viewing environment, too, so that a further ambiguity is set up between the relative 'reals' of the image and its 'subjects' versus the viewing space and its 'viewers'. In a way that is similar to Thomas Struth's Museum Photographs, viewing is configured as both spatial and performative, but also, and perhaps more importantly, it is staged as a kind of equivalent to the scene of the image. In the case of Mik's work this produces a quandary of ethical attachment, as the experience of viewing/ spectating is itself part of the subject of every work and implicitly posed as a part of the condition of living together.

There is rarely any sound in the video works, so the viewing experience remains open and reflective. As viewers we are able to stay with the constant mobility of the shots, the different angles of viewing that cross-refer and play off one another in the adjacency of the multi-screen installations, and the profusion of detail in people's gestures and actions and their physical, spatial and material interactions. Yet for all the work's complex constructions of engagement, we are allowed to remain outside the image, too. That position remains an important one. That place from which one encounters 'the real' in the guise of the image remains vitally held in Mik's work. We remain viewers – viewers who think.

In every case an encounter is set in motion between the principles of order, whether imposed by structures of law and violence or emerging through cooperation and mutualism and disorder, again displayed in positive and negative terms as a force that resists systems and structures of impositional power and also as a force that produces irretrievable entropy and collapse. At any point there is always the potential for apathy, just as there is for agency. While the scenes are familiar, or appear to be, the allocation of power in terms of subjects, identities, roles and behaviour is not. Who holds power in these scenarios is always shifting, and therefore the spectator's ability to align themselves with one subject position or another is equally thwarted.

Instead the scenes of assembly and convergence that he creates are always on the brink of collapse, a consequence of which is that both 'identity' (at individual and collective levels) and identification (that which brings a subjective engagement into play) is always unmoored, loose, floating constantly in and out of reach. As viewers we might want to empathise, or to accuse, but such grounded responses are unavailable. Instead the viewer, too, is set adrift in the seeing.

## **BEGINNING, OUT OF TIME**

IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT LIVE in a world that we desire we must intervene in the present: do research worthy of the present and engage in the creative actualisation of what could be – of living together *otherwise*.<sup>61</sup> Yes. Yet the present is an *interregnum*, a pause, a caesura, in which all the old certainties that fixed the present into place are gone. We have used up the world and each other. The present, in all its networked virtuality, is in a state of aftermath: post-truth, post-human, post-democracy. We are long past the ‘end of history’.<sup>62</sup> The ‘hauntologies’ that mark the present are no longer a mourning for a lost future, or for the loss of an abstract linearity in which the future was always promised, they are rather a mourning for the loss of dimensionality itself; for the feeling of coordinates.<sup>63</sup>

In her Prologue to *The Human Condition*, written over sixty years ago, Hannah Arendt anticipated this present when she wrote about the launching into space of the first satellite, the Soviet Union’s ‘Sputnik’. ‘In 1957’, she writes in the very first line of the book, ‘an earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe’ (Arendt, 1998, p.1). In her foreword to the third edition of *The Human Condition*, published in 2018 to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the book, Danielle Allen describes Arendt’s reference to this event (which Arendt considers ‘second in importance to no other’ (ibid.)) as ‘the astrological sign under which Hannah Arendt sets forth her argument’ (Arendt, 2018). In this, it is one of Arendt’s key coordinates, and defines her critique of science and of forms of technological and scientific progress that aim to escape ‘men’s imprisonment to the earth’ (Arendt, 1998, p.1). It is no surprise that Allen, writing from the perspective of the present, would choose to focus on this more ecological aspect of Arendt’s critique and remind readers that the human *polis* for which Arendt argued so fervently, is an *earth-bound polis*.

Arendt resisted the joy that attended the event of Sputnik’s launch not because she did not appreciate the ‘man-made’ achievement of it, but because it actualised an ‘Archimedean point’, outside the world, from which man’s continued attempts to master nature become an even worse ‘universal’ science, which, as she puts it, ‘imports cosmic processes into nature even at the risk of destroying her’

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<sup>61</sup> Maria Hlavajova, BAK Summer School, Utrecht, July 2019 (my notes).

<sup>62</sup> See Francis Fukuyama (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Hauntologies’ here refers to Derrida’s coinage of the term ‘hauntology’ in *Specters of Marx* (1994) and further discussion of it in the work of Mark Fisher (2014)

(Arendt, 1998, p.268). Arendt's concerns about scientific progress are not, therefore, to do with the many benefits of scientific discovery to human and 'natural' life, but rather to do with the dangers of progressing *away* from human and earth-bound capacity and plurality into realms of abstract 'scientific thought, mathematization, and mere "calculation"' (Allen, 1998, p.3). When co-opted by forms of politics equally invested in human superfluity, this momentum of abstraction manifests itself as totalitarian horizons resolutely unwilling to admit the only certainty of the present – its diversity, materiality and flux.

Such an Archimedean point, floating far beyond the world in a bright sky of ideas, from which we 'act on the earth and within terrestrial nature as though we dispose of it from the outside' (Arendt, 1998, p.262), is the truth Platonic philosophy contemplates. To resist it and fight for the freedom of politics, Arendt proposes the dispersed and relational contingency of human action. Didi-Huberman, invoking the dialectical and recuperative strategies of Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg, proposes the *image*. 'The image: a unique, precious apparition, even though it is such a very small thing, a thing that burns, a thing that falls' (Didi-Huberman, 2018, p.63).

An image that is itself a movement and a rupture, that 'is capable of breaking through the horizon of totalitarian constructions' (ibid.). This (dialectical) image space, that is for Didi-Huberman (following Benjamin) a way to contest our pessimism, to organise against it, has the inescapable energy and unpredictability of ball lightning, which 'runs across the whole horizon of the past' (ibid., p.62), breaking through it, forcing it into the present as a new image. Didi-Huberman invokes its energy and its motion, and describes it as '*falling* to us' (ibid., p.63). He writes,

Only rarely does it rise toward the still sky of eternal ideas: generally, it descends, it declines, it hurls itself and crashes into our earth, somewhere before or behind the horizon. Like a firefly, in the end, it disappears from our view, leaving us for a place where perhaps someone will see it, somewhere else where its survival can still be seen (ibid.).

The *falling* that Didi-Huberman gives to the image is not some kind of failure, or demise, it is rather, as he emphasises, a decline, a *declination*, a preference not to submit to the upward motion of transcendent thinking, nor to the assumption of disappearance, but rather to invest in 'an image space, discovered in the space of political action' (ibid.:) (a space of appearance) that flashes and glimmers with the imagination of something new, with, as he puts it 'our own principle of hope' (ibid., p.30). This *falling* image, then, dazzling as it goes, might register a new coordinate.

Didi-Huberman is writing in response to the filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 essay known as 'The Fireflies Article'.<sup>64</sup> In the article Pasolini argues that the reign of fascism in Italy has not ended, but continues in forms of cultural oppression and homogeneity fuelled by the vacuity of consumer capitalism, police brutality and 'disregard for the constitution', and repressive State conformity and control through surveillance (Didi-Huberman, 2018, p.10) and likens this to what he sees as the disappearance of the fireflies from Italy's night sky. For Pasolini, the 'fireflies' are the people, a politics of human plurality.<sup>65</sup> "The 'true fascism'", as Pasolini, quoted by Didi-Huberman, says, 'is one that takes over the values, the souls, the languages, the gestures, the bodies of the people' (ibid., p.11). In the context of his pessimism in 1974, Pasolini determined that 'the fireflies' (the people and their vital human interactions) had disappeared forever. He called it a cultural genocide (ibid.).

Writing in 2018, Didi-Huberman, of course, sees parallels with the atomisation of politics Pasolini identified as resulting from consumer capitalism and its attendant systems of power in the 1970s and our own times. But he argues that the fireflies, in fact, had not disappeared then, nor have they yet. They, 'we', survive as conditions of resistance moving, *falling*, into what is left of the dark, of the world, in order that we might constitute *images*, political imaginings – that we might also see. Didi-Huberman's response to Pasolini is that what had disappeared was not the fireflies, but Pasolini's capacity to see them, to see 'that which had not completely disappeared and, above all, that which *appears in spite of all* as reminiscent newness' (ibid., p.32).

I AM WRITING THIS CONCLUSION AT THE END. It is September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, six years, more or less, since the research as an explicit project began. I am writing it in London at a time of intense political instability. Never before have I read so many mainstream newspapers writing so much about 'democracy', nor attempting to channel the fury, anxiety and disenfranchisement felt by people in its terms. It strikes me as a synchronicity with my own concerns that fills me with pathos. But despite this attention to the

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<sup>64</sup> The article was first published in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera* under the title *Il vuoto del potere in Italia* (The void of power in Italy), but was later republished in its more famous title 'The Fireflies article' (*L'articolo delle lucciole*) in Pasolini (1977) *Scritti corsari*. Milan: Garzanti.

<sup>65</sup> In Pasolini's terms this potential of the people is situated in 'the working class' and is contrasted with the hegemonic values of the bourgeoisie.

present and to appearance (politically, aesthetically, and methodologically), this research project has been filled with pasts and disappearances. And strangely, although I knew it all along, it was only very recently that I properly noticed how much the dead figure.

The ghosts of a 'democratic subject' that *fall* towards me in the images of Nicolas Poussin, Paul Fusco or Gustave Courbet, or in my own photographs from Regent Street, have become themselves the remaining ghosts of this project, constructed into works through the 'outline', or figure, of 'the people'.<sup>66</sup> In the different forms that they take, they are replete with gestures. And in addition to the images that catalyse them, both works draw their gestures of survival from the street. I see them as sister works, because although very different in their final form they are both works within which 'the people', as a means rather than an end, struggle to appear. Potential and representation vie with one another, as do assembly, protest, composition and the problem of naming. In each work's surviving images death hosts a subject, of myth, of sovereignty, of humanity, of revolution, but holds the people to account for it. On the street they cheer, they raise up their arms, they wave, they fall to their knees. Having been triumphant, having taken to the streets, having walked on by and done nothing, now, because they have, *we* have the potential to grieve.

There were others, however, whose appearance as the political subject of, for example, 'the workers', or 'the citizens', have not remained in the project at its culmination because they do not figure, for my research, primarily through images. But they will figure in work that comes after this and in doing so will refocus the questions of appearance in other ways.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Two key visual works manifest this research alongside this thesis; *The Triumph of Crowds* (a play script) and *The Regent's Street* (a single-channel video with sound). These two works, along with this thesis, constitute the PhD submission. All three operate in parallel and with equivalence in terms of their function as either a manifestation of, or commentary on, the research ideas and methods. Though each does so in different ways and with different degrees of emphasis, together they constitute a shared practice.

<sup>67</sup> In addition to these three primary works, two further projects have been vital to the development of the research; *N scale* and *The House of Democracy*. I have chosen, however, not to discuss these works as part of this written component, nor to attempt to present them in any substantial way as part of my final submission. Partly this is because both are large scale projects that are still in progress and although aspects of each project have been manifested as artworks, performances and written essays: my feeling is that they have in a sense outgrown the scale of the artistic-academic exercise that is the PhD.

Additionally, I have made the decision to focus this submission around the specific political subject of 'the people'. These other two works are more concerned with the political subjects of 'the workers' and 'the citizens', and as such will be the basis of future postdoctoral art and research.

For now, I remain with these images of 'the people', ghosts of a democratic subject, reassembled in order that they might intervene in the present and become a new space of appearance in which they might glimmer with the hope of fireflies. To do so, however, they have to reintroduce a dark field against which they can be seen. This darkness is the registration of loss, a grieving, from which 'a livable life' can be recognised. This is what the images also withhold and, in doing so perhaps constitute a preparation for politics, for action – a pre-enactment. Art's use can also be this preparation, where grief is a beginning and new versions of 'us' are conjured from survival.



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