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Inhoudsopgave

Editorial: On Accomplishment

Dear reader,

I want to thank you and everyone involved for a wonderful year at Splijtstof. It is an honour to be surrounded by enthusiastic minds and to watch ideas transform in collective projects. I would like to take this opportunity to reminisce about some of the great things we have accomplished in our journal's 52nd year. As we look back on the past year, it is inspiring to see how our community has grown through meaningful discussion, creative expression, and collaboration. This year, we have seen a deepening of our commitment to exploring the intersections of philosophy and society. We have much to celebrate.

In February, we had the pleasure of hosting our Film and Philosophy event, where we were joined by Professor Arjen Kleinherenbrink. Together, we explored the intricate layers of Wes Anderson's cinematography, diving into discussions about the role of art and expression. The event was not only a screening but an enriching, intellectual journey.

April marked another significant milestone with our annual symposium on the theme 'Hopes and Dreams'. This gathering brought together diverse voices to explore topics ranging from climate ethics to the nature of dreaming itself. It was a day filled with profound insights and creative moments, including the poetry shared by one of our own editors, Mirte Debats. The symposium left us with a deeper appreciation for the power of shared ideas.

Since then, our reach has expanded as we have formed new relationships and embraced opportunities for collaboration. Looking ahead, we are excited to embark on future projects with F.C. Sophia, theologians, scholars of religion, and you. These new collaborations promise to broaden the scope of our inquiries. We also had the privilege of participating in Radboud University's Introduction Week, where we joined F.C. Sophia's XXXVIth board to welcome new students to the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies. Engaging with the curious minds of the incoming cohort was a great reminder of the community we are building together.

As we move forward, we carry the experiences and lessons of the past year. Our accomplishments remind us of the importance of creating spaces for critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. We are excited about what lies ahead, and on that note, I am delighted to share that a dear friend and fantastic editor, Charlie Chowdhry, has joined me as editor-in-chief at Splijtstof. We look forward to continuing this journey with all of you.

Sophie Ingle

Editor-in-Chief

Editorial: On Summer

Dear reader,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to work on Splijtstof with Sophie, who has been a source of constant inspiration and a wonderful friend to me for as long as I've been studying at this university. Becoming an editor-in-chief has made my inner child giddy with excitement; as will be the case for many of you, reading and writing have been my lifelong refuge. Sharing the helm of this publication is a dream come true. I have only been an editor at Splijtstof for a year, but in that time I have come to consider Splijtstof to be one of the most important things I have contributed to as a student.

It is quite fitting that I should start this new position in the lead-up to the Summer edition. Spring is traditionally the season of rebirth, but I feel as though Summer, and the associated break from our studies, gives students the opportunity to reimagine themselves and their futures. Summer is the season of results, acceptance and rejection letters, and confirming decisions. It is the season when our more time-demanding hobbies are picked up again without guilt, the season of buying another yearly planner (and vowing to actually finish this one), the season of group holidays that can often make or break our friendships and, for international students with roots in another country, the season when we can go back to visit our loved ones and stay a while. It is the season that much of our life outside of studying is postponed to. The rebirth we experience in the summertime is not the inevitable flourishing of an ecosystem left to its own devices, like Spring bulbs that bloom every year, but the result of purposeful hard work many months prior. Our Summer is a garden, carefully cultivated. It could not grow without us.

This is why I appreciate the symbolism of starting this new role during Summer. Many years ago, when I was 6 years old, I stood up and told my primary school class that I liked books so much that I was going to be an author when I grew up. I like to think that at that moment, a seed was planted. Another seed was planted when I started writing my own short stories. Another seed was planted when I was invited to write short pieces about school trips and class projects for my primary school's newsletter. Another seed was planted when a poem I wrote was selected to win a prize at school. Another seed was planted when my secondary school teacher encouraged me to send my writing to competitions. Throughout my studies, every single positive comment about my writing has planted another seed.

I do not consider myself a particularly accomplished writer, especially compared to many of the brilliant writers I encounter at university. I am

not at all ashamed of this. Their success does not take away from the fact that throughout my life, I have been purposefully constructing a future for myself that involves writing. Very few of us will achieve critical recognition – after all, this is what makes recognition special for those few who receive it. This does not stop us from planting our own gardens. We can each enjoy a Summer of our own making.

Being offered this position at Splijtstof is serendipitous. While writing this editorial, I have experienced the urge to be self-effacing, to attribute my invitation to be an editor-in-chief to knowing the right people. This is of course true – Sophie knows me (and knows how much of a perfectionist I am when it comes to editing) so she was happy to invite me to join her. However, I consider my friendship with Sophie to be one of the best things that's ever happened to me at Radboud, and having her respect and trust is an achievement I am incredibly proud of. If I am coming into this role as a result of my dedication to writing and my friend's faith in me, the garden I have planted throughout my life must be in full bloom.

I hope you have all enjoyed your Summer, and I will see you in the new year.

Charlie Chowdhry

Editor-in-Chief

Illustration by Mees van Kemenade

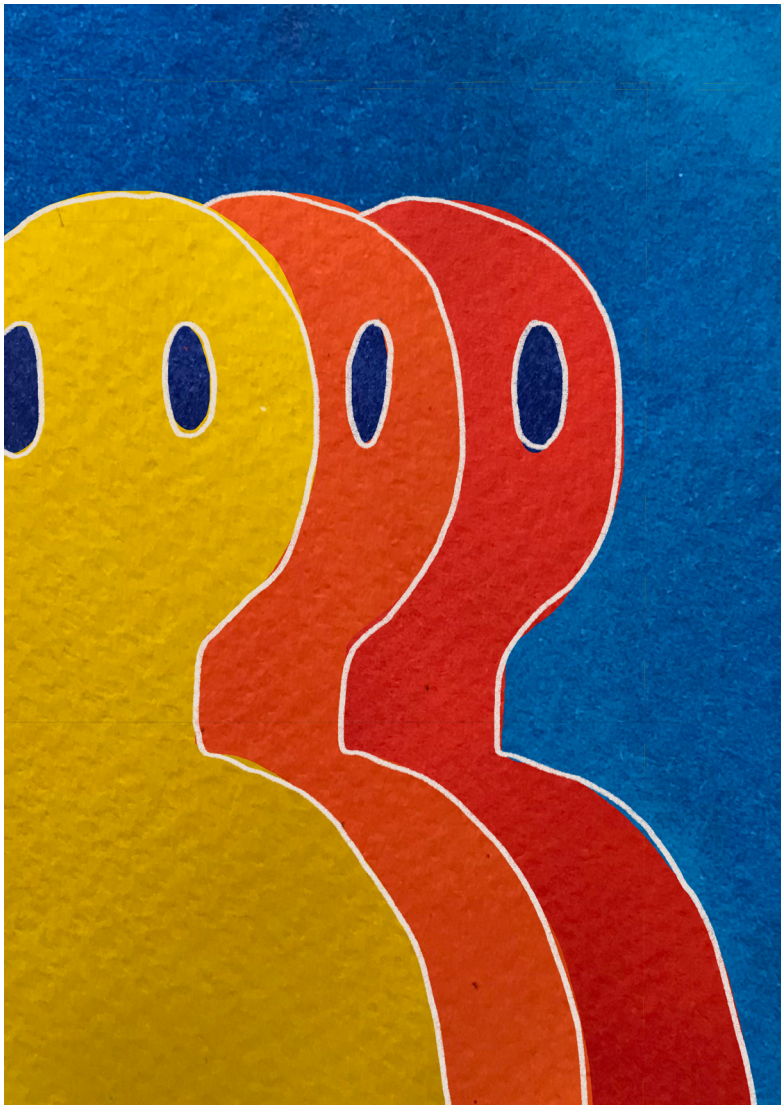

Illustration by Saar Boter

The Communist and Their Rolex

Mark den Dekker

Imagine for a moment that you are a communist. One evening you arrive at one of your local communist organisation's meetings, eager to quote Marx back and forth with your comrades until the sun rises. But then you see something that makes your heart sink; from underneath the cuff of a neatly ironed Brooks Brothers shirt appears what is unmistakably a Rolex watch. You feel your blood pressure rising. Feverishly your mind starts seeking for a quote from Marx, Lenin - hell, even Mao, to put this class traitor you once called comrade in their place for enjoying such bourgeois luxuries. The comrade, seeing you turn red in the face at the sight of their watch, turns to you and asks a simple question: When has Marx ever argued against wearing nice watches?

If you are a communist, or, in fact, if you are slightly to the left of Margaret Thatcher, you will have undoubtably been accused of hypocrisy for enjoying certain luxuries. Although this argument is often made in relation to owning an iPhone or enjoying a Starbucks latte, one would imagine that a self-proclaimed communist wearing a ten-thousand-euro watch would raise some eyebrows. In fact, even many leftists who are otherwise unimpressed by right-wingers' vague gesturing at imagined hypocrisy would probably be quite puzzled if you showed them your new Submariner or Yacht Master.

However, is this a valid critique?

The first argument levied against someone who wears a Rolex and a hammer and sickle pin at the same time would undoubtedly be that the money they've spent on a completely superfluous luxury could have been given to those who had much less money. After all, as a communist one ought to be opposed to the unequal distribution of wealth within the world, so why not share your own wealth? It is simple consistency: if you are for redistribution of wealth, start with redistributing your own. This argument, however, falls flat on its face when communism is critically analysed.

Firstly, there are different forms of wealth. The wealth which a communist is most concerned with redistributing is the private property of the bourgeoisie, contrasted with the personal property of the individual. Private property refers to the means of production, such as factories or machines, whereas personal property is the things which you or I use in our personal lives. In other words, communists are far more concerned with someone's watch *factory* than someone's watch.

Secondly, the argument of the communist is not that everyone distributes their goods and services unethically under capitalism; the argument is that the system by which we distribute goods and services is itself unethical. Yes, it is unethical that there are people who eat caviar and lobster whilst others only have bread and water, but this is not due to some inherent quality of the caviar or the lobster. This inequality comes to be because the money these people spend on the caviar and the lobster does not get divided over the workers who actually made that dinner possible. Instead of going to the fisher, chef, and waiter, the vast majority of this money goes to the man on Wall Street who owns the restaurant. Only after this man has been paid his profits are the wages of the workers considered. Because of this systematic inequality in capitalism, it does not matter whether one orders lobster or bread at a restaurant; there is no way an individual can consume their way out of the inequalities within capitalism. I will go as far as to say that the actions of the individual within the system are completely irrelevant. Even if every single person acted as ethically as possible, due to the mechanisms of capitalism inequality would still persist. It is therefore not on the individual, whether communist or not, to redistribute wealth; instead, the system by which we distribute wealth to begin with ought to be changed.

It does not matter whether one orders lobster or bread at a restaurant; there is no way an individual can consume their way out of the inequalities within capitalism.

The second argument for why it would be hypocritical to engage in luxuries as a communist would be that, even if a communist is not primarily interested in redistributing the wealth that individual workers have, it would still be better spent on charity than on luxury. Saving lives must obviously take priority over making one's life more luxurious if one is to be consistent. I certainly think that any person, regardless of whether they are a communist or not, should weigh the ethics of spending money on their own lives with the reality that money can save or else greatly improve lives of others through charity. This ethical burden is, however, not exclusive to communists. A capitalist would have just as much responsibility in this, but their spending habits are not questioned.

This moral question is, nonetheless, not the topic I want to discuss here. The point I want to make in this essay, instead, is this: if we are to apply this criterion of abstaining from luxury and do this consistently we would be

creating a standard that no person could reasonably be expected to reach. If we state that the only way in which someone can be a communist and not be labelled a hypocrite (and have all their critiques of capitalism rendered moot along with that) is to completely abstain from engaging in whatever one might label 'luxury', then this would apply not just to Rolexes or Starbucks lattes, but to everything that isn't bread, water, and shelter. This is because 'luxury' is a completely nebulous term. Ask a hundred people what constitutes luxury and you'll receive two hundred different answers. One could see luxury as a state of great opulence and comfort, but that only begs the question what we compare this to. If we were to compare the standard of living of the average person in a western country today with the standard of living of that of a typical medieval citizen, we would rightfully have to conclude that we live in a state of great opulence. Even compared to many people alive today in the global south, we undoubtedly live among many luxuries. Does an average western home not provide comforts that most people in human history could scarcely dream of? Is a communist a hypocrite for having central heating,

Ask a hundred people what constitutes luxury and you'll receive two hundred different answers.

electricity, and indoor plumbing? Must we check the contents of one's fridge when they start talking about unionising, in case it contains more than the bare minimum needed to stay alive?

Furthermore, communism never argues that people should only have the bare minimum. There have been plenty of communist theorists who have written on the need for luxury in people's lives. As anarchist Peter Kropotkin states: "Would life, with all its inevitable sorrows, be worth living, if besides daily work man could never obtain a single pleasure according to his individual tastes?" (1906, 134). We find here an often misunderstood, whether willfully or otherwise, component of communist thought. The point of communism is to feed the starving, not take away food from those who have it in the name of equality. A communist is not a hypocrite if they enjoy luxuries that others can't have under capitalism, even if they oppose this inequality. Their argument, after all, is that everyone should have these luxuries, not that no one should have them.

Surely though, one cannot reasonably claim that every person can own a Rolex. Did the Marxist revolutionary Thomas Sankara not say: "We must choose either champagne for a few or safe drinking water for all" (Skinner 1988, 444)? How can I say that it is perfectly fine for a communist to be indul-

ging themselves in all manner of bourgeois luxuries when, in the same breath, I would argue that the rich of the world must surrender their wealth for the sake of the rest of the world? This thinking, however, is too individualistic. Yes, we must choose between champagne for a few or safe drinking water for all; and yes, the safe drinking water for all is the only ethical and just choice. This does not mean that it is unethical or even hypocritical for me to drink champagne. As I have stated before, it is not the actions of individuals which communists take issue with, it is the system itself. The world for which I fight will come no closer whether I drink a bottle of champagne or if I were to donate the price of the bottle to charity. What would this standard for being a 'sincere' communist even be? That there is some magical threshold of wealth - conveniently placed above our own, of course - which turns an otherwise sincere and devout communist into a hypocritical petit bourgeois traitor of the working class? I do not believe so. What ultimately differentiates the working class from the bourgeoisie is not how much money one has but rather their relationship to the means of production. It is the class interests gained through this relationship that determines one's place within capitalism. If a worker chooses to spend the money they acquired through their own labour on a nice watch, it would not make them one bit less of a communist than if they had spent it drinking on the weekend with friends, buying a new car, or donating it to charity. What matters is that they are dedicated to a future beyond capitalism.

If we were to apply these arguments consistently, we would be creating a standard to which no person could reasonably be expected to adhere.

Ultimately the allegation of hypocrisy levied against communists is not unique. I imagine most climate activists have, at some point, had it pointed out to them that their existence also produces CO_2. It is easy to see why this argument is so seductive to make; once someone has been identified as a hypocrite, their arguments are no longer that threatening. Whether consciously or not, it is employed as a thought terminating cliché by those who do not want to critically analyse the assumptions they make about the world or those who do not want to have to defend the political positions they hold. That these allegations are not genuine critique becomes all too clear when we recognise the fact that there is no way to be a proper communist to people levying these allegations. If you are rich and a communist, you are called a hypocrite; if you are poor and a communist, you are called jealous. Any argument that can be levied against owning a Rolex can equally be

applied to many other commodities which we consider normal for people to own. If we were to apply these arguments consistently, we would be creating a standard to which no person could reasonably be expected to adhere. Furthermore, the allegation of hypocrisy is, in and of itself, invalid considering there is no communist principle against owning any kind of luxury, not even that of a Rolex. What makes someone a communist is not the watch they wear; it is their revolutionary spirit, their hunger for justice, their belief that a better world is possible, their yearning for a life beyond capitalism. All of which can be held just as fervently by a communist wearing a Rolex.

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Illustration by Saar Boter

Uses of Philosophy

Critical and Postcritical Interventions in the Philosophical Canon

Lucas Gronouwe

Introduction

This paper encourages academic philosophers in the Netherlands[1] to consider three questions: What do we study and teach? How do we study and teach? And why do we study and teach? The answer to the first question is no longer self-evident. For the past few decades, the canons operative in the humanities have been under attack for being too male, too white, and too Western. Within the disciplines of literature (Morrissey 2005), history (Grever and Stuurman 2007), and the arts (Brzyski 2007), the self-evidence of what is read, studied and taught is a thing of the past. Philosophy forms no exception in this regard: its canon has come under increasing pressure both inside and outside academia (Dabashi 2015; Van Norden 2017; Tyson 2018). In the Netherlands, the canon debate has been given a recent impetus by the publication of a series of articles about reforming the 'dead white males' canon for the history of philosophy (Ierna 2020; 2021; 2022). Responses to such a reform show great division between those who defend the canon as it stands, emphasizing the value of tradition (Molenaar 2020; Drayer 2021; Dros 2022; Doorman 2022), and those who agree the philosophical canon should be more inclusive, stressing the richness of diversity (Verburgt 2021; Booy and Varekamp 2021). Meanwhile, some have drawn attention to the limits of diversification (Dhawan 2017) and have instead challenged the very idea of a canon for philosophy (Bright 2020; Ierna 2022).[2]

To move this conversation forward, one needs to consider and respect the concerns of each of these parties. We cannot simply do away with Kant, for instance, but we cannot close our eyes to his sexism and racism either. Hence, we have to reconsider how we study and teach particular philosophers. And if we want to move beyond the canon, we also have to reevaluate

1 Since this paper was first presented at the 2023 annual conference of the Dutch Research School of Philosophy, its primary target audience is academic philosophers in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the issues it addresses extend beyond these institutional, disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

2 Although these sources are in Dutch, they are not necessary to make this point: one can find more or less the same positions in the books quoted earlier (or in staff meetings about curriculum reform, for that matter): there are always those who urge for a diversity of perspectives and those who argue for the relevance or the quality of the current canon.

why we study and teach certain texts in the first place. In the remainder of this paper, I address these two questions. First, how do we study and teach? This paper confronts three approaches that provide an answer to that question. The first is deconstruction: a way of reading initiated by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, that focusses on contradictory and marginal aspects of philosophical texts. The second is postcolonial-feminism: a critical movement within the humanities which demonstrates how the androcentric, ethnocentric, and Eurocentric biases of the philosophical tradition have led to the exclusion of various social identities. The Indian scholar Gayatri Spivak has critically adapted deconstruction for these purposes. Although both of these approaches focus on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in canonical philosophical texts, they recognize that one cannot do away with tradition: we still have to read Kant; we just have to read him in a non-traditional way. Hence in the first and second section of the paper, I provide a brief outline of what such a non-traditional way might entail.

If we want to move beyond the canon, we also have to reevaluate why we study and teach certain texts in the first place.

Deconstruction and postcolonial-feminism are confronted with a third approach, which is called 'postcritique.' This is both a theory and method of reading and interpretation, coined by literary scholar Rita Felski, that opposes critical or suspicious forms of reading, and instead seeks to reveal how texts can be seen as actors which create various kinds of attachments in present-day readers. What if we would translate this theory within the discipline of philosophy? If we would transpose Felski's project from the uses of literature to the uses of philosophy? That would certainly force us to reconsider why we study and teach certain texts in the first place. In the third and final section of this paper, then, I consider alternatives for the justification criterium of canonicity, such as the capacity of philosophical texts to change how we think and feel, to enchant, shock, or intrigues us, or to assist us in addressing problems we currently care about. I conclude by discussing how these criteria might reconcile the different parties in the canon debate.

Unity/Multiplicity: Derrida's Deconstruction

How do we read, study, and teach? This is the central question of this first section and the next. I have selected the work of Derrida and Spivak to provide an answer to it, as they agree with those who argue for the importance of

the philosophical tradition, but problematize a traditional way of reading it. While Derrida and Spivak continue to read and interpret canonical texts, they do so in a non-traditional way, by focusing on multiplicity rather than unity (Derrida), or historical and political context rather than just philosophical arguments (Spivak). Both have worked under the flag of deconstruction.

In the late 1960s and early 70s, Derrida (1967a) coined the term 'deconstruction' for his project of interrogating and problematizing Western metaphysics, insofar as it attempts to master reality by theoretical means. According to Derrida, this desire for control manifests itself in a variety of ways. One of them is to demarcate that which is allegedly 'proper' to philosophy, and to exclude everything beyond these self-defined limits (Derrida 1972a). Another is the search for principles and fundamentals which create order and stability (Derrida 1967b). On several occasions, Derrida (1967a; 1972a; 1984a; 2019) has remarked that the traditional way of reading and interpreting Western philosophy is directed at gathering together the unity/essence of a thinking, a single text, or an oeuvre. For him, this is yet another example of a metaphysical desire for theoretical mastery.

Let us elucidate Derrida's observation with an example. In each of the texts mentioned, Derrida's standard case study is Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Heidegger has two seminal books on Nietzsche, that are definingly called 'Nietzsche I' (1996) and 'Nietzsche II' (1997), in which he presents Nietzsche as 'the last metaphysician', because, arguably, in the end Nietzsche develops a metaphysics of will to power. Derrida argues, in turn, that this interpretation of Nietzsche is guided by a 'unifying' tendency: what Heidegger tries to do, is to read Nietzsche in such way that in the end, everything he says can be reduced to one great thought, which is that of the will to power, or that of the eternal return—for Heidegger these are different expressions of the same thought. It is in this move, in this strategy of reading that tries to find the unity of a thought, that Derrida takes Heidegger to exemplify a desire for mastery and control, which he also refers to as *logocentrism* (1967a; 1984a; 2019).

It seems to me that this way of reading is still very much present within our current academic milieu. Take, for instance, a standard introductory course to Plato. Usually, this starts with a short biographical sketch of Plato's life, and then turns to what is considered to be the guiding thread throughout Plato's work, viz. his theory of ideas. Subsequently, some specific sections of Plato's dialogues are selected to be studied by students, in which this theory of ideas is particularly well-illustrated (e.g., the allegory of the cave from the *Republic*, and the passages about the 'ladder of love' from the *Symposium*). Will we find something in these dialogues, then, that might

contradict the previously established unity of Plato's thought? It seems to me that we will likely find this 'essence' reflected in the dialogues—from which it was assembled or gathered in the first place. What if we would start from the heterogeneity of the Platonic dialogues instead (e.g., confronting parts of the *Republic* with parts of the *Parmenides*, where Plato, by voice of Socrates, undermines his 'own' theory of ideas), and then seek to determine Plato's relationship to the theory of forms?

In my view, deconstruction can best be understood as a strategy of reading and interpretation that challenges this hermeneutic practice of gathering together the heterogenous elements of a single text or entire oeuvre into a coherent totality. In his seminal reading of Plato, for example, Derrida (1972b) has attempted to demonstrate how Plato's dialogues structurally undermine 'Platonism', understood as a hierarchical system of divisions between ideas and representations, philosophers and sophists, body and soul, etc. Moreover, throughout his career, Derrida (1967a; 1984a; 1984b; 1994; 2019) has continued to contrast his own readings of Nietzsche, that highlight the *multiplicity* of positions, names and voices inhabiting Nietzsche's works, with those of Heidegger. In a similar deconstructive spirit, Derrida has shown Freud's corpus to be replete with contradictions and has drawn attention to the multiplicity of heirs claiming the name and heritage of 'Marx' (see Derrida 1993; 1997; 2002). What connects these and other cases is deconstruction's focus on the written philosophical inheritance, where it discovers tensions, unthoughts, and above all, a multiplicity of voices that resists homogenization. In fact, this heterogeneity at the level of written texts is what animates all debates on questions of interpretation amongst philosophers—which means that as long as a unifying tendency within research and education prevails, the philosophical community structurally undermines its own conditions of possibility.

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Exclusion/Inclusion: Spivak's Postcolonial-Feminism

Let us turn to the second approach; a second answer to *how* we might study and teach. It is only after deconstruction has reoriented our attention towards the internal logic of texts, that particular philosophers may be problematized for the sexist, racist and/or imperialist gestures accompan-

ying their writings, and that other texts may be read. Now this two-sided project, I would argue, has defined feminist and postcolonial approaches to the philosophical canon. Since both sides of this project can be found in the work of the Indian literary scholar Gayatri Spivak, I would like to dwell on it for a moment. In the wake of deconstruction in the 1980s and 90s, Spivak has exposed dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in the relationship between the European tradition on the one hand and what she calls the 'subaltern' on the other. The subaltern is a concept borrowed from the Italian neo-Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci to designate what Gramsci (2014) called 'social groups in the margins of history' (Spivak 2021), which can qualified in a variety of ways. From a feminist and postcolonial perspective, Spivak (1988; 1999) has shown how the androcentric, Eurocentric, and ethnocentric biases of the philosophical tradition continue to *silence* the subaltern. This tradition has systematically denied the Other the position of speaking subject, Spivak argues, and her texts are dedicated to finding ways for the subaltern to speak—and to be heard, for example in contexts of education (Spivak 2009; 2012) and translation (Spivak 2022).

Actually, Spivak first made a name for herself by a now widely celebrated translation of Derrida's *Grammatology* (1967a) into English, to which she added a long and influential preface. In fact, I would say that the profound influence of deconstruction on Spivak's postcolonial-feminist project can hardly be overestimated. Derrida, for instance, is the only contemporary French intellectual that comes off relatively unscathed in Spivak's (1988) seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in contrast to Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. Moreover, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Spivak 1999), references to Derrida and deconstruction are paramount, both in the main text and its footnotes. The book also contains an appendix titled 'The Setting to Work of Deconstruction', in which Spivak attempts to reconstruct the development of deconstruction throughout Derrida's works. Now since Spivak is explicitly engaged with canonical philosophical texts in the first part of this book (definingly called 'Philosophy'), it will be my focus in the remainder of this section.

Let us return to our guiding question: how do we study and teach? The dominant reading of the history of philosophy is, arguably, one that dismisses signs of sexism, racism, and/or imperialism as somehow unimportant, inessential, or marginal. Usually, we bracket the historical and textual context of certain philosophical ideas, in order to focus instead on certain arguments we deem important to write about or teach students about (Krogh 2022). Some have called this the 'streamlined version of the history of philosophy', where the proper name of a philosopher is taken to be a placeholder *not* for what they actually wrote, but for what are deemed to be their best

ideas or arguments (Bernasconi 2003). Spivak (1999) does something very different. Setting deconstruction to work in Kant's third critique, she demonstrates how Kant's system claims to be universal, but is actually founded on the exclusion of specific indigenous peoples. What Spivak's reading attempts to show, are precisely the historical and political conditions of possibility for Kant's claims to universality, as well as the 'philosophical' positions that contain what she calls an 'axiomatics of imperialism'. When Kant claims that the existence of certain inhabitants of South-America and Australia is less natural than others, as he does, then this might serve as a legitimation for colonial subjugation.

Subsequently, Spivak (1999) offers us a parallel reading of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* on the one hand, and the Bhagavad Gita on the other, in which she seeks to supplement Hegel's reading of the Hindu scripture with her own deconstructive one. This is already a remarkable intercultural dialogue in itself, but Spivak's aim is to show that whilst Hegel invokes the Gita to *exclude* India from the teleological dialectics of history, the Gita itself contains dialectical elements which can be manipulated for nationalist and/or colonial purposes. Finally, then, Spivak turns to the afterlife of a notorious statement by Marx on 'the Asiatic Mode of Production', in order to render visible how Marx, along similar lines as Hegel, excludes Asia from his historical materialism. Since Asia does not have the capitalist system, so Marx's reasoning goes, it cannot take part in the revolution and attain a state of freedom. According to Spivak (1999), this is also the kind of reasoning used to legitimate imperialist intervention in Third-World countries. In each of these readings, Spivak demonstrates how the philosophical theories of Kant, Hegel, and Marx are inextricably connected to the prejudices of their time, which, via these canonical texts, continue to influence the present.

To recall, I have selected these two authors—Derrida and Spivak—because they agree with those that argue for the inescapability and importance of tradition, but at the same time, they recognize the feminist and postcolonial concerns of those that have problematized the canon, and rightly so. What both Derrida and Spivak oppose is a traditional reading of the history of Western philosophy that starts from the putative unity and neutrality of the works of canonical authors. And what they oppose to it, is a deconstructive approach to what we read, study and teach. I am not arguing that we all have to become deconstructivists—in the next section I will explain why not. My point is rather that when we want to reconsider the question of how we study and teach, the work of Derrida and Spivak provides us with valuable, if not indispensable, resources.

Critique/Postcritique: Felski's Postcritique

The attentive reader may have noticed that I announced I will confront *three* approaches that provide an answer to the question 'how do we study and teach?'. This third approach is called 'postcritique'. Within the field of literary and cultural studies—if not the humanities in general—the past decade is marked by an attempt to develop approaches to cultural objects that move beyond the dominance of 'critique' in its various manifestations. Within this context, Felski (2015) has recently coined the term 'postcritique' as an alternative for the omnipresent method and style she calls—drawing on Paul Ricœur—a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Felski joins two highly influ-

When we want to reconsider the question of how we study and teach, the work of Derrida and Spivak provides us with valuable, if not indispensable, resources.

ential essays here—'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading' (2003) by queer theorist Eve K. Sedgwick and 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?' (2004) by philosopher and sociologist of science Bruno Latour —in challenging the hegemony of interpretative approaches that start from suspicion and critique.

In this endeavor, deconstruction is criticized for its emphasis on contradictions, instabilities, and foreclosures, as well as for its excessive vigilance and abundant use of scare quotes (Felski 2011; 2015; Anker and Felski 2017). Meanwhile, postcolonial-feminism is taken to task for its focus on ideological oppression and social inequalities, and for its persistent wariness of the reader's own complicity (Felski 2008; 2015; Anker and Felski 2017). This position is all the more remarkable, considering the fact that Felski's first books are all contributions to feminist theory. Nevertheless, Felski renounces feminist critique no less than deconstructive and postcolonial critique, because of their investment in denaturalization, their outright negativity, and their attitude of analytical detachment (Felski 2008; 2011; Anker and Felski 2017).

Yet, one might question whether this characterization is appropriate. Indeed, Derrida and Spivak are focused on destabilizing and denaturalizing, but both have resisted the idea that their approach would be negative (Derrida 1992; 2005; Spivak 2014). In fact, present-day critics have suggested that Felski's postcritique may be based on caricatures (Robbins 2017). Conversely, one could ask whether postcritique could be regarded as a herme-

neutics of trust. These doubts might compel us to consider what method or style—critical or postcritical—would be best suited to approach texts within and beyond the philosophical canon. Needless to say, critical reading has yielded valuable results, also—or perhaps especially so—in postcolonial-feminist contexts, and it will maintain its relevance for the decades to come. But when it comes to reading texts from a diversity of authors and traditions, a largely critical or suspicious interpretative attitude seems to be less appropriate.

Besides a vigorous debunking of critique, Felski's recent writings (from 2008 up until the present) are marked by a rather constructive spirit that tries to develop new forms of aesthetic engagement. From Latour (2007), Felski takes the insight that texts have agency: they are actors that can make an impact on the world by making connections, just like humans, animals, or things can (Felski 2011; 2015; 2020). It is because texts, like all artworks, are actors, that they can affect us and create various forms of attachment: they can move us to act in a certain way, make us feel a wide range of emotions, and change our ways of looking at the world (Felski 2008; 2011; 2015; 2020; Felski and Anker 2017). From the methods of Actor-Network Theory and phenomenology, Felski derives the inducement to describe these experiences, giving rise to novel ways of reading that take texts to be co-actors rather than reducing them to something they supposedly express. In fact, Felski replaces the explanation of texts or other works of art with an effort to describe what she calls the 'uses' of literature (Felski 2008) and art more generally (Felski 2020). The guiding question of her postcritical project is thus not what works of literature/art mean, but what they do.

What if we would translate Felski's theory within the discipline of philosophy? What if we would transpose her project from the uses of literature to the uses of philosophy? That would certainly force us to reconsider why we study and teach certain texts in the first place—which is my third, and last question. Usually, answers to this question resort to arguments of canonicity, whether in the form of historical influence (we read Plato because, as Whitehead famously said, the European philosophical tradition is nothing but 'a series of footnotes to Plato'), or philosophical quality (we read Ryle and Wittgenstein because they proposed such innovative arguments). But could we not also provide justification criteria for our selection of texts without recourse to what Felski (2008) calls 'the canon-worship of the past'? Such criteria would depart from the relevance of particular philosophical texts for the present-day reader rather than their canonicity. As Felski (2011; 2015) remarks, this would involve a rethinking of the relationship between past and present: we would no longer read texts because they belong to a certain historical period or context (such as 'modern philosophy' or 'German

idealism'), but because they appeal to us in the present, as they somehow affectively or cognitively transform us or assist us in addressing questions we currently care about.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to invite academic philosophers in the Netherlands to reconsider three questions: What do we study and teach? How do we study and teach? And why do we study and teach? I used the first question as an entry into the current debate about the canons within the humanities, and the philosophical canon in particular. In the past decades, the body of literature, philosophy, and works of art known as the Western canon has come under increasing pressure for being dominated by white male viewpoints. In the Netherlands, the canon debate has been given a recent impetus by the publication of a series of articles about reforming this 'dead white males' canon for the history of philosophy. I observed that responses to such a reform show great division between those who defend the canon as it stands, stressing the value of tradition, those who agree the philosophical canon should be more inclusive, stressing the richness of diversity, and finally those who have challenged the very idea of a canon for philosophy.

To answer my second question (how do we study and teach?), I turned to Derrida's deconstruction and Spivak's postcolonial-feminism, because they share both a sense of the value of tradition, and a sense for the concerns of those who have criticized this tradition for its limitations and biases. I have argued that Derrida and Spivak both oppose a traditional reading of the history of Western philosophy that starts from the alleged unity and neutrality of canonical philosophical texts. What they oppose to it, is a deconstructive approach to what we read, study and teach, which highlights a multiplicity of voices rather than a unity of thought, and historical and political context rather than merely arguments. Felski's postcritique then enabled us to reflect on the hegemony of interpretative approaches that start from suspicion or critique, like the deconstructive ones practiced by both Derrida and Spivak. I briefly discussed Felski's own approach to literature and art, which starts from the idea that texts have agency and can create various kinds of attachments in present-day readers, to subsequently describe these readerly experiences or 'uses' of literature.

Now, if we want to move beyond the canon, we must not only reconsider what and how we read, but also *why* we read, study and teach certain philosophical texts in the first place—my third and last question. I argued that by transposing Felski's project from the uses of literature to the uses of philosophy, we may be able to develop new justification criteria for the selection of texts within research and education. These criteria would depart from

the relevance of particular philosophical texts for the present-day reader rather than their canonicity. In some sense, this changes nothing: we can still read texts by authors that are part of the current canon, as long as we can justify their contemporary relevance, thus accommodating those that seek to defend the canon as it stands. In another sense, it changes everything: we are now unshackled from tradition, which allows for the inclusion of forgotten thinkers by making a case for the value of their work—thus accommodating those that emphasize the richness of diversity. To see how this might work, let me conclude this paper with two examples.

Returning to my initial question (what do we study and teach?): we might study and teach on the relationship between the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Franz Fanon; not because de Beauvoir is a woman, and Fanon is a person of color, but because each of them makes us think and feel in a different way. And if we want to teach a course on power, exclusion, and civilization, we probably do well to discuss Foucault, but we might just as well discuss Aimé and Suzanne Césaire; not for political reasons, but for hermeneutical ones, if you will; because their work can enchant, shock, or hook us—to use some Felskian terms. What I am looking for here, is a justification criterium that is neither founded on canonicity, nor on mere representation, but one that is founded on agency and attachment, or 'use'. The value of philosophy, I would argue, lies at least in part in its *uses*—which are vital, but understudied. My hope is that transposing Felski's project within philosophy enables us to fill this lacuna, since it may very well be a path on the way to reconcile the opposing parties in the canon debate.

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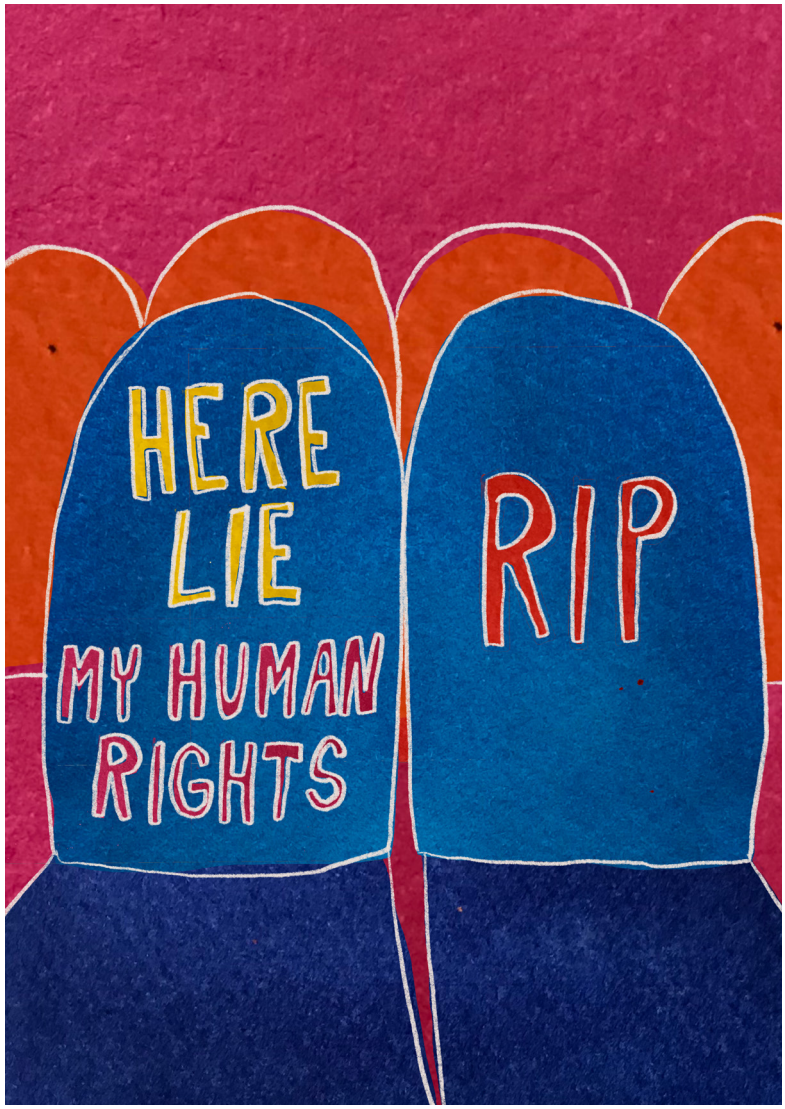

Illustration by Saar Boter

The Expiration Date of Human Rights

Rights of the Living and the Dead

Famke van Vilsteren

Introduction

Mexico has been dealing with a forensic crisis for years. The crisis, which allegedly began in 2006 at the beginning of the war against drug trafficking, continues to worsen every year. More than 111,000 persons were registered missing in October 2023 in the interior ministry's database, not including the many persons who went missing and were later found dead (Eschenbacher 2023). These numbers continue to rise daily. The United Nations has expressed its concerns about the lack of effort put into the investigation of the disappearances and the identification of deceased persons. Despite the efforts of both the United Nations and the Red Cross to organise programs, thousands of decedents remain unidentified, continuing the heartbreak of many loved ones.

This crisis raises profound questions about the right to identity and personhood for the deceased. Did these missing persons and unidentified decedents lose their right to be identified the moment they were no longer presumed to be alive? Do human rights have an expiration date?

This paper seeks to address these questions by first elucidating what human rights entail and why the concept of human dignity is fundamental to these rights. It then explores the notion of legal death, especially the Presumption of Death, and the definition of posthumous rights. Finally, it examines whether human rights expire, arguing that while human rights do indeed have an expiration date, it is not necessarily set at the time of death. This discussion will incorporate the three factors – impossibility, value, and time - related to posthumous rights to provide a comprehensive answer.

While human rights do indeed have an expiration date, it is not necessarily set at the time of death.

To illustrate these points, the paper delves into the forensic crisis in Mexico as a case study. The disappearance of over 111,000 individuals has left countless families in a state of uncertainty. While volunteer groups and loved ones try their best to fight for the rights of these missing and/or presumed deceased persons, they are unable to fully combat the harm caused by the violence that persists in their country, nor by their government, which has stayed passive in easing it.

Through this case study, this paper argues that the lack of government action and the persistence of violence significantly shortens the period during which the posthumous rights of the missing and deceased are respected. The systematic silencing and threats faced by those searching for their loved ones further exacerbate the deterioration of these rights, demonstrating an urgent need for more robust legal frameworks and governmental action.

Human Rights and Dignity

In order to be able to argue whether human rights only apply to the living or also to the dead, the notion of human rights needs to be clear. The framework of rights is substantial and complex. Wesley Hohfeld famously managed to show that this framework can be organised, and he distinguished rights into four different types and incidents (Hohfeld and Cook 1923, 37). These are: the rights to claim, liberty, power, and immunity. From his framework, we can draw the following definition of human rights: "First, rights are moral constraints on the actions of agents; they constrain the behaviour of individuals who can understand and act for moral reasons. Second, rights are grounded in the fact that individual right-holders [...] have their own aims and interests that are distinct from the aims and interests of others, and distinct from what would be best from some collective point of view" (Quong 2012, 623-624).

The foundation for these human rights is human dignity (Kleinig and Evans 2013, 559). The definition of dignity has been a debate within philosophy for a long time. However, the most used definition of dignity is "the essential and inviolable core of our humanity" (Lanigan 2008, 12), in other words, dignity as the quality of humanity. To better understand the idea of human dignity, it can be distinguished into four "strands" (Beitz 2013, 271). The first refers to dignity as a rank or status (2013, 271). The second refers to dignity as a value or a kind of value (2013, 272). According to Kant, the only thing that possesses this value is the moral law. Therefore, from the second strand follows that human beings have dignity through their capability to follow the moral law (Kant 2012). The third strand is the role of dignity in characterising and commending conduct (Beitz 2013, 272). From which follows that dignity can be understood as a generic human virtue and from which the fourth, and last, strand is suggested. This strand refers to dignity as the worthiness of respectful treatment that fits one's dignified character (2013, 273).

From this definition follows that human dignity is not a mere value. The articulation of dignity in numerous international documents shows that dignity possesses a certain foundational significance (Kleinig and Evans 2013, 599). It can be said that the fourth strand, the deservingness of

respect, is the most fundamental part of dignity in relation to human rights. The deservingness of respectful treatment is a foundation for both Human Rights as a concept as well as the idea of the right to human rights. The notion of respect as the foundation for human rights refers to the idea that every individual has a deservingness of respect, which grounds human rights. In other words, the idea that every individual is deserving of respect justifies as well as protects someone's right to human rights. Thus, we can conclude that, as beings with dignity, we possess and should be granted basic human rights (Kleinig and Evans 2013, 559-560).

The deservingness of respectful treatment is a foundation for both Human Rights as a concept as well as the idea of the right to human rights.

Death in Legal Terms

In the debate about the rights of decedents, the idea that dead bodies still carry some sort of (sentimental) value is of utmost importance. If human bodies are believed to carry some sort of significance, some sort of value, it might be expected and arguably logical for them to have rights.

Legally speaking, one cannot be believed to be dead without the presence of a dead body to confirm this (Wicks 2017). The only exception to this is a Presumption of Death. According to the Presumption of Death Act set in 2013 by the British government, one can be presumed dead if they have not been known to be alive for a period of at least seven years ('Presumption of Death Act 2013', n.d.). The period of time before one can be declared dead differs per country, in Europe most countries hold that in cases of general disappearances – disappearances unrelated to any life-threatening situation – one, too, must be missing for at least seven years before they can be presumed deceased (Council of Europe 2009). In China, however, this period is four years (China National People's Congress 2017), and Russia holds that one must be missing for five years before one can be declared dead (Consultant Plus, 2024). In light of the current crisis, Mexico reduced their former legislation and allows the issuance of a Presumption of Death after a mere year (Marquez 2012). Where formerly loved ones had to wait a minimum of two years to request a Declaration of Absence and an additional five years to apply for a Presumption of Death, as of 2012 they only need to wait a year. As a consequence, the number of missing persons in the Mexican Republic has seen rapid growth. Based on the juridical systems surrounding death, one

can conclude that whether it is the lack or presence of it, a corpse is of significant value when it comes to determining someone as officially and legally deceased.

Posthumous Rights

Important to the discussion of the rights of the dead is that a decedent can either have posthumous rights or can be nothing more than a mere beneficiary. Being a beneficiary of rights entails that the decedent profits from the rights of a living person and is, therefore, merely a third-party beneficiary. A good illustration is that of wrongful deaths for which loved ones claim a certain institution or company to be – one way or another – responsible. These companies are often sued in the interest of the decedent; however, should this lawsuit result in the company having to pay a fine or large sum

Based on the juridical systems surrounding death, one can conclude that whether it is the lack or presence of it, a corpse is of significant value when it comes to determining someone as officially and legally deceased.

of money as a form of reparation, the next of kin of the decedent are the recipients. Posthumous rights, on the contrary, imply that the decedent is a rights holder. Posthumous rights are the rights of the dead, or more specifically, the rights that come into being after a person has passed away.

According to Kirsten Smolensky (2008), there are three factors when it comes to deciding whether posthumous rights are granted. The first factor refers to the inability of the decedent to perform their contract and is known as 'impossibility'. The impossibility factor can give the decedent the right to, for example, not fulfil a contract as they cannot perform it. However, the impossibility factor does not only *give* decedents rights, it also *takes* constitutional rights from them. These rights include the right to vote, marry, or run for office. As it is impossible for a decedent to exercise these rights, they are taken away from them (Smolensky 2008, 775).

The second factor is the importance of the right itself. The court decides which rights are valued as important, and therefore more closely guarded, and which rights are seen as less important. The second factor holds that this principle is true whether one is living or dead. (Smolensky 2008, 782) Consequently, the law protects some fundamental rights after death as it would if the person were alive. However, the protection of such rights, for example, free speech or reproductive autonomy, seems illogical. Starting with free

speech, one could argue that the factor of impossibility would dismiss this right as the decedent does not have the possibility to actively perform it. Some courts, however, have suggested that depending on the importance of the case, the right to free speech should be pursued even after the death of the plaintiff. In her article, Smolensky refers to the McIntyre case in which the court pursued Mrs. McIntyre's claim – which stated that the (American) First Amendment should have protected her right to free speech – after her death. This case, according to Smolensky shows that Mrs. McIntyre's right to free speech survived her death in order to protect her right to sue. The idea that the right to free speech goes beyond the death of a person follows from a view called Interest Theory, which holds that the dead have interests that survive death (2008, 766). Therefore, the right to free speech of the dead would entail that these ideas and interests have the right to be pursued after the decedent's death.

As for the right to reproductive autonomy in posthumous cases, it becomes clear that one does not lose their autonomy when one dies. Reproductive autonomy, most of the time, is related to cases in which decedents' sperm or egg cells are desired to be used for posthumous conception. In these cases, the court assumes that the decedent, before their death, had the autonomy to make pre-mortem decisions about what happens to their bodies after death (786). The court then continues this assumption of autonomy and follows the intent of the decedent when making a decision during these cases.

The idea that the right to free speech goes beyond the death of a person follows from a view called Interest Theory, which holds that the dead have interests that survive death.

The third and last factor concerns time. This factor holds that the rights of the death are time-limited: the longer someone has been dead the less likely a court is to extend a certain right to them (Smolensky 2008, 789). The decedent's interest cannot increase in time, as they are no longer consciously aware of their preferences. In addition, decedents need ties to other living people so that their preferences can be recorded. However, over the years these ties fade and so does the decedent's influence. In other words, as the decedent's influence fades, so do their legal rights. Following this, it can be argued that human rights have an expiration date. However, this date is not set at the time of death, but rather years after.

From these factors, it can be concluded that both autonomy, as well as dignity, are the driving force behind the creation of human rights, including posthumous rights. This is evidenced by the fact that the court and the law go to great lengths to support the wishes of the dead and ensure these wishes are respected. In doing so, they protect the dignity of the deceased.

Raising and Answering New Questions

Two questions arise from the given definition of posthumous rights and the factors relating to them. First: Were the factor of time taken to be true for both the dead as well as the living, would living people with little to no influence not also have little to no human rights? And secondly: If the expiration date of human rights is not at the time of death, then when is it set?

As the decedent's influence fades, so do their legal rights.

To answer the first question, it needs to be clarified that 'influence', as used in the factor of time, does not mean the power or ability to affect something or someone. Rather, influence relates to someone's consciousness and ability to express their preferences, opinions, and ideas to those with whom they are in contact. Furthermore, these factors were meant to decide whether posthumous rights can be granted, and thus were not intended to be applied to human rights for the living. However, an additional rule could be introduced to prevent any confusion when it comes to enforcing these factors. This rule would state that for posthumous rights to be granted, all three factors must be true. Consequently, we can say that one has lost their rights over time if and only if they were already incapable of performing other rights and if the court has decided that the rights in question were not of much importance (anymore). This rule makes it, at the very least, very difficult to apply the third factor to rights concerning living persons.

Answering the second question is a bit more difficult. Smolensky's three factors make clear that while the dead do have rights, these rights do not last forever. So, when do they expire? A possible answer we can take from the third factor is that rights fade as the decedent's connection to life fades. This would mean that decedents lose their rights when they no longer have ties with living persons, for example, after those with ties to the decedent have also died. This possibility would, however, mean that some decedents have posthumous rights for a longer time than other decedents.

Case study

This latter question can be tied back to the crisis in Mexico. Whether missing persons and those presumed dead inherit the rights of the dead and lose the rights of the living is, reasonably, a debatable question. There is no guarantee of them being deceased, but neither is there any evidence proving the opposite. They exist only in a grey area, an undetermined place. This paper argues that those presumed dead and missing persons, like those in the case of Mexico, should be granted the rights of decedents, based on the fact that even if they are alive, they have no way to express their wishes and preferences other than through the voice of others. Their disappearance has muted them.

Following the theories discussed previously, multiple points can be made concerning the crisis revolving around the enforced disappearances in the Mexican Republic. First, as this paper has shown, for a decedent to remain in their position as a rights holder, they must have someone voicing their preferences. Simply put, decedents must be remembered. The crisis

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in Mexico has revealed that these people who continue the voice of the dead are not merely family members, but also strangers. There are over 180 search groups spread all over Mexico that voluntarily look for missing persons, identify the human remains they find all over the country, and, most of all, shed light on the violence Mexicans suffer from and the ability authorities lack to combat it (Eschenbacher and Elipe 2022). One of these groups is Las Rasteadoras del Fuerte, a group of women who have managed to find 423 bodies of which 218 were identified and returned to their families (Eschenbacher and Elipe 2022). These women, who were strangers to over four hundred of the bodies that they found, ensured that these decedents retained their right to be identified and fulfilled the right to a respectful burial of 218 people. With no ties connecting them, these women and their families increased the factor of time that Smolensky describes in her theory.

However, this deed is not done without its dangers. Volunteers and family members who continue to actively search for missing persons, whether it is remains or a sign of life, not only face the same violence the person

they are looking for suffered, but they also face systematic silencing from their government. Amnesty International reveals that relatives searching for disappeared persons face serious risks, including facing the same fate as their loved ones and going missing themselves (Amnesty International 2023). Enforced disappearances, especially of those looking for others, have become a synonym for death. As Amnesty International reports, these people include Teresa Magueyal, who was murdered while looking for her missing son Griselda Armas, and her husband who was also killed looking for their disappeared son, and many others whose names deserve to be

Enforced disappearances, especially of those looking for others, have become a synonym for death.

known. This threat is not limited to volunteers and relatives it seems, as the Interdisciplinary Groups of Independent Experts who reported a case of 43 missing students all forcibly disappeared (Amnesty International 2023). The Mexican government continues its efforts to silence the cries of loved ones who stopped asking for help due to a lack of faith, and has worsened their heartbreak by claiming that the number of enforced disappearances published by the United Nations is exaggerated (Eschenbacher and Eschenbacher 2023). Families are denied access to forensic reports and are threatened and attacked by staff of Attorney Offices (Amnesty International 2023). Seemingly, the government and authorities put more effort into shoving this crisis under the rug than resolving the issue at hand.

All of this leads us to conclude that there are two things posing a threat to the rights of the presumed decedents who have suffered under the Mexican crisis. First, is the violence many (young) Mexicans experience and face in the drug industry and within the republic itself. Second, are the government and law enforcement's incentives and efforts to conceal rather than resolve the problem of enforced disappearances, thereby refusing loved ones and volunteers the resources and actions needed to find the missing persons. Ultimately, the factor of time is systematically and rapidly decreased as a consequence of the government's attitude.

When tying the notion of the rights of decedents to the forensic crisis currently haunting many Mexicans, we can conclude that despite the best efforts of families, friends, and even strangers, missing persons and those presumed dead are often deprived of their rights much sooner than is rightful. Due to the government's passive attitude towards finding missing persons and the remains of those already believed to be dead, these people are ripped from the rights that, as proven by Smolensky, they had even in

death. These people are stripped of their right to an identity and a burial, if not many more, by the same government that allowed this violence to come upon them in the first place.

Conclusion

To conclude, the forensic crisis in Mexico, exacerbated by the ongoing war against drug trafficking, has raised profound questions about the human rights of missing persons and unidentified decedents. This paper has explored the theoretical framework surrounding human rights and dignity, the legal implications of death, and the concept of posthumous rights to address whether human rights expire upon death.

Human rights, grounded in the concept of human dignity, are moral constraints on the actions of agents and are essential to the respect and protection of individual autonomy and worth. Even in death, individuals possess posthumous rights that stem from their inherent dignity. Kirsten Smolensky's three-factor analysis – impossibility, value, and time – provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these rights. While the impossibility factor removes certain rights due to the decedent's inability to exercise them, the value and time factors ensure that important rights, such as free speech and reproductive autonomy, may extend beyond death, though they diminish over time.

The crisis in Mexico starkly illustrates the practical challenges in upholding these posthumous rights. The rapid issuance of Presumption of Death declarations, coupled with systemic violence and government inaction, has

The plight of Mexico's missing persons underscores the urgent need for robust legal frameworks and active governmental efforts to uphold the rights of the dead.

led to a significant number of missing persons being prematurely stripped of their rights. Volunteers and families continue to voice the preferences and dignities of these decedents, often at great personal risk, highlighting the critical role of societal memory in sustaining posthumous rights.

The discussion of posthumous rights in this paper emphasises the need for a broader societal and legal discourse on the rights of decedents. It is essential to recognise that human rights do not expire at death but fade over time as ties to the living weaken. This understanding necessitates a reassessment of governmental and societal responsibilities in addressing the rights of missing persons and unidentified decedents.

To emphasise, the plight of Mexico's missing persons underscores the urgent need for robust legal frameworks and active governmental efforts to uphold the rights of the dead. This paper advocates for a continued and expanded dialogue of the rights of decedents, recognising their inherent dignity and the importance of ensuring their rights are respected, even in death. Only through such discussions and action can we hope to address the limitations of current theories and practices, ensuring that human rights are preserved for all individuals, living or dead.

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Illustration by Saar Boter

The (Un)freedom of Dutch Housing

Jonas Hoekstra

In the Netherlands, there is a housing crisis. This fact has been so unanimously agreed upon that it even became one of the main spearpoints in the 2023 Dutch elections under the moniker of 'bestaanszekerheid', or security of living (NOS 2023). The main problems that make up this crisis are the scarcity of available housing and the price of housing that is available. Citizens looking into purchasing a house are often outbid, and those applying for social housing are placed on waiting lists that may take up to 17 years in some municipalities (Buijtendijk & Buijs 2023). One of the main driving forces in this housing crisis is the privatisation of the housing market during the 90s (Kras 2022). This privatisation was aimed at providing more citizens with cheaper housing due to competition on the open market. Privatisation also meant there would be less social housing and more opportunities for house ownership. Why is it that the liberalisation of the housing market, which would give citizens more opportunities and freedom regarding housing, has made many citizens unfree due to their inability to find a stable place to live?

A central turning point often mentioned regarding housing in the Netherlands is the 1990s (Kras 2022). Before this period, it was often the case that municipalities owned large pieces of land and willingly distributed these to housing associations eager to start building affordable, accessible housing. This meant municipalities had control over the amount, size, and specifications of new housing. An inevitable shift occurred during the 1990s when the citizen became important as an individual and consumer. Citizens had specific, personal wishes and desires, which also affected their perspective on the role of housing in society. Creating considerable diversity in housing types and fulfilling more specific wishes regarding lifestyle became central. Adding to this, providing citizens with the ability to own a house privately became a central political goal (Haas, Heerink, and DWARS Commissie economie, n.d., 12). To fulfil these goals, municipalities sold their shares in land and housing projects, thus privatising the housing market.

This tendency in economic politics is also considered to be a shift from socialist politics towards a more liberal mindset. Liberalism, as an ideology, focuses on personal freedom and the freedom to conceive of your own personal idea of 'the good life'. This is also often referred to as the idea of *negative freedom*. With negative freedom, citizens are free to decide for themselves and free from interference from others (or the state). Negative conceptions of freedom also stimulated the liberalisation of the housing market. Citizens would be able to choose a living space that best suits their

taste. Thus, by focusing on providing more options (type and size of a house, private or social housing, etc.), a citizen's personal freedom is increased. While on paper, citizens are free to choose what kind of housing they desire, in practice, they do not have the ability to actually express this freedom. Due to privatisation, housing prices have increased, and the availability of housing has decreased, which has, in practice, made citizens less free. In this sense, citizens are forced to apply to any social housing projects that remain or apply for a mortgage that limits their financial mobility significantly. While liberalism proposes an ideology of personal choice and freedom, the practical consequence is that citizens have become less free.

While liberalism proposes an ideology of personal choice and freedom, the practical consequence is that citizens have become less free.

A potential opening to escape this deadlock in housing is finding a different conception of freedom, namely, *positive freedom*. Positive freedom is generally conceptualised as the idea that citizens have the freedom to actualise the possibilities given to them (Warburton, n.d.). Positive freedom focuses on the ability to make a specific choice. This is opposed to a liberal conception of freedom, which focuses on the opportunity to make choices, not your actual capacity to make choices. Hegel suggested that free will is actualised through the choices that individuals and collectives make; therefore, being able to actualise choice is more an expression of freedom than the opportunity to make choices. A housing market focused on positive liberty is thus focused on realising citizens' ability to receive housing, instead of providing irrelevant possible choices. This would, for example, lessen possible options in housing but make the options that are there more accessible.

To provide some perspective, this idea has already been realised in Austrian social housing (VPRO 2023). In Austria, over 80% of citizens are eligible for social housing and pay comparatively little for their housing. In the Dutch context, social housing is seen as something for 'the poor' and is generally seen as undesirable. This is completely reversed in the Austrian context. Citizens see social housing as something positive and that it does not entail living in poor or inadequate housing. Positive freedom, when translated into providing as many citizens as possible with adequate housing, causes innovative and livable housing options to arise (VPRO 2023).

Additionally, other opportunities open up by providing more citizens with suitable housing. Since citizens can now access housing more easily,

they may also have better job opportunities and access to social and community participation. Thus, by providing accessible housing, citizens have more choices that are open to them, and become, in turn, freer. Citizens in this situation are less restricted and gain opportunities instead of losing them.

While the housing crisis in the Netherlands may seem like a purely practical or technical problem, it is, in actuality, fueled by a specific, negative conception of freedom. Therefore, the housing crisis problem can only be resolved by adopting a new conception of freedom. This can be found in positive freedom, which focuses on capabilities instead of opportunities. Additionally, housing based on positive freedom has already been realised in Austria, which could serve as an example for the Netherlands to tackle its housing crisis.

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SPLIJTSTOF

Illustration by Jordy Hanegraaf

The Earth as Human Condition

Against Negative Worldbuilding in the Anthropocene

Jochem Snijders and Sarah Hanning

In this essay, we will use two thinkers that are not normally associated with debates surrounding the Anthropocene: Hannah Arendt and Achille Mbembe. Even though both of them are predominantly political thinkers, we think their ideas are a good avenue to explore when thinking about the Anthropocene. We aim to do three things within this paper: first, we will use Hannah Arendt's concepts of world and earth – and the relationship between the two – to argue that humans are conditioned by the earth in the creation of their world. Using Arendt, we identify a productivist economy based on surplus and growth without limits that threatens the recuperative processes of the earth, and therefore the possibility of creating worlds. Second, we will argue that productivism not only creates worlds, but is also a process of what we in this paper will call 'negative world-building' in that it creates worlds without meaning or humanity. We see two examples of these negative worlds in Mbembe's concepts of 'death-worlds' and 'zero-worlds'. We perceive these worlds as manifestations of what Justin McBrien calls the 'Necrocene'. Third, we will argue – with both Arendt and Mbembe – for a form of politics that allows for a positive creation of a plurality of worlds. This is based on the idea of a shared earth, and the ethics of cohabitation.

Earth, World and the *Vita Activa*

In *The Human Condition* Arendt identifies three kinds of human behavior and activities that make up the *vita activa*: "human life as it is actively engaged in doing something" (Arendt 1958, 22). These activities are 'labor', 'work', and 'action', and play out in different spheres – or conditions – of human existence: 'earth', 'world', and 'plurality', respectively. We will briefly examine each of these conditions and the aspect of the *vita activa* associated with it.

Arendt at first seems to draw a sharp distinction between earth and world. She conceptualizes the earth as the natural environment in which we, like other animals, live. The earth is characterized by cyclical movement: generations of lifeforms are replaced in recurring cycles that more or less stay the same. The uniqueness of individuals is irrelevant here (Chapman 2004, 64). For the earth, we are simply members of the same species, only differentiated through biology and genetic makeup. Death is not the loss of a specific person, but simply the replacement of one lifeform with another (Chapman 2007, 436). Labor is the activity tied to the earthly sphere: it consists of all activities that meet our biological needs or are part of our daily lives, like cooking or cleaning. These activities have no beginning or

end (Chapman 2004, 62). Products of labor (such as food) are perishable: they are either consumed the moment they are produced, or returned to the earth through processes of decay.

We live on the earth as a biological species, but as human individuals we also inhabit a world that we create through work. Unlike labor, work produces durable products and artifacts, like books, tables – and buildings especially (Chapman 2004, 63). Work processes have a clear beginning and end, as they are done with specific ends in mind: the creation of durable artifacts. The products of work make up our world and provide a stable space in which we can speak and act. As such, work creates products that can never be fully consumed or destroyed (Oliver 2015, 97). Within this stable world we are differentiated in terms of personal identity and moral excellence: we are individuals that are born, live, and die. Human life takes on a linear, rather than cyclical movement in the world (Chapman 2004, 64). While our life on earth – as imagined apart from the world – is necessary for our survival, it only becomes meaningful within the world (Oliver 2015, 74-75). Moreover, while we do not share the earth according to Arendt, we do share the world: human activities are conditioned by the fact that we live together. As we will see, however, political problems within the Anthropocenic context put this distinction between a shared world and an earth that is not shared into question.

Arendt makes a further distinction between *a* world and *the* world. We share *a* world only with some people, while *the* world is shared by all: everyone who has ever lived and will ever live on the earth. Worlds are various perspectives or positions within the world. The "real, true, reliable world" is what these different worlds have in common. The world, however, is not the sum of all other worlds, but rather a variety of perspectives (Oliver 2015, 89). The more perspectives – or worlds – there are, the more we have of the world: not only will we understand the 'real' world better, it will also have a richer meaning. For Arendt (1958), existing together in the world makes us human. That world only exists through the plurality of human relationships that goes beyond "a simple multiplication of a single species" (1958, 90). This leads to questions about how many people are needed to make up a world: can a world consist of only one person? (1958, 87). Arendt herself does not seem to answer this question. For the purpose of our essay, however, we want to emphasize the shared character of worlds, and *the* world in particular.

While the distinction between earth and world seems sharp at first, Arendt states that the earth is a 'limit' condition on the world: it limits where we can move and what natural resources are at our disposal to construct the world; and it determines the conceptual resources we use to build worlds

with (1958, 75). Arendt sees the earth as given, the world as made: the given is a limit condition for what is or can be made (1958, 95). Our relationship with the made world, in turn, restricts our freedom as meaning-creating subjects. Our world consists of things produced by human activities, which condition their human makers. Having a world means being enveloped in a setting in which things have a potential relationship to us (Whiteside 1994, 344). This potential relationship also connects us with others. Unlike private thoughts and sensations, it can be perceived not only by ourselves but by others as well. For Arendt, the things of the world lie between us: they both separate us from others as relate us to them (Chapman 2004, 64).

The more perspectives – or worlds – there are, the more we have of the world: not only will we understand the 'real' world better, it will also have a richer meaning.

This relationship with others brings us to the last characteristic of the *vita activa:* action. For Arendt, action is the capacity humans have to act in ways that are unexpected, and to initiate something new. This capacity is facilitated by – and includes – speech. Arendt thinks that by acting, our humanity is most fully realized (Szerszynski 2003, 204). Because every human being is unique, their actions are unique, too. Furthermore, action is only possible through other people: the condition of human action is therefore plurality (Chapman 2004, 63). Other individuals can react to an action, which then creates an unpredictable and boundless process: we cannot control the effects and consequences of our actions on other people. Therefore, action has no clear end and is only a beginning (Chapman 2004, 63). For Arendt, the highest form of action is politics, which she sees as acting in concert, or coordinated action within its condition of plurality.

Productivism and World-Alienation

In Arendt's view, these three spheres of activity threaten to merge together in destructive ways through a process of 'productivism'. Arendt described this process in 1958, but it seems to be as prevalent – perhaps even more so – with the context of the Anthropocene. Kelly H. Whiteside defines productivism as "an adherence to the belief that human needs can only be met through the permanent expansion of the process of production and consumption" (Whiteside 1994, 340). Productivism – of which capitalism is a subset – is characterized by an emphasis on growth, which for Arendt stems from the modernist reduction of all values to that of life itself. Life processes become regulated through society: all energy is devoted to assuring everyone receives

physical security and a wide range of consumption goods (Whiteside 1994, 348-349). Moreover, society encourages us to become ever more sophisticated in our appetites, removing any limits to consumption. Life is valued in an immediate, sensory way. This means a constant shifting of needs, tastes for luxury, and cravings for additional sources of pleasure, until "eventually, no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption" (Whiteside 1994, 349-350).

Under productivist conditions, the transient nature of labor has infected the permanent character of work. Production and consumption now engage in a continuous cycle, rather than the linear movement of work with its defined ends. As Bronislaw Szerszynski puts it: "questions of utility – of what is being done for the sake of what – becomes as impossible to answer and as irrelevant as they are in nature" (2003, 210-211). The cyclical nature of earth

Action has no clear end and is only a beginning.

in this way invades the durable human world. This is in large part due to the fact that the stability of property – of tangible objects produced through work – has been supplanted by monetized wealth that can flow and accumulate in a way that mimics – or is even an extension of – life's metabolic powers. However, unlike the earthly products of labor that are either consumed or returned to the earth, wealth has the capacity to create surplus. This way, growth overcomes the cyclical processes of decay that kept labor and life in check. Yet surplus is a double-edged sword: as the capacity for growth increases, so does the capacity for destruction. This diminishes the earth's recuperative powers (Szerszynski 2003, 212) Human actions threaten natural systems or cause them to produce very different conditions. This can result in drastic changes to the type and quantity of life that can be supported by an ecological system. On a global scale, this may threaten the continued existence of the human – as well as many other – species (Chapman 2007, 438).

Moreover, as Achille Mbembe (2019) states, western politics transforms from a realm of action and excellence into the administration of a self-propelling life process. Democracy is reduced to the right to consume, making it hard to envisage a different economy, different social relations, different ends and needs, or different ways of life (2019, 24). This threatens our world, as where work serves the world, labor only serves *life itself* without any regard to quality. We are therefore confronted with a growing world-alienation in which people abandon the togetherness of a shared public world for subjectivist consumption. Here we use David Macauley's definition of alienation as

a disturbance in our being at home on the earth and in the world: "a loss of roots and a common, shared sense of place, a realm of meaningful pursuits secured by tradition against the forces of change" (1992, 25).

Not only does productivism then threaten the earth through resource use, pollution and habitat loss, it also threatens the world that gives our life meaning and value (Szerszynski 2003, 212). As Mbembe notes, capital attempts to transform life itself into a commodity in an era in which all beings and species are only valued insofar they are available for consumption. This leads to a planetary pursuit of power and pure profit for their own sake. This power, moreover, is indifferent to any ends or needs except its own (2019, 21-22). Everyday life has been colonized by market relations, wealth-worship, and a mode of production based on the destruction of the natural foundations of life. Our work, needs, desires, fantasies and self-images in this way have been captured by capital (2019, 24).

While productivism yields the benefits of material abundance, it ultimately devours the sources of its own vitality. A society oriented towards growth that is presumed endless will ultimately run up against insurmountable limits. Catastrophe will then only be avoided by fundamentally changing modes of production and consumption (Whiteside 1994, 340). However, within capitalist society we face the choice of producing without regard to social or ecological ramifications, or risk not having access to the minimum of other products we need (Whiteside 1994, 343). Justin McBrien identifies this as a process of 'necrosis': the biological process that occurs after an injury in which cells are killed by their own enzymes (2016, 117). Capitalism works the same way, in that it is: "the reciprocal transmutation of life into death and death into capital" (Whiteside 1994, 117). Capitalism destroys and kills itself because of its own logic. Within this process, capitalist models and practices also annihilate whole ecosystems. Moreover, both extractive (e.g. in Africa) and deindustrialized economies (primarily in the Global North) now quickly accumulate surplus populations: those with insecure or no employment – or who will never be employed at all. For Mbembe, this signifies "a new age of capital when people and things can become the objects of a sudden process of devaluation and expendability. Disposable containers, they are subject to 'obsolescence' and can be discarded" (2019, 31).

McBrien therefore speaks of the 'Necrocene', "the age of death and extinction as a result of capitalist accumulation" (Batalla 2020, 67). For McBrien, extinction and death are essential characteristics of capitalism. Death is a fundamental trait of capitalist practices, since "capitalism leaves in its wake the disappearance of species, languages, cultures and peoples. It seeks the planned obsolescence of all life" (McBrien 2016, 116; see also Clark 2019). Capitalism, according to Mbembe, will either move towards increa-

sing exploitation of large parts of the world through primitive accumulation of resources, or it will use its technological and regulatory prowess to "[squeeze] every last drop of value out of the planet" (2019, 33), most notably through "a planned human intervention in the climate system that would undermine all notions of limitation" (2019, 33).

While productivism damages worlds, we argue that it also brings about processes of negative world-building: the creation of worlds that lack the meaning and humanity of Arendtian worlds.

Productivism threatens to destroy the world in two ways. First, by organizing society in such a way that people withdraw from the world into a realm of superficially meaningful subjectivism. Second, because it wreaks havoc on the earth, therefore endangering *the very precondition* for having a world. With people losing their world, *the* world is damaged. While productivism damages worlds, we argue that it also brings about processes of *negative worldbuilding*: the creation of worlds that lack the meaning and humanity of Arendtian worlds. We base our concept of negative worldbuilding on Szerszynski's observation that activities of labor (in Arendt's definition) can still leave permanent traces in the landscape, therefore producing their own 'worldly' structures. We argue that this holds especially true within the Anthropocenic context, as productivist processes have an ever-increasing impact on the planet. Moreover, these productivist processes often go hand in hand with local power dynamics and armed conflict, especially in regions such as the Sahel and Saharan Africa. This, in turn, is detrimental for how people within these regions are able to construct and experience their world. We find two types of negative worlds in the writings of Achille Mbembe, who explicitly uses world in a way we find in line with Arendt's notion of the concept.

Negative World-Building: 'Death-Worlds' and 'Zero-Worlds'

Mbembe develops two concepts of negative worlds, the 'death-world' and the 'zero-world'. We see these negative worlds as belonging to the Necrocene epoch as described by McBrien. Death-worlds are "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe 2017, 59). They are governed by what Mbembe calls 'necropolitics,' a politics in which life and death are reversed, "as if life was nothing more than the medium of death" (Mbembe 2017, 59). Like the politics of life within productivism, necropoli-

tical power too attempts to erase the distinction between means and ends. The inhabitants of death-worlds are surplus populations: redundant life which has neither market nor real human value aside from the kind of death that can be inflicted upon it. Necropolitics is indifferent towards cruelty and has no sense of responsibility or justice when it comes to these lives it has designated as redundant. As Mbembe asks: "capitalism in its present form might need the territory people inhabit, their natural resources (diamonds, gold, platinum, and so on), their forests, or even their wildlife. But does it need them as persons?" (2019, 30). Within death-worlds, people are not so much exploited as being utterly deprived of the basic means to move and the resources needed to produce a semblance of life – the basic stability needed to create positive worlds.

We find these death-worlds, for instance, in places within post-colonial Africa that are "extractive enclaves, some of which are totally disconnected from the hinterland, in some nowhere that is accountable to nobody except to petro-capital," where "in order to create situations of maximum profit, capital and power must manufacture disasters and feed off disasters and situations of extremity that then allow for novel forms of governmentality" (Mbembe 2019, 30). These novel forms of governmentality come from a splintering of the monopoly on violence in these areas: military forces, police, judiciaries, local warlords, private security companies, and the criminal underworld form complex networks of temporary and shifting alliances to lay their hands on manpower and minerals (Mbembe 2017, 122). To these networks we might add the multinational companies of petro-capital. Repression and illegal trade go hand in hand in these areas, giving rise to

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political-cultural configurations where arbitrary violence runs rampant (Mbembe 2017, 55). Populations are regulated through wars waged to lay hold of resources. They are either killed, or their bodies are made maximum use of: either as manpower for extraction, or for (sexual) pleasure. Perpetrators of war and terror create new military markets, transforming themselves to means of production (Mbembe 2017, 56-57). They form alliances with transnational networks to further their exploitation and export of natural resources, which in turn feeds their wars (Mbembe 2017, 122-124).

Within the Anthropocene, terror inevitably takes on forms connected to the climatological context and way of life that is specific to different ecological environments (Mbembe 2017, 57). In the Sahel and Saharan Africa, for example, dynamics of violence closely follow – and are aimed at controlling the flows of movement and trade networks. Moreover, the desert itself is in movement, changing borders due to natural and manmade climate events (Mbembe 2017, 58). Nature also becomes the medium through which military and paramilitary violence is conducted. The militarization of nature and the naturalization of war are engaged in a dialectic in which earthly matter shapes the contours of conflict, and is shaped by them in return (Mbembe 2019, 21).

While death-worlds are made through configurations of people in places where extractivist capital goes hand in hand with a fractured monopoly on violence, zero-worlds are landscapes left behind – but still marked – by exploitative activities. For Mbembe, these worlds on a deeper level represent the confrontation between humans and matter, and between humans and life. Specifically, it relates to processes in which humans themselves are transformed into matter – and the circumstances in which they perish. In the death-worlds, human life has value insofar as it can be killed or used as a resource. Life in the zero-world instead expands outward towards a different state that has no definite end (Mbembe 2017, 198-199). In the zero-worlds, both people and matter do not return to a previous state through a reclamation by nature. Rather, these landscapes – and the people used in exploiting it – are 'used up' and remain in this state.

In impressionistic terms, Mbembe paints a picture of landscapes wrecked by processes of extraction, littered with rusty machines and the ruins of factories and graveyards, populated by people that assume the same color as the dirt and the earth they mine through "as if they are already burying themselves" (Mbembe 2017, 199-200). Zero-worlds, then, are worlds left behind by the activities of unchecked labor, such as landscapes completely reformed through the mining of rare materials. While Arendt states that labor does not create world, we agree with Szerszynski's observation that labor can leave enduring traces in the effects of its iteration, specifically in the landscape: "the 'collapsing' of patterns of activity into enduring structures such as landscapes and ecosystems gives labor/life the capacity to produce its own enduring *worldly* structures … [that] can serve as an enduring backdrop to human biographies, can provide places and objects for meaningful human interaction, can serve as objects of appraisal and judgment" (2003, 209). The zero-worlds, however, provide no meaningful human interaction. The threatening presence of their objects is only subject

to appraisal and judgment insofar as the inhabitants of the landscape – indentured servants, exploited peoples – can bear witness to what has happened here (Mbembe 2017, 200).

So how do we escape this negative worldbuilding? How can we steer the emergence of the Necrocene towards that of what Batalla calls the 'Eleutherocene', "the age of liberated Earth and Humanity" (2020, 65)? We think this needs to be done by developing a politics that can restore "the witnessing structure of the world itself" (Oliver 2015, 93). We find the foundations of such a politics in the thought of both Arendt and Mbembe.

A New Politics

Mbembe proposes a world politics that is not based on difference but on an idea of equivalence and communality: "are we after all not condemned to live within each other's field of view, sometimes within the same space?" (Mbembe 2017, 62). Due to this structural proximity there is no outside that can be placed in opposition to an inside: we cannot declare 'home' a protected area while causing chaos and death far away, where others live. "Sooner or later, we will reap at home what we have sown in foreign places" (Mbembe 2017, 62). To declare an area as protected can only happen in a mutual process. This requires a world politics that moves beyond thinking in terms of opposition and strangers, but also avoids the trap of a simplistic ideology of integration. More specifically: there has to be a clear distinction between universalism and communality. Universalism is based on absorbing people in a unity that is already formed; communality implies a relation of sharing, to belong to something together. This 'something' for Mbembe is the idea that this earth is all we have, and that it can only last when all rightful claimants share it together. Not only humans, but all species – without distinction (2017, 61-62).

We cannot declare 'home' a protected area while causing chaos and death far away, where others live.

We noted that, for Arendt, the earth is an essential part of the human condition. The earth is the ultimate given: we are all earthly embodied creatures entirely dependent on the world for our existence and freedom. In addition to living on the earth, we inhabit and share the world. The earth allows us to be able to create the worlds through which *the* world – as a variety of worlds or perspectives – becomes a richer, more meaningful place. An Eleutherocene politics should start by embracing the limits of the given. For Arendt, our freedom is freedom precisely because it is bound by what we cannot control and do not – cannot! – master. Our relationship to

the given might change and evolve, and we have a responsibility to interpret the given as it affects our lives. However, we do not have the power to control or master it – and might not even understand or know it. We must therefore acknowledge our own limitations insofar as we master neither the given, nor the made (Oliver 2015, 95-96). Similarly, Mbembe notes that: "If to survive the ecological crisis means to work out new ways to live with the Earth, then alternative modes of being human and inhabiting the world are required. The new ecological awareness forces us to recover an appreciation of human limits and the limits of nature itself" (2019, 21).

Rather than imagining ourselves as limitless, we must create our world – and worlds – with what Arendt calls an *understanding heart*. This means accepting and embracing what is given, specifically the diversity of human existence. Arendt uses the term '*amor mundi*' (love of world) to refer to the love and friendship that carries over into our world-building activity. We should embrace our unchosen cohabitation with other people and other creatures of earth, and attend to them "in ways that open up rather than close off the possibility of response" (Oliver 2015, 102). Furthermore, we should acknowledge our own limitations, and exercise self-restraint (2015, 101). As Kelly Oliver writes: "If we associate what is given with the earth and what is made with the world, this means that for us the earth always requires a world in terms of which to view it [...] finding our home may involve an endless journey visiting different worldviews in order to find ourselves situated – and, more to the point, situating ourselves – amongst them. It may involve wandering to the ends of the earth, metaphorically if not also literally" (2015, 102-103).

This, for us, resonates with what Achille Mbembe calls the 'ethics of the passer-by', an ethics based on the idea that we are more capable to name a place and live in it if we remove ourselves from it. According to Mbembe, we should strive to learn how to continuously travel from one place to another, establishing a double relationship of solidarity and distance (2017, 223-224). Becoming a human in the world, according to Mbembe, is a process of metamorphosis that requires us to embrace the fractured part of our lives; to obligate ourselves to take detours and facilitate sometimes unlikely encounters; to operate within the cracks because we value finding (and giving) a shared expression of things that would normally distance ourselves from others (2017, 222-223).

For Oliver, these unlikely encounters with others should extend not only to our fellow humans, but to other lifeforms as well. Contrary to Arendt, we should acknowledge that non-human animals can also have worlds. Moreover, we should give up our fantasies of control and mastery over nature, and – through friendship and love – embrace the feeling of 'uncanny strangeness' that an encounter with another species gives us (Oliver 2015, 105).

Like Mbembe, Oliver theorizes that: "perhaps the possibility of being at home is bought at the price of continual wandering through the desert and oases of our imaginations and our planet" (2015, 110). We will always require a necessary element of the alien or foreign in every home, otherwise we run the risk of inaction or contentedness contradictory to both ethics and politics regarding the struggle for social justice (Oliver 2015, 103). As Arendt puts it: "The danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it" (Oliver 2015, 103).

Conclusion

In this essay, we aimed to show how the writings of Hannah Arendt and Achille Mbembe might be relevant – and important – inclusions in the growing pile of literature on the Anthropocene. We specifically focused on the relationship between world and earth as defined by Arendt. This relationship is threatened by the forces of productivism, which not only causes us to retreat from our shared world into subjectivist consumerism, but also impacts the earth – and therefore the very precondition for creating worlds in the first place. Moreover, we argued that productivism not only destroys worlds but also creates negative worlds, as exemplified by Mbembe's concepts of death-worlds and zero-worlds. We see these negative worlds as aspects of a Necrocene: an epoch marked by death and extinction. To steer the planet away from the Necrocene into the Eleutherocene – the era of liberated earth and humanity – we need a politics based on our sharing of the earth. This earth is what makes the creation of worlds possible: *the* world that we all share is a variety of these worlds or perspectives. If we want our world to be rich and meaningful, then, we should act in concert to create conditions that allow for a plurality of worlds, both human and non-human.

On a final note, we would like to state that this paper is not exhaustive. Other parts of both Mbembe's and Arendt's thought can be explored in the context of the Anthropocene, though they fall outside the scope of our current argument. As a specific example, both Arendt and Mbembe note the connections between the human-nature divide at the root of western metaphysics and politics, and the subjugation of indigenous peoples by colonizers. Because some indigenous peoples regarded nature as their indisputable master – and thus behaved as part of nature – colonizers regarded them as lacking the specifically human reality of a world outside of nature (Mbembe 2017, 113). More generally, we think it is worthwhile to explore the parallels between Arendt's and Mbembe's thoughts on technology, nature, war and politics. We would like to explore these avenues in future papers and recommend others to do so as well.

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‘The Trauma of Srebrenica’

On the Production of a Victimhood Narrative and Epistemic Injustice

Lea Kerst

Introduction

29 years ago, Srebrenica, a city in Eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, became a synonym for the most severe genocide within Europe after World War II. From July 11, 1995 onwards, troops of the Bosnian Serb military murdered 8,372 Bosnian Muslim men and underage boys who had taken refuge in the city of Srebrenica, which was declared a ‘safe’ area under UN protection (Bosnian Girl 2020). From 1994 onwards, a troop of 400-450 Dutch UN soldiers called ‘Dutchbat’ was sent to the UN zone to protect around 25,000 people, who fled to Srebrenica as the risk of ethnic cleansing by Bosnian Serb forces rose (Fink 2015, 381). The Dutch soldiers, numbering 400-450 in July 1995, were highly outnumbered, limited by their status as UN peacekeepers, unable to carry heavy armor, and highly unprepared (Ibid.). On July 11 1995, Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian-Serbian commander in chief, gave the order to ‘evacuate’ Bosnian refugees out of the enclave. The Dutch soldiers failed to protect the civilians and the Bosnian Serb forces started to separate women and men by leading them into different buses and, later, systematically executed the men and boys (Bosnian Girl 2020).

Today ‘Srebrenica’ remains a shared history that connects the Netherlands and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This becomes apparent in the fact that the Netherlands still struggles with its role of responsibility and reconciliation. In the year 2019, the International Supreme Court of Justice filed a case called ‘Mothers of Srebrenica against the state of the Netherlands’ and ruled the Netherlands to be liable for the death of 350 Bosnian boys and men (BBC 2019). Moreover, there are many Bosnian and Bosnian-Dutch people living within and outside of the Netherlands today, who have survived the war or had relatives that were murdered. This strong connection implies that the Netherlands, whose status as the seat of the International Court also symbolizes a certain moral authority, possesses an important responsibility in the process of historical reappraisal and the establishment of justice for those who experienced violence during the genocide. Crucially, establishing justice should hereby include the creation of a collective awareness of what happened in Srebrenica and the inclusion of Bosnian people in a Dutch commemoration of the genocide. In the aftermath of a genocide, recognizing the harms suffered by those who experienced violence can establish empathy with the group, while the denial of such recognition can reinforce a distinction between In- and Out-Groups after the conflict (Fuchs 2017, 239).

Nevertheless, in the Netherlands, the memory of Srebrenica seems to face the risk of becoming a 'forgotten genocide' that is excluded from the Dutch collective memory, which entails that the histories of Bosnian people today are largely silenced. In the Dutch public sphere, the commemoration of the genocide remains behind and there further seems to be little political willingness to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. A prominent example of this is the European Resolution to implement an official Srebrenica Memorial Day on July 11, which has never been adopted within the Netherlands (Rijsdijk 2014, 143). Also, within Dutch history education, the issue is scarcely touched upon, and many Dutch students today have never heard of Srebrenica. In the year 2020, the Dutch peacekeeping organization PAX interviewed 52 students from the Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen, which showed that only half of the students had learned about Srebrenica in secondary school education, while the other half of the students had never even heard of the genocide (van Berkel 2020, 14). In addition to this large

In the Netherlands, the memory of Srebrenica seems to face the risk of becoming a 'forgotten genocide' that is excluded from the Dutch collective memory.

exclusion of a Dutch collective awareness, the discussion around Srebrenica seems to be almost entirely fixated on the suffering of the former Dutchbat soldiers. Within the Dutch media and political discourse, the rhetoric of a so-called 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' noticeably reappears, which emphasizes Srebrenica as a traumatic event for the Dutch veterans and the Dutch state itself, but paradoxically seems to exclude the experience of Bosnian people from this narrative.

In this paper, I aim to investigate the knowledge production about Srebrenica in the Netherlands more closely and examine how the contemporary discourse influences the commemoration of the genocide. Significantly, I will contextualize the discourse of a 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' as a victimhood narrative that, I argue, is established by Dutch political and educational institutions, which problematically excludes Bosnian and Bosnian-Dutch people from the dominant creation of knowledge around the topic to uphold this narrative.

In the first chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework of this paper and specifically concentrate on how victimhood discourses can be used to construct a single In-Group narrative. Moreover, I will introduce the concept of the cultural archive as a resource of historical knowledge and examine how the implementation of a victimhood narrative in the archive

can cause epistemic harm. In the following chapter, I will examine the narrative of the 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' in more depth and discuss the work of Dubravka Zarkov, who first analyzed the phenomenon as a rhetoric that reappears in the Dutch media. Furthermore, I will apply her analysis to the knowledge production of Srebrenica in the Dutch political discourse. Finally, in the third chapter, I will take a closer look at the body of available knowledge about Srebrenica that emerges as a result of the institutionalization of a victimhood narrative. More specifically I will draw on a case study, namely the study titled *Veilig Gebied? Srebrenica in het Nederlands onderwijs* by the historian Marc van Berkel, which investigates how Srebrenica is taught in Dutch history education.

Eventually, I will therefore answer the following research question: *How does the 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' narrative produce epistemic injustice?*

Chapter 1: State of The Art

Within this first chapter, I aim to outline the theoretical framework for investigating the knowledge production of Srebrenica. Hereby I will contextualize the discussion around the topic within the victim/perpetrator binary, which describes a dynamic that discourses after violent conflicts tend to center around the punishment and responsibility of individual actors. In doing so, they thereby establish pre-defined roles and identity categories of 'innocent' victims and 'guilty' perpetrators (Jankowitz 2017, 2). My central focus point will be to show how victimhood discourses are upheld by a distinction between Out- and In-groups. These groups can therefore be applied as a power mechanism to construct a single historical group narrative and silence competing narratives of those who are excluded from this group identity.

1.1 How Do Victimhood Narratives Exclude People?

The Construction of Victimhood

In the process of reconciliation after a violent conflict, the production of a historical narrative can crucially determine how a war will be remembered and who is included in a national identity. Discourses of victimization can importantly illustrate with whom a group might identify and, through the production of narrative, provide a sense of unity based on the experience of a shared trauma. Narratives can provide a framework of meaning-making and evaluation of historical events (Cobb et al. in Demirel 2023, 3). A shared narrative of suffering can emphasize a collective group identity through a subjective distinction of an In-Group of those seen as 'victims' and an Out-Group of those considered guilty (Demirel 2023, 1). As wars are usually complex and ambiguous, the status of 'the victim' can become a powerful

tool, which actors can use to maintain a beneficial self-identity (Jankowitz 2017, 17). The phenomenon of 'competitive victimhood' stresses a tendency of actors to highlight that they have suffered more than other involved parties (Noor et al. 2012, 351). Groups can thereby emphasize their own experiences of suffering to avoid political responsibility or attempt a peaceful reconciliation (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 230).

Discourses of victimization frequently involve denial or downplaying the fact that another group has suffered harm (Jankowitz 2017, 4). Determining who classifies as a 'legitimate victim' hereby can happen through a rhetoric of 'the ideal victim' (Jankowitz 2017, 17), a construct that first was developed by the criminologist Nils Christie. It describes which individuals are most

A shared narrative of suffering can emphasize a collective group identity through a subjective distinction of an In-Group of those seen as 'victims' and an Out-Group of those considered guilty.

readily given the status of being a victim (Christie 1986, 18). The 'ideal victim' is innocent, pure, lacks responsibility, needs rescue and is hence seen as morally superior (Bouris 2007, 32). As frameworks about 'innocence' are largely socially constructed, the construction of 'ideal' victims is highly biased and often fails to include the experiences of minority groups who are subjected to racist prejudices (Long 2021), for example. Claiming the status of an 'ideal victim' is often tied to a denial of the actor's responsibility as this undermines the group's own 'image of blamelessness' (Lawther 2013 in Jankowitz 2017, 25). A sense of victimhood can be transformed into a more collective sentiment as in-group members may identify with a group even if they have not suffered harm themselves (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 234). The construction of a collective victimhood identity is also often based on an ethnocentric self-image and is also linked to an enhancement of ethnic nationalism (Shnabel et al. 2013 in Demirel 2013, 2).

Othering as a Way to Claim the Status of 'the Victim'

Implementing an exclusive victimhood discourse within a national narrative can thus reinforce a distinction between In- and Out-groups and hence strengthen forms of exclusion in the present. In the process of distinguishing oneself from an Out-group, dehumanization—the process of denying another's status of full humanity—is frequently applied by actors to reduce identification with that group and to establish distance (Halpern and Weinstein 2004, 566). Through framing another party as 'the Other',

members of that group are deindividualized, largely excluded from a moral community (Kteily et al. 2016, 1234), and are further often excluded from measurements of social protections (Rubin et al. 1994, 99). Especially after a genocide, whereby dehumanization is often a preliminary step in the justification of violence, it is important to 'rehumanize' those who have experienced violence by recognizing them as individuals. If a group is continuously homogenized, no empathy and solidarity can be established, and 'victims' are reduced to an essentialized identity. Positioning others as less than human thereby also prevents effective reconciliation, for which it is necessary to counter stereotypes and create a feeling of 'emotional connectedness' (Halpern and Weinstein 2004, 582). A victimhood discourse that includes a clear 'us' versus 'them' narrative diminishes solidarity with 'the Other' and denies identification with the Out-group and their histories. Otherizing an Out-group within a narrative can follow the aim of constructing a single in-group narrative and to silence other competing victimhood narratives (Demirel 2013, 2). In this sense, victimhood narratives can show with whom a group identifies, as well as help to construct a national self-image and identity.

1.2 How Do Victimhood Narratives Produce Epistemic Injustice?

Reconstructing an Event Through a Victimhood Narrative

Binary discourses between 'victims' and 'perpetrators' thus often uphold existing power hierarchies and thereby reinforce structures of inequality and marginalization. For an actor that was involved in a violent conflict, accepting responsibility often threatens a positive self-image and thereby can lead to a 'crisis of meaning' (Hirschberger 2018). Often, this extends into the wider society, which might identify with the group and share a collective memory of the event, which threatens their sense of collective identity (Ibid.). Positioning oneself as the 'victim' of the conflict can hereby become a powerful tool to reestablish such a positive sense of identity, as a victim identity is associated with virtues such as innocence and moral righteousness. One way to reframe a dark chapter in the collective history as a 'positive event' is through a drawing on a narrative of a *chosen trauma* (Volkan 1997), which is a form of collective victimization. Essentially, narratives of *chosen traumas* present an event as a form of collective trauma, which was meaningful for a group as a way of "walking through blood that was necessary to establish freedom, independence and group security" (Hirschberger 2018). To uphold this narrative, actors might apply a number of strategies to silence competing 'victims', whose different accounts of history would not

only challenge the dominant narrative but also a sense of collective identity (Ibid.). Strategies to silence competing histories can include denying the event and reconstructing it in a favorable way (Ibid.).

Implementing a Victimhood Narrative in the Cultural Archive

Historical narrating can thus be an immensely powerful way to establish dominance over competing victimhood discourses and systematically exclude people from the knowledge production of the topic. Through implementing a victimhood discourse as a historical narrative, this perspective can eventually become universalized and serve as the foundation for the cultural archive, which can be seen as a body of culturally accessible knowledge. The cultural archive is a concept that was first coined by James (1990) but is most often associated with Edward Said, who defines it as "particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference" (Said 1993, 52-53) and hence a source of 'common knowledge'. In a broad sense, the cultural archive incorporates archival material such as scriptures or history books, but, importantly, according to Said's definition can also refer to the transmission of collective memory and ideology. In the formation of the cultural archive, narratives are interpreted and sorted out, which highlights that state actors have large control over what will be remembered and forgotten

Testimonial injustice occurs when someone is wronged in their capacity as a knower and is seen as less credible in their testimony due to an identity prejudice.

in the future.

To more clearly conceptualize how victimhood narratives in the cultural archive can uphold epistemic inequality, it is helpful to refer to Joe Melanson (2020, 89). He investigated the creation of archival material after human rights abuse and argues that archives can perpetuate epistemic injustices in two distinct ways. Firstly, through the exclusion of the testimonies of Outgroups at the point of the creation of the archive and, secondly, through the transmission of epistemic inequalities as a form of dominant knowledge (Ibid.). Importantly, Melanson bases his argument upon Miranda Fricker's distinction between testimonial and hermeneutical epistemic injustice. For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on his analysis of testimonial injustice in the creation of the archive.

According to Fricker (2007, 7), testimonial injustice occurs when someone is wronged in their capacity as a knower and is seen as less credible in their testimony due to an identity prejudice. Applying this definition to

the production of government documents after human rights violations, Melanson argues that archives often only reflect the testimonies of a dominant group and can be a means to justify the government's actions and ensure social control (Melanson 2020, 92). In this process, testimonial injustice frequently occurs as the viewpoints of Out-groups are excluded from the historical record, which can manifest itself in silencing specific perspectives or neglecting materials, which are seen as less credible (Ibid.).

Concluding from Melanson's analysis, it thus might be maintained that victimhood narratives can lead to testimonial injustice when actors in power purposefully neglect the counter-narratives of 'competing victims' or undermine their credibility by otherizing them. This wrongs them in their capacity as rightful knowers. As a result of this, the knowledge production itself can be harmed through including forms of dehumanization as a form of dominant knowledge. Therefore, the knowledge production remains highly biased and restricted to a certain perspective.

Chapter 2: The 'Srebrenica Trauma' Narrative

As a relatively recent genocide, the memory formation around Srebrenica is still contested. Both survivors of the genocide as well as Dutchbat soldiers are still alive, and the narrative production of the topic highly influences reconciliation processes and the way that Srebrenica will be remembered. Arguably, it might therefore be maintained that now, 28 years later, the formation of the cultural archive is in a substantial phase. Reports from eyewitnesses as a source of knowledge become less frequent, and gaining dominance over the discourse can be determinate for the establishment of a hegemonic commemoration of the topic. In this second chapter, my prime focus lies in investigating two competing narratives about Srebrenica in the Dutch public sphere. The first is the dominant narrative of a 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' that recurs within Dutch media and, I argue, is further largely followed by the Dutch government. Secondly, there are the counter-narratives of Bosnian and Bosnian-Dutch people, and NGOs in the Netherlands who advocate for more public recognition and demand a more inclusive commemoration of Srebrenica. Centrally, I will contextualize the 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' narrative as a victimhood discourse that aims to gloss over Dutch political failure in Srebrenica and thereby is auxiliary in avoiding responsibility and for maintaining a positive sense of national identity.

2.1 The 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' as a Media Discourse

The phenomenon of a 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' is a rhetoric that has first been analyzed by the military ethics professor Dubrvaka Zarkov, who fundamentally questioned to whom the notion of a 'Srebrenica trauma' is referring.

It is an expression that has been increasingly used within Dutch newspaper articles and several TV shows (Zarkov 2002, 185). Exemplary sources that Zarkov explicitly refers to include newspaper articles with titles such as 'Srebrenica Trauma is difficult to process', which center around the individual stories of Dutch soldiers and frequently emphasize this experience as a specifically 'Dutch national trauma' (Ibid., 184). To make this more tangible, Zarkov defines the narrative of a 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' as a discourse that reappears in the Dutch media and refers to "the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness of the Dutch soldiers and the Dutch military stationed in Srebrenica and the sense of humiliation of the Dutch nation in the eyes of the world" (Ibid., 188). Instead of highlighting stories of grief and suffering of Bosnian survivors, the rhetoric of trauma hence could only explicitly refer to the experience of around 450 Dutch soldiers (Fink 2015, 277) who were stationed in Srebrenica.

The fact that the discourse nevertheless emphasizes Srebrenica as a traumatic memory from which the whole nation of the Netherlands itself needs to recover represents, for Zarkov, an appropriation of the victim's status as a form of a collective victimhood identity. She highlights this victimhood status as discursively constructed by the media (Zarkov 2002, 188), and as a reflection of power relations in the creation of meaning after the genocide. To substantiate this claim, she points out that there is no specific reason to assume that Dutchbat veterans who served in Srebrenica are more traumatized than any other soldiers involved in violent conflicts within the Netherlands or outside of it (Ibid., 189). Nevertheless, Srebrenica is noticeably singled out and framed as a collective Dutch trauma (Ibid., 184), which is particularly paradoxical given the fact that many Dutch people don't know about the genocide. In this sense the expression of a 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' instead functions as a floating signifier, which does not describe a psychological condition anymore, but according to Zarkov (2014, 38) describes a national sentiment of feelings of powerless and humiliation

'Srebrenica' symbolizes an event that fundamentally threatens a positive Dutch self-image of being seen as just and morally superior

that are attributed to the whole of Dutch society.

Through drawing on a rhetoric of trauma, the narrative hence reframes the genocide as a tragedy that 'we' have suffered from, which emphasizes Dutch innocence and moral blameworthiness. According to Zarkov, 'Srebrenica' symbolizes an event that fundamentally threatens a positive Dutch

self-image of being seen as just and morally superior, which is amplified by the fact that the involvement in the peace mission became seen as a symbol of the Netherlands' relevance within international politics (Zarkov 2014, 184). A fundamental result of this trauma discourse is that it opens up the possibility for a narrative of "remedy and recovery" (Zarkov 2002, 38), as 'Srebrenica' is turned into a "universal moral story" (Ibid., 38) which detaches the event from its specific political context. More concretely: a discourse of collective trauma frames all members of the Dutch society as equally suffering from this event, which completely erases differences between the different roles of Dutchbat soldiers, Dutch citizens, and Dutch politicians who share responsibility for the genocide (Zarkov 2014, 38). Simultaneously, this construction of a collective Dutch traumatized subject also highlights Srebrenica as a primarily Dutch collective memory, which can function as a form of legitimization that Dutch institutions produce knowledge about 'their own history'.

2.2 The Knowledge Production of Srebrenica in the Dutch Political Discourse

My aim in the previous paragraph was to delineate the 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' as a victimhood discourse, which reappears in the Dutch media discourse. Importantly this rhetoric is also frequently applied by Dutch government institutions, which emphasize their identification with Dutchbat soldiers and exclude Bosnian-Dutch people from the knowledge production around the topic.

A prominent example are two different 'apology' speeches that were held by the Dutch government in June/ July 2022. The first speech was held by prime minister Rutte within the Netherlands and offered an apology to Dutch veterans who served in Srebrenica. The second speech was held one month later in Srebrenica by Dutch defense minister Kasja Ollogren and addressed Bosnian relatives and survivors (AlJazeera 2022). During the first speech, prime minister Rutte expressed that the Dutch government feels responsible for the perceived lack of recognition of the Dutchbat suffering, and further awarded the veterans a Medal of Merit (Government of the Netherlands 2022). In this speech, the identification with Dutchbat soldiers primarily manifests itself in the establishment of a 'collective we', which Rutte used to highlight the Dutch veterans as representatives of Dutch values:

> Especially that recurring theme of powerlessness: a maddening inability to do the very thing you joined up to do: protect people and defend our democratic values. [...] By confronting the past together we gradually come closer to healing. (Government of the Netherlands 2022)

Through using expressions such as 'our values', the government highlights Dutchbat as an In-Group of Dutch national identity and the collective memory of Srebrenica. The speech hereby follows a discourse that Michael Rothberg (2019, 3) describes as an act of 'solidarity-via identification' with those that are perceived as victims. The alignment of the Dutch government hereby is based on a feeling of sameness and similarity with Dutch veterans, which implicitly also highlights the role of the government to be a 'protector of democracy'. In contrast to the latter apology speech that was held in Srebrenica, this speech by the prime minister is published on the official website of the Dutch government. Accordingly, it is available as public knowledge within the Dutch cultural archive and, in this sense, also serves as a source of identification with Dutchbat soldiers and the Dutch government. Simultaneously, the exclusion of the apology speech in Srebrenica from the Dutch cultural archive entails that the opportunity for solidarity with survivors is significantly diminished.

'Srebrenica is Dutch History': The Silencing of Counter-Narratives

In the Dutch public domain, the counter-narratives of Bosnian and Bosnian-Dutch people, which would arguably challenge this dominant discourse, are repeatedly neglected and largely repressed. This is particularly illustrated by the collective *Bosnian Girl*, a group of Bosnian-Dutch women who have launched the campaign 'Srebrenicaisdutchhistory'. The campaign portrays the faces and stories of Bosnian-Dutch people, who live within the Netherlands and have a personal connection to Srebrenica. One of their core aims is the Dutch government's implementation of the EU resolution to establish an official Srebrenica Memorial Day within the Netherlands and, for this reason, holds conversations with relatives and organizations who have long worked for more public recognition (Bosnian Girl 2020). However, this Memorial Day has still not been implemented and was rejected by the Dutch government with the explanation that "Srebrenica already possesses a more extended attention place in Dutch history education within the Dutch canon and hence is not limited to one day a year" (Rijsdijk 2014, 143).

Their initiative thus visualizes the exclusion and underrepresentation of people who fall outside the collective 'we' that is constructed in the 'Srebrenica trauma' narrative. Moreover, the assertion that 'Srebrenica is Dutch history' further challenges this narrative by highlighting the entanglement of Bosnian and Dutch histories outside of a binary discourse. The fact that the Dutch government has repeatedly and deliberately ignored the perspectives of relatives and NGOs further highlights the testimonial injustice that the group is experiencing. They are not recognized as 'credible knowers',

who would highly contribute to the knowledge production of Srebrenica because the topic already is 'more elaborately discussed' in the Dutch canon, which was established by the Dutch ministry of education.

Chapter 3: Srebrenica in Dutch History Education

In this last chapter, I will investigate the knowledge that is produced about Srebrenica in Dutch school education. For this reason, I will draw upon the case study, *Veilig Gebied? Srebrenica in het Nederlands onderwijs*, by the historian Marc van Berkel, which analyzes how the 23 most important[1] Dutch history schoolbooks narrate the genocide. While doing so, I will especially focus on the different portrayals of Dutch soldiers and Bosnians, who have experienced violence in Srebrenica, and importantly aim to show that Dutch history books follow and transmit the narrative of a 'Srebrenica Trauma'. Centrally, I will argue that this dominant victimhood narrative is upheld by otherizing Bosnians, which undermines their 'victimhood status' and further attacks the credibility of relative and survivor organizations. Moreover, I will also assert that the implementation of this narrative in history books harms the knowledge production of the topic itself, as the body of available knowledge remains largely limited to a specific perspective and an incomplete depiction of the conflict.

3.1 The Portrayal of Srebrenica in Dutch School Books

The Historical Framework

History books might be seen as vital for investigating how a country teaches its own historical narrative as they often lay the foundation for a country's cultural archive. Far from narrating an unachievable 'objective' historical truth, they often show how much importance is placed on a topic and reflect which information a nation wants to highlight. Overall, Dutch history books are primarily focused on producing knowledge about the role of Srebrenica for the future of the Netherlands rather than providing a thoughtful and comprehensive understanding of the genocide. Teaching about Srebrenica is implemented in the *Canon van Nederland*, which can be seen as a guideline for history education within primary and secondary schools. It was developed by the Dutch government to "provide a common understanding of important events in the history of the Netherlands"[2] (Canon van Nederland 2020). The discussion around the topic is hereby included as one of 50

1 For a detailed list of references see van Berkel (2020, 77).

2 This quote was translated by the author, as are all quotes from the Dutch case study cited hereafter, unless otherwise indicated.

windows, which do not need to be strictly followed by Dutch schools (van Berkel 2020, 43). On average, the space dedicated for the discussion of Srebrenica amounts to less than one page (Ibid., 46). The topic is often further disentangled from its historical context and touched upon in the context of the Cold War, the United Nations, or most commonly in the context of peacekeeping missions (Ibid., 46). This entails that the subject is reduced to a very narrow time frame, which leaves no room for a more complex discussion around the events surrounding the conflict. Consequently, Dutch students also do not learn about the trials in the International Court in Den Haag, or how the genocide is still affecting Bosnia today. On the contrary, the word 'genocide' is not even mentioned (Ibid., 47) even though UN courts juridically classified it as such (European Parliament 2015). As a result, the severity of the massacre is minimized, and Dutch students learn about Srebrenica as a single 'event' in the history of the Netherlands.

Even though the Bosnian population is sometimes referred to as 'victims', the narrative nevertheless only emphasizes the suffering of the Dutchbat soldiers.

Meanwhile, Dutch history books often follow the rhetoric of highlighting Srebrenica as a 'Dutch trauma' and determine that the responsibility for the failed peace mission is primarily a failure of the UN (van Berkel 2020, 10). Within this framework, a lot of the books demonstrate Zarkov's analysis that Srebrenica is often placed in a context of international peacekeeping and frame the genocide as a traumatic and meaningful event from which the Netherlands itself can move forward. This framing manifests itself in headlines such as "the Netherlands as a guiding nation", "working together for peace" or "working towards peace" (Ibid., 45). Without explaining who concretely has caused this trauma, one source visually illustrates how the Dutch state is recovering, and in this regard underlines the passive and helpless position that the Netherlands occupies: "*This traumatic experience with peacekeeping missions left deep scars*, which is why the Netherlands is now more careful with taking over international responsibility" (Ibid., 53).

The Different Portrayals of Dutch Soldiers and the Bosnian Population

This victimhood narrative is continued through framing the role of the Dutch soldiers as one of helpless bystanders, who could do nothing to prevent the genocide (Ibid., 10). Even though the Bosnian population is sometimes referred to as 'victims', the narrative nevertheless only emphasizes the suffering of the Dutchbat soldiers. This happens, for example, through outlying

the personal experience of Dutch veterans within multiple personal letters, who "because of the experience of powerlessness can't sleep at night" (van Berkel 2020, 55). Moreover, the narrative often stresses the blame that Dutch veterans had to face after returning and the impact on their lives: "We were personally made responsible as the traitors of the Bosnian Muslims (...) some paid the highest price and committed suicide after coming back" (Ibid., 52).

While there is much room to empathize with the Dutch soldiers as a reader, the entire experience of all people who died in Srebrenica is reduced to a category of the "8000 Muslims who were murdered" (Ibid., 47). The signifier 'Muslim' is further extended in one source which describes that: "the Netherlands had the task to protect *the Muslim-city of Srebrenica*" (Ibid., 53). The textbooks further interchangeably use the words "Serbs" and "Bosnian Serbs" (Ibid., 47) which are two distinct ethnic groups. Particularly, one source (Westerbork 2003) first follows a clear role allocation of portraying the Bosnian Serbs as perpetrators, but later obscures this narrative by describing: "The thing we were so afraid of has happened. We were hit by a hand grenade of the Muslims, whom we need to protect against the Bosnian Serbs. It was to go crazy. The bastards are shooting at their own helpers!" Furthermore: "Both parties easily pull the trigger and against the murdering patrols you don't do much" (van Berkel 2020, 48) and "Bosnian-Serb troops [...] herded together 8000 Muslim men and boys and murdered them in cold blood" (Ibid., 47).

3.2 The Production of Epistemic Injustice Through Dutch History Books

In the case study, it thus becomes apparent that Dutch history books draw a sharp line between the experience of Dutchbat soldiers and the Bosnian population. They further otherize the group by implementing Islamophobic and dehumanizing language frames. There are no accounts of grief and trauma such as depicted in the personal letters of the Dutchbat soldiers, and the Bosnians who died in Srebrenica are entirely homogenized and reduced to their faceless victimhood. Language frames such as 'the Muslim-city of Srebrenica' cannot be seen as 'neutral' signifiers to distinguish the ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but instead highlight a process of racialization as the religious identity becomes the primary signifier not only of the group but also of the genocide.

This racialized language repeatedly leads to historical inaccuracy. A significant minority of Bosnian Serbs lived in the city of Srebrenica during the time of the genocide (Toljaga 2010, 1), while also the equation of 'Serbs' and 'Bosnian Serbs' leads to an incorrect portrayal of the conflict. Depictions such as 'herding together' furthermore draw on linguistic frames that

are commonly used for animals and dehumanize people who have experienced violence in Srebrenica further. Moreover, by depicting the conflict as 'bloody' and the Bosnian Muslim population as partially violent, the narrative draws on Balkanist stereotypes and directly undermines the innocence of the group, which prevents them from being seen as 'ideal victims'.

This black-and-white depiction allows the Dutchbat soldiers, and also the 'traumatized Dutch state', to occupy the status of the innocent 'victim'. This portrayal emphasizes that the histories of Bosnian and Bosnian-Dutch people are not seen as part of Dutch history and simultaneously frames them as an Out-Group of a shared national identity. By depicting Bosnians as a threat to the Dutch soldiers, the narrative implements Islamophobic prejudices that directly attack the credibility of relative and survivor groups as rightful knowledge producers about Srebrenica. Moreover, the misrepresentation of the conflict also causes testimonial injustice in denying survivors public recognition for the harm they have suffered during the genocide.

A severe consequence of the exclusion of Bosnian-Dutch people from the knowledge production is that the cultural archive remains largely limited to the 'Dutch Srebrenica Trauma' narratives as an epistemic resource that can be referred to understand the genocide. As shown above, this narrative is highly politicized in aiming to convey the message that the Dutch state is not responsible for Srebrenica, rather than focused on providing an elaborate discussion on the topic. By excluding important definitions like 'genocide' and implementing a one-sided portrayal of the conflict, Srebrenica cannot be fully comprehended. This especially harms survivor-and relative groups who advocate for more public recognition. Implementing an Islamophobic portrayal within history books that are authorized by Dutch educational institutions further legitimizes anti-Muslim prejudices and consequentially transmits them as a source of 'common knowledge'. If the signifier of 'the Muslims' is today connected to racist and discriminatory stereotypes, this could be counteracted, especially in school literature, by making education more inclusive and more accurate.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated the discourse around Srebrenica in the Netherlands closely. Hereby, I have argued that the discourse of a 'Srebrenica trauma' can be seen as a victimhood narrative that is established by Dutch institutions, which largely exclude Bosnian and Bosnian-Dutch people from this narrative. This exclusion takes place through neglecting the testimonies and accounts of relative and survivor organizations and through the establishment of a strong binary between 'our' and 'their' history, which emphasizes that the group is not seen as part of the Dutch national identity.

As a result, relative and survivor groups are largely epistemically oppressed and subjected to forms of dehumanization within this narrative. Also, the knowledge production itself is harmed, as highlighted by the depiction of Srebrenica in Dutch history education. This education is inaccurate and transmits Islamophobic language frames as common knowledge to Dutch history students.

I have also introduced the initiative 'Srebrenica is Dutch history', which emphasizes the entanglement of Bosnian and Dutch histories and, thus, proposes a discourse outside of a strong binary framework. It is important to destabilize rigid ontological categories of 'them' versus 'us' by implementing the narratives of those who are directly affected. This allows for a more sensitive commemoration of Srebrenica and thus also a more inclusive societal future of the Netherlands.

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What Biopolitics for Nietzsche's *Homo Natura*?

Patrizio Caldara

List of Abbreviations

For quotations of Friedrich Nietzsche's works, I used the abbreviation system employed by *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, De Gruyter.

BGE = Beyond Good and Evil
BT = The Birth of Tragedy
D = Dawn
GS = The Gay Science
HC = Homer's Contest
KSA = Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988.; KSA Volume:Notebook[Fragment] or Page
SE = Schopenhauer As Educator
TGS = The Greek State
UM = Untimely Meditations
WP = Will to Power
Z = Zarathustra

Introduction

Defining Nietzsche's political philosophy is not an easy task. Multiple scholars in recent years embarked on this very enterprise. At first, the debate focused on Nietzsche's a-, un- or anti-political attitude and whether he could be categorized as modern or anti-modern, democratic or aristocratic (see Rodt and Siemens 2008 for a complete overview of these topics). This happened particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the work of Walter Kaufmann (2013) was very influential. According to Keith Ansell-Pearson's *Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Ansell-Pearson 1994), Kaufmann's work rehabilitated Nietzsche's philosophy, at the cost of de-politicizing it. The end of the 20th century and the first years of the new millennium produced a series of influential publications that pushed in the opposite direction (see Strong 1975, Ottmann 1999, and Conway 1997). Manuel Knoll and Barry Stocker, in their recent *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher* (Knoll and Stocker 2014, 2) claim that we are far from a final reckoning. In fact, many recent contributions argued for a deflation of Nietzsche's political dimension (see Brobjer 2008, Leiter 2002, and Shaw 2007). The discussion kept developing and is still very alive today.

One of the branches of this inquiry area asks questions about the biopolitical character of Nietzsche's thinking. In her contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Biopolitics,* Vanessa Lemm discusses four readings of Nietzsche that label him as a biopolitical thinker (Lemm 2017). She distinguishes between four different meanings of the term 'biopolitics', and hence respectively between the same number of ways of reading Nietzsche. The first one builds on Roberto Esposito's reading of the German philosopher (see Esposito 2008) and argues that Nietzsche is the one bringing the immunitary lexicon to its full extension. The second one inscribes Nietzsche in the *thanatopolitical* paradigm and associates him with a 'totalitarian biopolitics' that finds its peak in the notion of 'great politics'. The third one sees Nietzsche as a neoliberal biopolitician, committed in critiquing the modern state in order to free the individual from its suffocating grasp. This view also interprets the Nietzschean overman as the embodiment of the *homo oeconomicus*, a super-entrepreneur (Lemm 2017, 50-51).

If the first three readings tackle classical nuances of the meaning of biopolitics, the last one tries to open up a new horizon of signification. Lemm herself argues for this biopolitical connotation of Nietzsche's work. She advocates for an 'affirmative biopolitics', a politics that "is no longer reduced to concerns around the stabilization of political forms or institutions or alternatively their critique, transformation and revolution" (Lemm 2017, 60). A politics that, instead, strives towards community and justice while overcoming the 'hyper-immunitary' reaction. Lemm claims Nietzsche's philosophy to be one of the most representative of such an approach.

Homo natura *demands to rethink the divisions between nature and culture, human and non-human animals that the classical biopolitics presupposes as its general framework.*

In the background of Lemm's perspective constantly resides the latent figure of Nietzsche's *homo natura*. This disputed concept has been addressed by Lemm herself in her recent book *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics* (Lemm 2020). According to Lemm, the image of *homo natura* stands for an 'affirmative biopolitical posthumanism', namely, "an affirmative discourse that opens up new ways of thinking about a community of life that is shared between humans, animals, plants and other forms of life" (Lemm 2020, 11). This last development of Lemm's interpretation can be uncontroversially seen as building on her previous contribution. Although now the figure of *homo natura* does not inscribe Nietzsche under

an 'affirmative biopolitics', but rather in a biopolitical variant of 'posthumanism'. The shift is as crucial as it is slight. Depending on how much relevance we assign to *homo natura* in Nietzsche's production, we are left with a different categorization of Nietzsche himself. *Homo natura*, therefore, deserves a closer look. How central can its role actually be? How does it relate to other Nietzschean concepts, like the 'eternal recurrence of the same' or the 'overman'?

Pushing further Lemm's proposal, we can see the figure of homo natura as an interesting standpoint from which questions can be posed to the biopolitical paradigm itself. *Homo natura* demands to rethink the divisions between nature and culture, human and non-human animals that the classical biopolitics presupposes as its general framework.[1] Can we still speak of biopolitics in both cases, the anthropocentric and the posthuman one?

1. Homo Natura: Naturalism, Historicism and Philosophical Anthropology

In her book, Lemm presents four different views on *homo natura*. The first one amounts to a naturalistic (or, as she calls it, scientistic) reading. Brian Leiter (1992) is taken as the most prominent exponent of this approach (Lemm 2020, 20).[2] In his proposal, *homo natura* stands for a naturalistic conception of the human as a "natural organism". Leiter argues that for Nietzsche human behavior and values are causally determined by "natural facts" or–as him and Joshua Knobe call them–"type-facts", namely, "heritable psychological and physiological traits" (Knobe and Leiter 2007, 89-90). Borrowing a Foucauldian argument, Lemm discards this option. Lemm claims that a neo-Kantian fallacy resides at the very core of Leiter's view. The transcendental subject that inquiries human nature ends up understanding itself as a living organism with natural attributes that become accessible through the empirical sciences. Beatrice Han-Pile points out that Foucault's argument is against an essentialism that turns "man" into a mere object of nature (Han-Pile 2010, 130). As it is, in this view the transcendental subject is deprived of its transcendental attributes in favor of its empirical ones.

The second option presented is historicism. According to Lemm, Marco Brusotti advocates for a different reading of Nietzsche's philosophy that is critical of Leiter's reductionist approach (Lemm 2020, 24). He claims that

1 Thomas Lemke reports that Gesa Lindemann (2002) and Bruno Latour (1993) have "convincingly and from different perspectives criticized this anthropocentric curtailment of the biopolitical problematic" (Lemke 2011, 96).

2 Lemm also refers to Christian Emden (2014) in a footnote, but underlines his distance from Leiter's approach.

Nietzsche is committed to both a critique of natural sciences and a thorough rethinking of the relation between them and the human sciences as a kind of natural history (Brusotti 2014). By that, Brusotti means "the collection and surveying of a great variety of moralities in Nietzsche so as to be able to investigate what lies beneath the phenomenon of moral behaviour" (Lemm 2020, 24). According to him, *homo natura* stands for a "repressed basic type" that has to be recovered (Brusotti 2014, sect. 7.4). Lemm claims that in this view "*homo natura* is meant to clear the slate from 'mistaken metaphysical anthropologies' (ibid., sect. 7.5) in order to 'breed' a new higher type of human being" (Lemm 2020, 25). She argues that "Brusotti's reading of aphorism 230 produces a problem similar to the one found in Leiter's" (Lemm 2020: 27). If Leiter's reduction flattens the *homo* dimension onto the *natura* one, Brusotti proposes the opposite reduction: his "focus is on *homo* (the seeker of knowledge) and thus may run the risk of reducing the human being to a (transcendental) subject of knowledge" (ibid.).

Both the presented accounts fail, for Lemm, to live up to what she calls the perspective of philosophical anthropology. Lemm claims that "the question of human nature cannot be separated from the question of human knowledge" (ibid., 28). Philosophical anthropology considers the human as a living being that "produces knowledge that is lived and reflected in nature" (ibid.). In her view, Nietzsche's philosophy adheres to this conception. He writes:

> Know thyself is the whole science. Only once the human being has gained knowledge of all things will the human being know itself. For things are nothing but the limits of the human being. (D, 48)

For Lemm, this aphorism clearly states that knowledge produced by natural and human sciences "must be conceived within the human being's experience of itself as a living being. [... T]ruth is produced by and inseparable from the living philosopher's self-experimentations" (Lemm 2020, 29).

The third option is the philosophical anthropology approach proposed by Karl Löwith (1933). In his study he argues that Nietzsche does not understand philosophy as a closed metaphysical system. Rather, philosophy resolves in the "basic question" about what the human being is. Truth is no longer at the center of the philosophical enterprise: probity (*Redlichkeit*) takes its place (ibid., 43-44). For Lemm, what Löwith thinks is at stake in BGE is "the transformation of a pure philosophy of spirit into a multifaceted philosophy of the human being whose authors understand themselves as both 'last' and 'future' philosophers" (Lemm 2020, 29). The probity, to see the necessity of the return to a more natural human being, is the key for such a

transmutation. But *homo natura*, for Löwith, cannot be the figure that stands for this enterprise. Its features are too polemical and reactive against Christian morality: *homo natura* shows itself being a parasitic notion, not standing by itself. Lemm also recalls that Löwith deems Nietzsche's conception of life as vague and indeterminate, "oscillating between purely naturalistic and physiological explanations of the human and an articulation of moralistic/immoralistic interpretation of the world" (ibid., 30).

Lemm herself proposes a fourth reading that adheres to the philosophical anthropology approach. We will talk further about her proposal in the following section. Nonetheless, she extensively criticizes Löwith's view, proposing some revisions (ibid., ch. 2). She argues that his account of human nature has an excessively anthropocentric character that prevents him from adequately capturing Nietzsche's conception of human life (ibid., 44). In fact, "[f]rom the perspective of philosophical anthropology, 'life' can only be conceived within the horizon of the human being's lived experience of the world" (ibid., 46). Even knowledge itself is nothing but a self-understanding

The naturalness of human life can no longer be expressed from a human point of view.

of the human being: the notions of "life", "human", "nature" and "natural" are "constructs of the human being's lived experience in the world" (ibid.). Löwith himself writes that for Nietzsche: "[m]eaning exists only in accordance with what the human being means to himself" (Löwith 1933, 60, en. tr. Vanessa Lemm). But this focus on the human is not what Nietzsche had in mind, according to Lemm. Rather, "what Nietzsche uncovers behind the 'many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations' (BGE 230) of human nature is the animality of human being" (Lemm 2020, 51). For her, the anthropocentric tendency is what drives Löwith to read the figure of *homo natura* as non-coherent, and hence fails to apply the charity principle.[3] The naturalness of human life can no longer be expressed from a human point of view.

Lemm moves a further critique to all the mentioned approaches. Their understanding of "nature" does not coincide with Nietzsche's one. When conceiving of nature, the first two accounts draw from the life sciences in the nineteenth century (Lemm 2020, 43). But Nietzsche explicitly refuses such an approach. She reminds us that the German philosopher recom-

3 I.e., the methodological principle that prescribes to choose, if available, a coherent and rational interpretation of a given theory (or statement) over an attribution of irrationality, logical fallacies or falsehoods.

mends us to "beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities". But necessity for Nietzsche means anarchy: "there is no one who commands, no one who obeys, no one who transgress[es]" (GS 109). As a posthumous fragment from summer 1882 makes clear: "Chaos sive Natura" (*KSA* 9:21[3]). This Dionysian conception of nature is what Lemm thinks none of the previous interpretations had sufficiently considered.

Lemm claims that what Nietzsche is attempting is to recover "the animality of the human being as the wellspring of its creativity: as the source of what is 'human and in its own human way natural' (Löwith 1933, 64, en. tr. by Vanessa Lemm)" (Lemm 2020, 51). Animality, here, does not refer to a "Darwinian account of biological life", nor to "a consideration of the natural history of morals, where animality is simply what needs to be 'repressed' and 'disciplined'" (ibid., 52). Animality is crucial to Nietzsche's understanding of human culture as self-cultivation: invoking the truth of *homo natura*, Nietzsche "seeks to transform the human being back into an animal that generates culture" (ibid.). This idea comes directly from his early philosophical production. In HC Nietzsche opens with the following statements:

> If we speak of *humanity*, it is on the basic assumption that it should be that which *separates* man from nature and is his mark of distinction. But in reality there is no such separation: 'natural' characteristics and those called specifically 'human' have grown together inextricably. Man, at the finest height of his powers, is all nature and carries nature's uncanny dual character in himself. Thus the Greeks, the most humane people of ancient time, have a trait of cruelty, of tiger-like pleasure in destruction, in them [...]. (HC, 174)

A kind of natural and animal cruelty is therefore what defines and is inextricably bound to humanity. Accordingly, Lemm reports that for Nietzsche culture is a thirst for "the spicy potions of the great Circe, 'cruelty'" (BGE 229). We can already see emerging the belief that will be further explored in BT, where Nietzsche develops the idea that Greek's beauty is only possible as an Apollonian sublimation of the dreadful Dionysian substratum.

> But what lies *behind* the world of Homer, as the womb of everything Hellenic? [... W]here do we look if we stride backwards into the pre-Homeric world, without Homer's guiding and protecting hand? Only into night and horror, into the products of a fantasy used to ghastly things. (HC, 175)

She argues that, in order to really grasp Nietzsche's conception of culture, nature and animality, one ought to turn to his reception of the Greek thought (Lemm 2020, 55).

This move is precisely what distinguishes Lemm's approach from Löwith's. Having the Cynics in mind specifically, she claims that Greek thought elicited Nietzsche's belief that animality is "a source of value in its own right" (ibid., 54). The natural aspect of the human being needs to be enhanced not in order to better define the boundaries of the *anthropos* (as Löwith seems to suggest), but to move beyond the Roman-Christian conception of *humanitas*. As it is, for Lemm, Nietzsche's philosophy moves "beyond both humanism and anthropocentrism" (ibid.).

2. Homo Natura: Cynics, Sex and Posthumanism

Let's now turn to Lemm's interpretation of *homo natura*. As mentioned above, what clearly departs Lemm's philosophical anthropology approach from Löwith's is the focus on the Greeks. Aided by Foucault's text *The Courage of Truth* (2011), she proposes that the Nietzschean probity (*Redlichkeit*) is the best translation of Cynics' *parrhesia*. This virtue of "truth-telling" and "free-spokenness" is, according to Lemm, comparable to the probity required by Nietzsche to approach the "*terrible* basic text (*schreckliche Grundtext*)" *homo natura*. Interestingly, Cynics' objective is to recover a more natural way of living and, already for them, "this return to nature passes through an overcoming of conventional and hence false interpretations of human nature and is an essential aspect of their understanding of *parrhesia*" (Lemm 2020, 31). Furthermore, according to Lemm, the ancient Cynics provide "an example of the philosophical life and of probity as lived and embodied truth where the return to nature [...] enables a transvaluation of all values" (ibid.). As the Nietzschean free spirits must blot out any "overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over the eternal basic text *homo natura*" (BGE 230), so too the Cynics "seek to overcome the barriers that civilization has erected between nature and the human being" (Lemm 2020, 32). The results of this enterprise are puzzling: this new naturalization reveals the plural and ever-becoming character of human nature. No essence or foundation can be found at the very bottom of the human. In Lemm's words: "[t]he question of *homo natura* is not a question of what we are (scientistic naturalism) or how we have become what we are (natural history), but of what else we could become (philosophical anthropology)" (ibid., 33). All those commonalities lead her to argue that "Nietzsche's notion of probity and of the natural human being may have been inspired by the ancient Cynics" (ibid.).

One of the most original theses proposed by Lemm is that Nietzsche's *homo natura* is not just an attempt to recover nature in the form of animality, but also in the form of vegetality. In BGE 44 Nietzsche speaks of the human being as the "human plant" that has been uprooted from its natural soil. Human beings share with plants what she calls a "transformative force" (Lemm 2020, 62) that enables the both of them to relate with their environment. Furthermore, since antiquity plants are thought to possess the most basic soul, namely the nutritive one, that is also shared by all the other living beings. Interestingly, this very attribute is also central to Nietzsche's will to power. She recalls a posthumous aphorism that describes life as will to power in such terms: "a multiplicity of forces linked to each other through a common process of nutrition" (*KSA* 10:24[14]). This nutrition process is not merely preserving the human being, it is also a transformative force. In BGE 231 Nietzsche speaks of this other kind of nutrition that changes us, as well as learning and knowledge do. Lemm claims that this following aphorism is meant to be read in the same context of 230. She writes: "[f]rom the perspective of plant life, transplanting the human back into nature produces a type of nutritive knowledge which has transformational power and is future-oriented" (Lemm 2020, 66).

Nietzsche's homo natura *is not just an attempt to recover nature in the form of animality, but also in the form of vegetality.*

It is exactly the weight put by Nietzsche on knowledge–particularly on the transformative character of self-knowledge–that drives Lemm towards a Greek reading of *homo natura*. Pierre Hadot (1995) has claimed that ancient philosophy was ultimately intended as practical. Knowledge was primarily self-knowledge: a way to learn how to properly live, how to face death, and so on. From modernity onwards, philosophy as a spiritual exercise was progressively abandoned. Notwithstanding rare exceptions–like Spinoza–the first contemporary philosopher to break this pattern is Nietzsche (Hadot 1995: 108). One more time the pursuit of knowledge "can no longer be considered apart from the life of the philosopher" (Lemm 2020, 31). What differs in Lemm's reading is the lack of focus on an explicit ethical dimension of analysis. Knowledge as a transformative force is not merely intended as a 'spiritual exercise' of the self. To be sure, the question of how far truth can be embodied (GS 110) is still an experiment, a continuous self-experiment meant to discover and create new forms of life (Lemm 2020, 32). But, for her, with *homo natura* also a (bio)political dimension is disclosed.

The author argues that "Nietzsche's pursuit of the theme of *homo natura* does not end with aphorism 230", rather, "aphorisms [...] 231-9 introduce sexuality as a third element in the relationship between the human being (*homo*) and nature (*natura*) that is crucial to the transformation of the human civilization towards a more genuine and natural humanity" (ibid., 118). She argues that *homo natura* is linked to the problem of sexuality since, while speaking about the "basic problem 'man and woman'", "woman as such" and the "Eternal Feminine", Nietzsche also speaks about woman's 'nature' and claims it to be "more 'natural' than man's" (BGE 239). He also warns that "[w]herever the industrial spirit has triumphed" women want to become more and more like men: "'woman as clerk' is inscribed on the gate to the modern society" (BGE 239). But this movement, seen as a form of *progress*, is producing a departure of women from nature: once again, a new layer is being added to the "basic text *homo natura*", and "*woman is retrogressing*" (BGE 239). Lemm claims that the re-naturalization of the human being is seen by Nietzsche as a "libera-

Sexual nature here is not a biological given, anterior to any social or symbolic construction.

ting [...] empowering experience that allows individuals to rediscover in their sexuality a creative and transformative force" (Lemm 2020, 112). According to her, Nietzsche is close to contemporary feminists–like Judith Butler–who advocates for a re-embodiment of sexuality that affirms the human as a "more natural" sexual being. Sexual nature here is not a biological given, anterior to any social or symbolic construction (ibid., 113). The anti-foundational character of Nietzsche's philosophy points toward a Dionysian human nature as chaos of drives that, precisely in this lack of a clear and defined biological path, can establish a creative-sexual life.

For Lemm, "Nietzsche's discourse on sexuality needs to be situated within the broader biopolitical context of the nineteenth century" (ibid., 116). As argued by Foucault (1990), sexuality emerges as a dispositive of governmentality due to a biopolitical reason: it is the pivotal point around which revolve both the production and re-production of individuals. To have a firm grasp over the ways through which sexualization happens means to have control on the modes of subjectification. It makes sense, then, that Nietzsche decided to explore sexuality and human nature in Chapter 7, "Our Virtues", of BGE. In it, he "sets the tone for a cultural renewal of Europe [...] by raising the question of what virtues, if any, are required to realise a transition (*Übergang*) towards a morality beyond good and evil" (ibid., 122). Furthermore, Lemm claims that for Nietzsche "the debate on the Dionysian is decidedly biopolitical: the Dionysian approach to sexuality understands

it from the start as entanglement of nature and politics" (Lemm 2020, 125). Following Johann Jakob Bachofen, Nietzsche highlighted the female and matriarchal character of Dionysus' cult in order to critique the bourgeois Christian civilization (Lemm 2020, 125). According to Lemm, Nietzsche "places the task of fashioning *homo natura* under the name of Dionysus in order to identify in sexuality the primary site of the liberation of the modern individual", but also to embrace "sexuality as a vehicle of social transformation" (ibid., 124).

This Dionysian interpretation of sexuality is, for her, a direct consequence of Nietzsche's archaic conception of nature as an "uninterrupted becoming" and an "underlying force" that determines an "eternal cycle of life" made of "contest or war between opposites" (ibid., 155). She argues that, for Nietzsche, "sexual difference arises out of a relationship, a productive tension or *agon* between 'man and woman', and as such undermines any attempt to conceive their relationship as one between opposite binary poles" (ibid.). This tragic conception of sexes is precisely what enables him to critically address "the socialization of sexuality in the nineteenth century" (ibid., 153). If *homo* is *natura*, and nature is tragic, so is the human being. But then, all the social constructs that fixate the human are nothing but unnecessary layers painted over *homo natura* that need to be scraped off. Here, nature immediately has a political charge, as well as politics (culture) has a (second) natural dimension. Borrowing Lemm's words: "[t]he biopolitical dimension of Nietzsche's thinking about sexuality and gender requires bringing together both the sexualization of nature and the socialisation of nature" (ibid., 157).

She goes even further with her claim. *Homo natura* does not stand just for a biopolitical figure–as *homo sacer* could be for Giorgio Agamben's *thanatopolitics* or *homo oeconomicus* could be for Foucault's biopolitical interpretation of neo-liberalism. From a biopolitical perspective, "and employing Giorgio Agamben's concept, there is no *anthropos* without an 'anthropological machine'". This last works by separating an originary community of life for which the distinction between *zoe* and *bios* is untenable. Then, it recombines *zoe* and *bios* in an apparatus through which power is exercised over life" (ibid., 170). But such an 'anthropological machine' is exactly what is missing in *homo natura*. What Lemm proposes is a 'biopolitical posthumanism' that "turns on recovering a community of life beyond all attempts to immunize one species being against another" (ibid.). This markedly anti-humanistic and anti-anthropocentric approach is, for her, the key for an 'affirmative biopolitics' that acknowledges life as a becoming that "conti-

nuously forms and transforms, creates and recreates itself in and through its multiple encounters with other forms of life" (ibid., 175). Nietzsche's *homo natura* embodies, according to Lemm, all those features.

3. Homo Natura: Stoics, Ethics and Politics

Let us now draw our attention to a different reading that develops in an alternative direction the common insight shared by Lemm and Hadot about philosophy as a practical matter. We will call this other approach the *ethical* reading of Nietzsche. This term is not intended to have a moral meaning: "the word 'ethical' denotes a way of being and behaviour. Somebody's *ethos* is evident in their clothing, appearance, gait, and in the calm with which they respond to every event" (Ansell-Pearson 2014, 283). Ethos is also the character of an individual (Fabbrichesi 2022, 21), the set of their *existential habitus*. In his contribution to *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*, Keith Ansell-Pearson claims that we can read Nietzsche's enterprise precisely in this ethical sense, at least during his middle period. According to him, Nietzsche is looking for a personal ethics: "Nietzsche wishes to replace morality [...] with a care of the self. We go wrong when we fail to attend to the needs of the 'ego' and flee from it" (Ansell-Pearson 2014, 282). He recalls a posthumous fragment to support his claim:

> It is a myth to believe that we will find our true or authentic self once we have left out or forgotten this and that. That way we pick ourselves apart in an infinite regression: instead, the task is to *make ourselves*, to *shape* a form from all the elements! The task is always that of a sculptor! A productive human being! *Not* through knowledge but through practice and an exemplar do we become *ourselves*! Knowledge has, at best, the value of a means! (*KSA* 9:7[213])

For Ansell-Pearson, the original source of such beliefs is to be found in ancient thought. In particular, he identifies in Nietzsche the influence of Epicurus and of the Stoic Epictetus.

Both Lemm and Ansell-Pearson stress the Greek heritage in Nietzsche's thought. But, if she goes along with Esposito and claims for a clear (bio)political dimension of Nietzsche's operation, Ansell-Pearson takes the opposite direction. To be sure, is not that Nietzsche's thought is disinterested in or lacks a political level. He "recognizes the fundamental bio-political tendencies of modernity and the way they will impact on individuals, leading ultimately to a political technology of control and discipline" (Ansell-Pearson 2014, 273). Esposito is probably right in claiming that, although Nietzsche did not formulate the term 'biopolitics', he nonetheless "anticipated the entire

biopolitical course that Foucault then defined and developed" (Esposito 2008, 85). However, for Ansell-Pearson "[t]his is not to say that Nietzsche is a political thinker in *Dawn*; it would be much more incisive to describe his project at this time as one of an ethics of resistance" (Ansell-Pearson 2014, 270). We encounter "a Nietzsche preoccupied with the care of the self and in opposition to the fundamental disciplinary tendencies of bio-political modernity" (ibid.).

Belonging to the same productive period of D is the GS. In it we can clearly see emerging for the first time in Nietzsche's thought some of the critical notions that will be further developed in the last part of his career, like *amor fati* (GS 276), eternal recurrence (GS 341) and Zarathustra (GS 342). If Ansell-Pearson is right, then such concepts are to be interpreted in the wider context of Nietzsche's quest for a personal ethics (a *techne tou biou*), a unique way to cope with the difficulties he was facing during his life. This is also what Rossella Fabbrichesi claimed in her recent book *Vita e Potenza: Marco Aurelio, Spinoza, Nietzsche* (2022). Browsing in Nietzsche's writings and correspondence, Fabbrichesi weaves a narrative that brings together the German thinker's life and philosophical production in an untangleable knot. *Amor fati* and 'eternal recurrence' are 'spiritual exercises' meant to help facing some of the darkest periods of Nietzsche's existence and strive to attain what he calls the 'great health' (GS 382). In order to do so, a posthumous fragment from 1882 exhorts us to become 'periodical beings', 'identical' to existence (*KSA* 10:1[70]).[4] The exhortation is then to conform to the primordial law of the circle and to go through the ring of recurrence (*KSA* 9:11[157]).[5] Indeed Nietzsche admonishes that "Everything becomes and recurs eternally – escape is impossible!" (WP 1058). Escape is then perhaps not even desirable. According to Fabbrichesi, even the "become who you are" motto is, in the end, an exhortation to go through the ring of recurrence. The aim of 'eternal recurrence' would then be to unmask the ego and to redirect man towards nature. Assertions such as "[t]he *ego* is a hundred times more than merely a unit in the chain of members; it is this chain itself, entirely" (WP 682) or "[w]e are *more* than the individuals: we are the whole chain as well, with the tasks of all the futures of that chain" (WP 687) seem to confirm what we just suggested. Like the Stoic thinkers, Nietzsche asks us to become *homologoumenos* with nature. The best existential attitude (*ethos*) is then the one that merges man and nature together. Ina Fabbrichesi's words: "feeling like 'fragments of fate' must not be reduced to a diminutive formulation

4 "Wir dürfen nicht Einen Zustand wollen, sondern, müssen periodischen Wesen werden wollen = gleich dem Dasein".

5 "Der Kreislauf ist nichts Gewordenes, er ist das Urgesetz".

that weakens the singular part, rather, it should be read as the adhesion to a physics that listens to the 'eternal basic-text *homo natura*'" (Fabbrichesi 2022, 173, my translation). In the ethical reading, *homo natura* stands for the best ethical attitude (*ethos*) humans should strive for. At the end of the path of renaturalization we find the former human beings that were able to make *amor fati* their innermost nature (EH, Wagner 4) and to bear the abysmal thought of the *eternal recurrence*, namely the *overmen*. But this attainment is reached only after a long way of self-knowledge and self-empowerment (*enkrateia*) in which one has become who one has learned to be.

Amor fati *and 'eternal recurrence' are 'spiritual exercises' meant to help facing some of the darkest periods of Nietzsche's existence and strive to attain what he calls the 'great health'.*

The political need can only follow this process. To be sure, Nietzsche's philosophy does not lack a political dimension at all. Manuel Knoll (2014) presents a reading of Nietzsche's whole parabole that advocates for a continuity in Nietzsche's political thinking from the start of his philosophical production to the end. Knoll claims that already in Nietzsche's posthumous essay TGS (written in 1872) his political view is clear: "Nietzsche claims that the 'Olympian existence', the 'generation and preparation of the genius', is the 'actual goal of the state'" (Knoll 2014, 241). Knoll argues that such a view is confirmed in the third UM, SE (appeared in 1874), in which it is stated that "[m]ankind must work continually at the production of individual great men–this and nothing else is its task" (SE 6). Knoll proposes two theses in his contribution: 1) the early writings already "contain essential elements of Nietzsche's later conception of the '*Übermensch*", setting then the overman "at the center of Nietzsche's entire philosophical thought" (Knoll 2014, 241-242); 2) "Nietzsche conceives the generation of a higher type of man or '*Übermensch*' not primarily as the affair of an isolated individual but as a social and political task" (ibid., 242). In contrast, what Ansell-Pearson and Fabbrichesi show is that politics was probably not always at the core of his concerns. First of all, one has to empower oneself to then be able to turn to society at large in order to transform it.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding the clear differences, Lemm's reading and the ethical one are compatible with each other. Their pictures of *homo natura* find a strong connection in the anti-anthropocentric character of the Nietzschean

figure. In the ethical view, such a feature is declined as anti-humanistic. Specifically, Nietzsche's enterprise is seen as an overcoming of the Christian *humanitas*. There is no separation between nature and culture, humans and animals, material and spiritual. We are "pieces of fatum" and, as such, we have to find the best *habitus* (*ethos*) to cope with existence. But this is not solely a human prerogative: every living being is up for this challenge. No God makes human beings special; no afterlife should distract us from this self-empowering (spiritual) exercise of self-knowledge. On the other hand, Lemm focuses more on the social and political implications of Nietzsche's *homo natura*. In her view, the anti-anthropocentric character takes the shape of an 'affirmative biopolitical posthumanism'. Since no line can be drawn between humans, animals and plants, we should strive for the creation of a political community that breaks up with the immunitary logic. This paper argues that Lemm's reading can be interpreted as the political concretization of the ethical need that we find at least since Nietzsche's middle period.

This combined view puts a lot of weight on *homo natura*'s shoulders. Its figure becomes central in Nietzsche's thought: it is another name for the natural aspect of the overman, "the meaning of the earth" (Z, Prologue 3). It also stands for the best spiritual exercise that can be attained by men, the extremization of *amor fati*, namely the thought of the 'eternal recurrence of the same'. It is, furthermore, the highest expression of 'will to power', and the political device that Nietzsche proposes when envisioning a cultural and social renewal. A great importance for a concept explicitly mentioned by Nietzsche only three times: once in a posthumous aphorism of 1882 (*KSA* 12:2[131]) and twice in BGE 230.

If we take *homo natura* to be a critical concept in Nietzsche's production, then suddenly we are left with a categorization of the German thinker that leaves no room for biopolitics–at least in the classical nuances of the term. Nietzsche's political project is markedly anti-anthropocentric and none of the three readings presented in the introduction are compatible with this feature. Immunity, *thanatopolitics* and neoliberalism all want to breed and foster a specific kind of human being, a specific human community at the expense of the other living beings. They have to produce *homini sacri* or *homini oeconomici*. *Homo natura* is no longer a human being. Even the concept of 'great politics' does not need to have biopolitical roots. Friedrich Balke argues that 'great politics' is "essentially [a] politics of selection ('*Auslese*') and extinguishing: a selection of positively evaluated abnormalities over those that are negatively evaluated" (Balke 2003, 709). For him, the concept is the expression of an inherently racist "bad aristocratism" that envisages the continuum of life as "divided into a hierarchy of species, and where the destruction (death) of one species, or life form, is understood as the condi-

tion for the protection of the life of another species" (Lemm 2017, 57). The *thanatopolitical* character of 'great politics' should be confirmed by posthumous fragments that describe it as a politics that "measures the rank of races, people and individuals according to the degree of life and future they carry within themselves" (*KSA* 13:25[1]). This would be true if the community that has to be immunized was not nature itself. *Homo natura* is no longer the humanized product of an immunitary logic. The selection is not made in human terms: what is evaluated is the "degree of life and future" carried within natural beings. That is to say, the hierarchical ranking is made on an ethical basis: which are the beings that embody the *ethos* that best enables them to cope with life? Then, of course, comes the political decision to foster only life forms that live up to such standards. But this operation can hardly be deemed anthropocentric.

If what we said until now is convincing, classical biopolitics is not a good label for Nietzsche. In fact, Lemm herself proposes an 'affirmative' connotation of biopolitics to better describe his work. But such a move is not enough when we face *homo natura*. Its anti-anthropocentric character seems to push Nietzsche further away from biopolitics. If we still want to call him a biopolitical thinker we will need to propose a new meaning of the term: a meaning so distant from classical ones that it almost seems to belong to an entirely different category. *Homo natura* is able to question the biopolitical paradigm that articulates in biopower (power *over* life) and biopolitics (power *of* life), i.e. *thanatopolitics* and 'affirmative biopolitics', i.e. 'anthropocentric' and 'anti-anthropocentric' biopolitics. Can we still really speak of biopolitics when the focus is no longer on human beings, but rather over them? Isn't it still a 'human all too human' politics?

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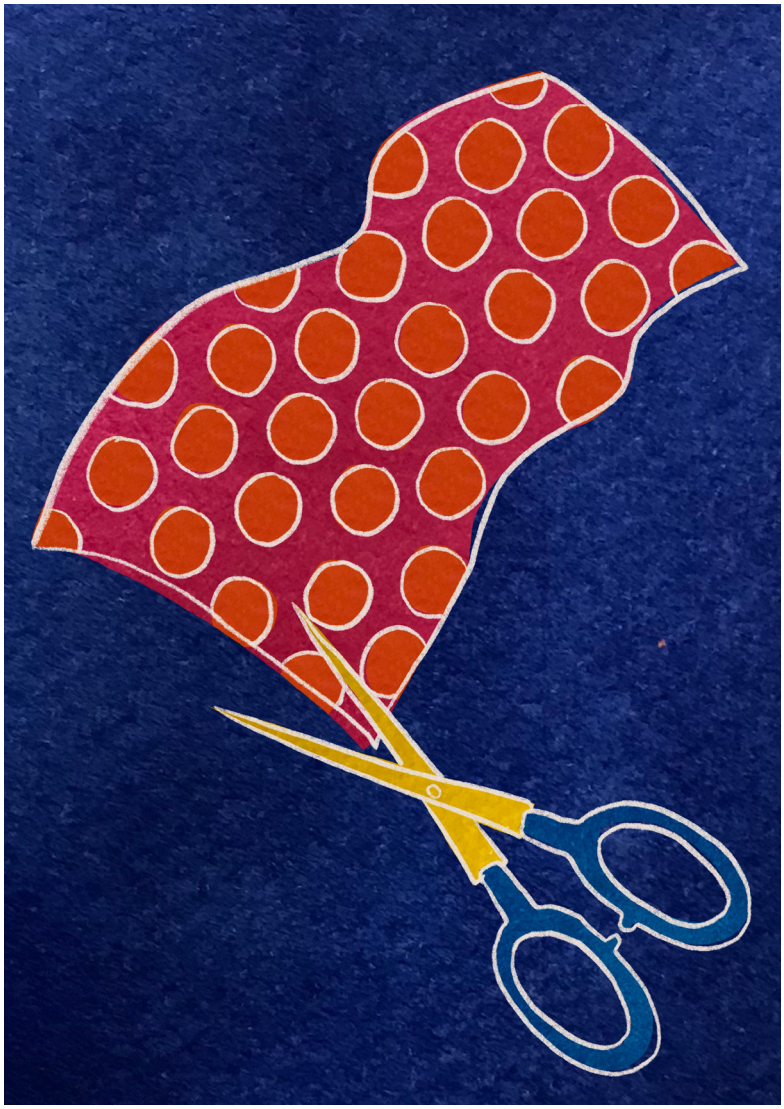

Illustration by Saar Boter

Dress to Impress

Communicating Knowledge and Power through Fashion

Caetana Ribeiro da Cunha and Linda Freitag

If he had not worn that borrowed blazer from Princeton University, Dickie Greenleaf would not be dead. In the movie The *Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), Thomas Ripley fakes having attended Princeton to be accepted into the high society of New York. As part of his ruse, he flies out to Italy to visit Dickie Greenleaf, a true *bon vivant* living his life partying. Trying to survive in the world of the rich and pretty, Ripley has to adapt by wearing the clothes worn by high society. After rising suspicions from Greenleaf's side, they get into a fight and Ripley kills Greenleaf. Based on the book with the same title (1955), the story follows a con-artist who desperately yearns to be part of the upper class and uses clothes to uphold his scheme. Similarly, earlier this year, the 'old money style' trend reemerged, with people attempting to emulate the fashion choices of the contemporary upper class. This essay entails a discussion of class distinction through clothing.

We will argue that clothes can be used as a means of communication, transmitting knowledge about status, belonging or political statements. After explaining the term 'old money style', we will speculate that the style (re) gained popularity earlier this year, because its conservative roots give safety and its classic, basic look is in line with the demands for a more timeless wardrobe in the face of the climate crisis. Giving an outline of the theory of proletarianization from Marx and Engels, and adding to it with Stiegler's notion of lack of knowledge, we will combine this theory with fashion. Firstly, clothing is used as a class distinction, shown in the example of the 'old money style' trend and the more concrete example of the 'suit' apparel. Secondly, in contrast to the desire of dressing like the upper classes, dressing in opposition to them as a political statement is explained with the example of Black people and their reclaiming of 'Hip Hop culture' from those who have devalued or appropriated it. Hereby the problematic, ignorant use and capitalization on the Hip Hop 'style' by white brands is highlighted, because the meaningful aspect of the clothes is disregarded. Having explained why clothes can be a form of communication, we will argue that choosing to not care about this communication is a form of privilege resulting from class, economic context, conventional attractiveness or fame. Furthermore, we will argue on the example of the con-artist Anna Sorokin that, apart from mere clothes, context is important. Aspects of whom the wearer is, how the garment is worn and when must also be considered when analyzing communication through clothes.

‘Old Money Style’

The ‘old money style’, or ‘old money aesthetic’, is a recent clothing trend of people wanting to dress in an elegant and classic style, imitating the fashion choices of upper-class wealthy people with a grand family tree and set traditions. Popular clothing items are cable knit sweaters, linen pants, boat shoes, polo shirts, oxford shirts and navy blazers (Berlinger 2024, n.d.). As the names already suggest, the clothes are tied to a certain kind of lifestyle – having a boat, playing polo and going to esteemed universities like the University of Oxford. The specific look, worn by the likes of the Windsor family or John F. Kennedy, is based on the already existing ‘preppy’ style. ‘Prep’ stems from American and English preparatory schools, which are private schools for children who want to go to college or university (Lingala 2013, 4). The style is said to have originated in the late 19th century (Lingala 2013, 2), when the upper class could afford to study classical programs instead of having to work. This class of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, henceforth referred to as WASPs, were proud of their family history and wanted to distinguish themselves from the people who got rich through the Industrial revolution in the 19th century, marking the beginning of the separation of ‘old money’ and ‘new money’ (Lingala 2013, 8).

The question arises – why now? Why did the trend of ‘old money’ reemerge at this particular moment? On Tik Tok, the hashtag #oldmoney has over 600,000 posts (June 2024) and on Instagram, the hashtag has over a million posts (June 2024). Additionally, the search expression ‘old money style’ gained a sudden, steep rise in interest around late February of 2024 (Google Trends, n.d.). Two connected reasons could be responsible for that. Firstly, the ‘old money aesthetic’ can give a person safety and stability, especially in times of crisis. The conservative attitude of ‘old money’ to rely on heritage and tradition, wearing what always has been worn, is somewhat against a core principle of fashion: change. Fashion is defined by its restlessness, always changing, evolving, and the need to have the latest trend. By dressing timelessly and traditionally, the WASPs cling to their rituals and rules. It is no wonder that in a time of crisis and financial instability, people yearn even more for stability and the fantasy of being rich. It could therefore be argued that on a deeper level, pretending to be ‘old money’ by wearing their attire is a form of escapism. Escapism is understood as people trying to escape reality by imagining being somebody else or somewhere else; to not be confronted with the problems of reality (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). This presentation of one’s social status is visually heightened through the constant comparison on social media. While people have always wanted

to be carefree and/or rich, the possibility of showing off one's lifestyle and being confronted with the lifestyle of others is essentially limitless on the internet.

Another influencing aspect on the popularity of the 'old money style' might be the current climate crisis and ever-escalating mass production and consumption. Fashion occurs in cycles. What was trendy roughly 20 years ago always comes back in style, sometimes in slightly different variations (Mollard 2022). Trends can emerge as a response to past trends; if big sunglasses are 'in', soon people will want to go against the grain and wear small sunglasses, and eventually the trend will once again cycle back to bigger sunglasses. The actual length of each phase of this cycle, however, has rapidly shortened over the past couple of years: "the advent of innovative technologies and social media has drastically condensed the life cycle of trends today" (Mollard 2022). Given the current climate crisis, a counter movement of sustainable clothing has arisen, with individuals attempting

'Timeless' clothes are therefore hard to define objectively, because it depends on who you ask, and when.

to avoid purchasing mass-produced garments. Sustainable clothing is not only sustainable in terms of their fabrics and materials, but the look should somehow transcend trend cycles and remain wearable. If the new shoe silhouette people want to buy fits the current trend but could be 'out' again at any moment, sustainable shoppers may instead opt for a more classical and timeless look that will stay fashionable regardless of what is currently 'trending'. This thinking goes hand in hand with the conservative thinking (in the non-political sense) of 'old money' regarding clothing. However, this is not to say that the current 'old money' look is truly timeless. While, for example, jeans and a white t-shirt are now seen as 'timeless', back in the 18th century one would have been quite out of place in jeans. 'Timeless' clothes are therefore hard to define objectively, because it depends on who you ask, and when.

The Proletarianization of Fashion

In a society with a growing social media and technological presence, comparison between lifestyles becomes ever more frequent. The problem follows from the previously described term 'escapism'. The idea that one group desires to be like the other can be linked to a problematic social class disparity that forces lower classes to take matters into their own hands to find a

place within their society, or lack thereof. Questioning these dynamics takes us to several burdens, especially that of class struggle, which can be linked to proletarianization.

'Proletarianization' originally comes from Marx and Engels, who introduced the term 'proletariat': the working class who had no ownership and were, in a way, exploited for their work, while the bourgeois class gained the fruits of the proletariat's labor. Marx maintained that the working class was a victim of the ruling elite because they had no ownership over the means of production (that they were producing themselves). With that, several problems came, all boiling down to substantial economic and social inequalities which were to Marx, Engels, and many thinkers of the time (and now), unacceptable. According to Hutnyk, on the topic of proletarianization, the initial stages of this term had more to do with pauperization and the lack of ownership, one which "results in the first place from the loss of savoir-faire of workers enslaved to machines, and no longer masters of their tools" (Hutnyk 2012, 128).

Philosopher Bernard Stiegler reintroduces the term Proletarianization, going beyond the traditional Marxist view of the working class's lack of ownership of the means of production. For Stiegler, the lack of possession that the proletariat has is not limited to ownership but rather to the dispossession of knowledge, skills, and cultural memory. The lack of "know-how" or "savoir-faire" in the consumerist and capitalist society of today has "led to a deprivation of recognition, sociability, and finally existence, generating the suffering of the consumers becoming miserable" (Hutnyk 2012, 128).

Modern and industrial technological developments have led to a significant loss in individual thinking skills. By introducing new methods of machinery and production, workers have become unaware of what their tasks actually are – comparable to machine operators. This also links to their lack of knowledge on how to conduct certain tasks in the workforce; the same introduction and development of technological systems into human structures have removed humans' ability and desire to learn and understand what they are doing. All these new perspectives on proletarianization are also linked to how people, in turn, live in a society. If they are reduced to limited knowledge capacities and abilities, their ability to communicate and socialize becomes equally limited, creating a society with little to no individuation. Rather, a homogenous society emerges where everyone thinks and does the same, due to a lack of ability to do otherwise.

However, his conception of proletarianization comes, once again, closer to Marx when he suggested that the impact of this proletarianization in economic structures is great. With a concentration of technological power, control and knowledge in the hands of a few elites (leading corporations), the

social structures have a more focused controlling and exploitative starting point. This only perpetuates the economic and social disparities which Marx also believed to be a problem with the working class's lack of ownership over the means of production. The term 'proletarianization', as Stiegler reintroduced, can be connected to what this paper intends to examine: the lack of individuation. In a homogenous society, a ruling elite (unintentionally) sets the basis for what the lower, working class is meant to wear, and also what they wear themselves.

In a homogenous society, a ruling elite sets the basis for what the lower, working class is meant to wear.

The creation of a general framework of style and fashion, such as the 'old money aesthetic', can be associated with Marx's bourgeoisie, which leads the behavior of the working class. If we take a step towards fashion, we can see that a growing number of people in the working classes attempt to make themselves visible within workplaces or other professional locations by wearing clothes similar to those worn by people high in command. The lack of originality that is – according to Stiegler – a product of a growing technological society, sees an increase in the homogeneity of fashion styles within communities. Let us take, for example, a suit. A suit in its full form, with all that it embodies – accessories included – has the power to establish a person wearing a suit as having a powerful position within the workplace. But this goes beyond the clothing item. There are plenty of other factors which should be taken into account alongside the suit. Namely: the brand, the shape of the lapel, the color, the lining, the fabric, the shoes that accompany it and whether they have a buckle, whether the belt is brown or black, and if it matches the suit, etc. All of these questions seem extremely superficial and irrelevant for a workplace and should say nothing about a person's professional abilities, but unfortunately, this is not the case.

Counter Movement: Fashion as a Means of Communicating a Political Statement

What is seen within the proletariat in terms of what they wear are two things: they either want to come closer to the higher-class, ruling elite by dressing the same way (albeit taking into account this lack of originality and overall societal homogeneity), as seen in the old money style. Or, the opposite: where the proletariat, taking Marx's views on the working class uniting and stepping away from all things bourgeoisie, decides to take the alternative stance and wear something completely different, thereby making a political and social statement.

The first option is very visible within American sororities and fraternities in the Ivy League school system. Whereas 'old money' and 'new money' are no longer visible to the naked eye and require more intensive research and knowledge on each person individually, the case is now that there is a homogeneity of fashion even within the higher class. Here, it is relevant to echo Stiegler's discussion regarding the generalized lack of know-how and originality that has emerged from an incredibly technologically dependent society. Individuals within it no longer have the ability to choose things for themselves. Going back to the Ivy Leagues, the point is that, although the principle of the clothes is the same and the idea of outfits is the same, the place where the clothes are bought are quite disparate. While some purchase their clothes in high-end stores that, today, are in vogue, others turn to lower-cost and more accessible alternatives that will provide the same concept of clothes but at a substantially lower price. This way, the sorority girls will still be a part of the community without spending a small fortune in order to look the part.

On the other hand, there is a desire on part of the proletariat, the people that are not encapsulated within the elite class, to emancipate themselves from the framework. We have looked upon the lower classes desiring membership of the upper classes to the extent that they dress similarly (in a conceptual sense) to the latter. We will now examine another perspective that can be taken as one of emancipation, individualization, and of making a statement: "I do not want to be a part of this". This second option entails many movements which have arisen throughout the last decades, aiming to step away from all that is known as 'old money'. These include the punks, hippies, and Black Panthers, for example, who all decided to make their own political statements by dressing in very particular ways, exclusive to the message that they were trying to convey – mostly based on countering the leading elite's power, in very simple terms.

Punks, hippies and Black Panthers all decided to make their own political statements by dressing in very particular ways.

For instance, much like 'old money', we can look at how some Hip Hop trends increased in the late 1980s, 1990s, and remain alive in today's society. In these decades, young Black people were establishing their own sense of style and appreciation for their culture via their clothing, following the Hip Hop trends that were on the rise within the music industry. These clothes were based on "unique styles that they feel reflects their Black identity such

as bold colors or traditional garments from African cultures" (Johnson et al. 2022, 265). These are set to reflect a deeper sense of their own identities as a minority group.

By claiming this sense of style within their community, Black people were, too, making a statement regarding their position within society. They would not give in to the hegemony (as seen in Stiegler's works) of style just because the leading elites, the white people, were doing so. They made their own movement and chose to present themselves in these clothes because it was what made them happy for themselves and represented their culture. They could also be trend-setters, cool and powerful, within their circles, and hoped they could extend this to the racist world that surrounded them.

This is exactly what happened. By being trend-setters to such an extent, the urban fashion movement spread so much that it started being used by white people. This was inappropriate in two ways: firstly, it was an appropriation of a style that encapsulated African American culture and their struggle (which white people couldn't relate to, no matter how much they tried). Secondly, it exacerbated social injustice and disparities in treatment between races: while a white person wearing a hoodie and sweatpants was overlooked, a Black person wearing a hoodie and sweatpants could be considered a thug by authorities, bringing them into unnecessary trouble and creating several additional problems.

Following this cultural appropriation, Black communities created brands that would represent their trends in clothing, in music, in relatability, in a shared struggle, in everything that meant anything to them. These brands were their way of establishing themselves within the system. By creating these brands, not only did they attempt to address an economic injustice perpetrated by white store owners who were profiting from a culture that was not their own, but they established a place where Black people's shared interests could be found and represented. A problem arose when big brands such as Tommy Hilfiger or Hugo Boss, at the time, noticed that Black-led 'urban' fashion trends were increasing and, therefore, decided to create collections that would replicate these types of clothing. This was problematic, again, for two reasons. First, it was culturally appropriating clothes and trends that they, as majority white-owned companies were not familiar with and could not represent in their full essence. Secondly, as large companies, they were taking away profits that would otherwise have gone to Black-owned businesses, perpetrating further economic injustice. Big companies were feeding from trends that were created as statements, as an affront to the status quo, and turning those statements into the status quo, removing their essence entirely. They were capitalizing on Black people's struggles and the marginalization they had experienced. These companies

have significantly attenuated urban, Black fashion, whereas 'urban' "is a term that used to be synonymous with the Black community, now 'everybody's trying to use the word ("urban") to appropriate Black culture'" (Johnson et al. 2022, 264).

This goes to show how different cultures and clothing styles can provide different ways of asserting one's power, status, and role within a society. From 'old money' clothing wearers, who stick to a century-old clothing style as a means to remain in vogue and ever-classic, ever-powerful and ever-rich; to Hip Hop clothing wearers who, in delving into new areas of styles and trying new things, are able to make basic political statements. Ultimately, there are several ways in which clothing plays a part in communication.

The Fascinating Case of Anna Delvey - The Privilege to Not Care

In recent years, Anna Sorokin, or as she called herself, Anna Delvey, originally from an area near Moscow, posed as a German heiress in New York's high society and cheated many people out of their money. She was arrested in 2017, when she could no longer pay her bills (Taleb and Hellmich 2024). In 2022, the series about her, *Inventing Anna*, aired on Netflix and made her story even more famous. But how was she able to uphold her masquerade for around four years? She desperately wanted to be part of the glamorous world of the pretty and the rich. She therefore created her own character with a backstory, made believable through her designer outfits. She did not always have the most coherent, stylish outfits and often mismatched designer brands. That is exactly why her scam worked. As an article in *Vogue Australia* puts it: "She didn't look like her outfits cost a million bucks - and that is why she looked like she had a million bucks" (Brown 2022). If you are truly rich, you do not need to show other people and convince them of your status: "Her seemingly sloppy clothing, rather than revealing her true origins, in fact made her look more like a rich person" (Tashijan 2019). You can have the privilege to not care, to not fit in, because you are able to financially stem the consequences.

Usually, trying to distinguish one's own class can be compared with an arms race. Because the lower classes strive to imitate the upper classes to profit from the privileges resulting from being part of that class, the upper classes must constantly adapt and find new ways to distinguish themselves. Similarly, the 'Red Queen Hypothesis' in evolutionary biology states that "species (or populations) must continually evolve new adaptations in response to evolutionary changes in other organisms to avoid extinction"

(Langerhans 2018). The real privilege is, now, to step away from the constant comparison and to care less about refining one's social standing within society.

Anna Delvey did not always have the most coherent, stylish outfits and often mismatched designer brands. That is exactly why her scam worked.

The privilege to not care can also be attributed to privileges other than being rich. Two examples are being conventionally attractive or being famous. The 'model-off-duty look' describes a very casual look, inspired by outfits that models wear on the street when they are in between jobs or running from airport to airport. In its formula, the 'model-off-duty look' shows similarities with the old-money style in its neutrality and timelessness: "To craft a genuinely effortless model-off-duty look, stick to high-quality wardrobe basics. Investing in classic pieces is sustainable and practical, as the garments will take you from decade to decade" (Chwatt 2024). The outfit consisting of a white t-shirt and jeans, which on an average person seems basic and put together without attention to detail, looks elegant and effortless on the models. Since models have a body according to the common beauty standard, their body turns into an accessory itself and makes the clothes look well-fitted and desirable. Additionally, the public knows that this is only a functional outfit for in-between duties, and not the laziness of not coming up with a creative outfit, since they are able to wear fancy dresses to Galas, in campaigns, and on the runway all the time.

Another desired aspect is fame. The Coachella Festival, also colloquially called the "Influencer Olympics" (Espada 2023), is a very popular music festival in California. Each year, a lot of celebrities show up to present themselves, their brands and, of course, their outfits. Especially influencers, people who became famous on social media such as Instagram, Tik Tok and YouTube, attend this event to present themselves. Every year, the outfits become grander and louder and bigger to not get lost in the sea of other influencers posting their outfits at Coachella. However, another trend has recently developed – non-influencers such as models show up to Coachella dressed very casually, in just a leather jacket, jeans and a t-shirt. With this act, they show that they do not have to partake in the war for attention, because they are already famous. They are so rich that such a special event like the expensive Coachella Festival is not worthy enough to dress up for.

In summary, aspects such as good looks, fame or wealth afford the privilege to not care about broadcasting one's adherence to these standards.

Visibly and desperately working to convince other people of one's good qualities may be an indicator that, in fact, those good qualities are missing. In a time where anybody can buy grand and colorful clothing, the choice to transcend the arms race for better, newer, more expensive clothes is seen as desirable. It is a privilege to be able to rely on other qualities – a healthy body, good manners, disposable income and connections – not having to hide the lack of one of those qualities behind a gaudy outfit. Because as much influence clothes have on *how* one is perceived, the matter of *who* wears them is of as much importance.

The Secret Language and Habits of the Rich

The 'old money aesthetic' is, in itself, a personification of class struggle. Wanting to dress up like wealthy people already distinguishes one from the other. Wanting to show off already signals a kind of missing ambivalence concerning what other people think. Although people can try to imitate the looks of the rich, customs and traditions are hard to train overnight. Furthermore, not all blouses are created equally. Just imitating the silhouette or color scheme is not enough to elevate oneself into the upper class: "Micheal Kurtis, a luxury-fashion consultant, knows of shoppers who will spend $100,000 on clothing from the n'Row' [high end fashion brand] that's barely identifiable to the untrained eye. Clothes like these are a secret language, communicating wealth only to those in the know" (Brooke 2022).

Although one can try to imitate the looks of the rich, customs and traditions are hard to train overnight.

The speech act, "dogwhistle" (Olasov 2016), is a linguistic tool used in politics to allow multiple interpretations of a phrase or a word, depending on which audience you belong to. In that sense, dressing in casual high-end brands without logos to identify them on the first look, is similar to a speech act as a way to communicate your status to the people who know about it and recognize the pieces from the latest runway because they were sitting in the first row. This trend of dressing in understated yet expensive high-quality pieces is called "quiet luxury" (Fröbe 2024). It poses a counter trend to the "logomania" (Glasheen 2024) of the mid 2010s, where the "overt use of logos on apparel, accessories, consumables and – in a few unfortunate cases – printed onto model's faces" (Glasheen 2024) was trending. Although 'quiet luxury' and 'old-money' are heading in the same direction, 'quiet luxury' is more toned down and about fabrics and silhouettes, while 'old-money' is about specific clothing items like loafers and cardigans. 'Old money' does not frown upon showing brand logos like Polo Ralph Lauren (Fröbe 2024).

Even apart from the specific clothing items, Anna Sorokin's case also teaches us that it is not merely about the items themselves, but also about *how* and *when* you wear them. The context matters. Anna "didn't take care of her things, acted like she didn't have to" (Brown 2022). Similarly to the Coachella Festival, if luxury items and events are nothing special for someone anymore, they do not have to take special care of them. One example of this is Jane Birkin. The French actress and singer gave her name to the famous Hermès 'Birkin Bag' – for many, the epitome of luxury handbags (Der Stern 2023). While most wear this bag with the utmost care due to the price, Jane herself wore her bag with ribbons, stickers and bangles. Apart from the how, the timing matters as well: "Looking wealthy goes deeper than what you wear [...]. It's about wearing a white silk suit on a rainy day in New York because you have a driver to ferry you through the gray slush" (Brooke 2022). These details come through knowledge, through experience and cannot be imitated by merely putting on clothes.

However, clothes do create social standing. In that regard, it is a two-way street. Malcolm Barnard proposed that clothes "are not used simply to indicate or refer to social and cultural positions, they are used to construct and mark out that social and cultural reality in the first place" (2002, 38). Clothes are part of forming the classes. In contrast, one's social standing also influences how clothes are perceived. This fine line can be demonstrated by the story of the con-artist, Tom Ripley, in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955;1999). Although initially "admitted to Dickie Greenleaf's circle to itinerant rich kids thanks to a borrowed Princeton blazer", he is later "skewered for wearing a heavy corduroy jacket in the Italian heat" (Brooke 2022). Passing as wealthy due to a blazer may work at first glance: "Dress is a convenient method to keep class distinction because it is so visible" (Lingala 2013, 24); but no respectable, wealthy Italian would wear a jacket in the middle of a summer day. *When* to dress up and when *not* is as much of an importance as *how* to take care of the clothes.

Conclusion

Questions like *when*, *how* and *why* are questions that the average person does not ask themselves when it comes to fashion. It seems superficial, indifferent and arguably should not even play such a big role within professional settings. But the cold reality is that it does. Clothing, fashion, and all that it entails has almost as much to say today as the information one learns in one's curriculum. It seems that as society evolves, trends keep spawning back from the past, and with that, the restlessness which was talked about previously has an even greater impact in drawing the lines for knowledge and power assertion.

However important the restlessness of different fashion trends is, there are still some timeless and permanent trends that have remained. 'Old-money styles', and other styles that have emerged from class struggles demonstrate how truly communicative fashion can be when it comes to power dynamics. Everyone wants to fit in somewhere; Stiegler (and Marx) displayed that there are different social groups, and one which rules them all. Eventually, the ruled groups lack means of knowledge due to the growing presence of technological artifacts in today's society, which forces this group to follow along the lines of demarcation that have already been set. However, wanting to fit in seems to backfire in the end. As we have seen with Anna Sorokin or Tom Ripley, or even with white people wanting to wear 'urban' fashion clothing items that were innovations by and for Black people, there are certain things which cannot be imitated, and the truth comes out in the end. No matter how much we deny it, fashion and its context play a big role in demonstrating someone or some movement's true colors, from the lower class to the upper class, clothing travels through it all.

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Virtual Presence and Descartes' Last Stand

Tim Miechels

Are we fully 'present' in a virtual world when we are playing in VR? Or does a VR headset finally turn us into the detached spectators Descartes always said we were? According to Hubert Dreyfus, the epistemological concerns that were largely abandoned by philosophers in the twentieth century, have become very relevant again in the twenty-first century. The reason for this, is the possibilities of telepresence and virtual presence: the ability to be present in a place where you are not actually, i.e. bodily, present. This type of presence can take the form of, for example: joining a Zoom meeting, controlling a drone in some distant location, or inhabiting a virtual world by means of VR. In this paper, I want to examine the problem Dreyfus notes with virtual presence and see whether it is indeed a real problem when it comes to virtual reality. I will argue that it is not, with the help of Heidegger's analysis of tools, state-of-mind and care in *Being and Time*. Similar to how using a hammer plugs us into a significant network of references, so does playing in VR plug us into a network of virtual significance.

In *On the Internet*, Dreyfus starts his investigation of telepresence with the following question: "What would be gained and what, if anything, would be lost if we were to take leave of our situated bodies in exchange for telepresence in cyberspace" (Dreyfus 2009, 51). He relates telepresence to Augustine's emphasis of inner life and Descartes' "modern distinction between the contents of the mind and the rest of reality" (2009, 52). For Descartes, sensations caused by the 'outer world' are first passed to the brain and from there on to the mind. And citing people with phantom limbs as evidence, I can even question the direct experience of my own body. Descartes, as read by Dreyfus, understands our relation to the world and even our own bodies as an indirect relation. Only the contents of our minds are directly given, the rest is given indirectly, representational.

According to Dreyfus, when using telepresence, our relation to the world is reduced to the narrow, indirect connection Descartes presumed us to have naturally. In order to fully understand Dreyfus' criticism, we have to distinguish telepresence - being indirectly present in another physical place - from virtual presence - being present in a place that is itself not at all physical, but virtual. In his 2001 article "Telepistemology: Descartes' Last Stand", Dreyfus explains his criticism of telepresence by using the example of Telegarden, a digital project where people can log in to a robot in order to tend to a garden in a museum in Austria. Normally when you walk through a garden, you have no reason to doubt its reality. You are bodily present there, which means you

can see, smell and feel the garden all around you. In the case of Telegarden, however, you are of course not physically there, so who says that there even *is* a physical garden that you are walking through with a physical robot?

Dreyfus expands on this criticism in the second edition of *On the Internet*. His criticism hinges on the idea that bodily presence brings with it the possibility of optimal grip regarding a specific situation. Our feeling of reality depends on this feeling of optimal grip, which in turn depends on bodily presence. As Dreyfus puts it: "Its [(the body's)] ability to get a grip on things provides our sense of the reality of what we are doing and are ready to do[.]" (Dreyfus 2009, 72). The answer to the question of what is lost in telepresence, is thus answered by Dreyfus in the following way: "What is lost, then, in telepresence is the possibility of my controlling my body's movement so as to get a better grip on the world" (Dreyfus 2009, 60).

However, Dreyfus also expands the scope of his argument here from telepresence to virtual presence. In a new chapter on the game *Second Life*, he explicitly discusses the notion of being present in a virtual world and submits it to a similar line of criticism. Does virtual embodiment provide a good substitute for actual embodiment? Dreyfus thinks it does not. Again, embodiment plays a crucial role here. Indirect communication of moods through our avatar means that it is impossible to acquire the required grip on social situations. The conclusion: A lack of bodily presence in a virtual world prevents the possibility of ever getting optimal grip on a virtual situation, which would in turn prevent an experience of virtual reality as reality.

Does virtual embodiment provide a good substitute for actual embodiment?

Dreyfus' claims concerning the presence of virtual presence and the reality of virtual reality stem from a specific reading of phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the latter in order to argue that a less dismissive view of virtual presence is possible based on a reading of his philosophy.

Zuhandenheit and *Vorhandenheit*

Dreyfus' understanding of optimal grip has a basis in a specific reading of *Being and Time*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger famously makes a distinction between *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. This distinction relates to two different ways of relating to the world around us, that is, theoretical and practical, respectively. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger prioritizes the practical attitude:

> The kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of 'knowledge'. (Heidegger 1962, 24)

This practical attitude is different from the theoretical view, which sees everything it encounters as what Heidegger calls *Vorhanden*. This attitude will regard any being it encounters as an object, a thing, with certain properties, like heaviness, shaped in a certain way, etc. that we can discover by looking at it. This attitude of merely looking at things is the attitude of the theoretical view: "Theoretical behavior is just looking, without circumspection" (1962, 99). This is, as said, not the way we primarily relate to our environment. And it is close to the way Descartes would describe our natural relation to the world, and if we follow Dreyfus, the way we relate to the world through telepresence.

In the practical relation that we first and foremost have with the world, we don't regard the beings we encounter as mere things, but we encounter what Heidegger calls *Zeug*, or tools. Tools never exist in isolation; any tool refers to a multitude of other beings. The pen refers to paper, to ink, to the grocery list I am writing with it etc. These references are not like features of an object, they are part of the being of the pen, it is what makes us understand the pen *as* a pen. This totality of referencing equipment, to which the pen belongs, is therefore always already discovered before the individual pen. The tool can always only be understood from the whole to which it belongs. This referring to other beings is not some accidental feature of tools, it is a fundamental characteristic of the being of tools, which Heidegger calls *Zuhandenheit*. My proper understanding of a tool depends on me knowing my way around in this referencing totality. I do not grasp the being of a pen by looking at it and studying its properties, but by picking it up and writing with it.

Significance

So, in his analysis in *Being and Time*, Heidegger indeed seems to favor what Dreyfus would call embodied optimal grip, over theoretical onlooking. Yet, following Matthew Ratcliffe's reading of Heidegger, I would argue it is a mistake to think that Heidegger takes this way of coping to be the essence of the way human beings relate to their world. Similar to how Descartes, at least in Dreyfus' reading, misinterprets the human relation to the world as an all too narrow theoretical relation, I argue Dreyfus' understanding of it as acquiring and embodied optimal grip is equally narrow. To cite Heidegger himself, looking back at his analysis of *Being and Time* three years later:

> It never occurred to me, however, to try and claim or prove with this interpretation that the essence of man consists in the fact that he knows how to handle knives and forks or use the tram. (Heidegger 1995, 177)

So how should we understand the distinctively human way of relating to the world that Heidegger wants to lay bare? Ratcliffe gives the following characterization:

> [W]e find ourselves in a world where things matter to us in a range of different ways and, in the context of that world, we pursue certain concrete possibilities. It is only in virtue of pursuing these possibilities against the backdrop of an already significant world that we are able to make sense of the readiness-to-hand of equipment. (Ratcliffe 2012, 147)

The basis for Ratcliffe's characterization can be found in the first page of division 1 of *Being and Time*: "That Being which is an *issue* for this entity in its very being, is in each case mine" (Heidegger 1962, 67). This means, crucially, that my existence is not something that is predefined, set in stone, but something that I have to take a stand on, that is an issue for me. I exist as fundamentally open to different possibilities. My relation to the world accordingly to be understood as being delivered over to a context which is significant for me because it shows itself as a world of possibilities. Only from the prior discovery of this world as a significant whole, can beings then show themselves as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand:

> *Dasein, in its familiarity with significance, is the ontical condition for the possibility of discovering entities which are encountered in a world with involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of being[.]* (Heidegger 1962, 120)

The being-in aspect of being-in-the-world should thus be understood as signifying a disclosive relation, in such a way that things are able to *matter* to us in one way or another. Heidegger uses the term *Befindlichkeit* or state-of-mind to describe this type of relation:

> Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us. Indeed from the ontological point of view we must as a general principle leave the primary discovery of the world to 'bare mood'. Pure

> beholding, even if it were to penetrate to the innermost core of the Being of something present-at-hand, could never discover anything like that which is threatening. (1962, 177)

Hence, being-in-the-world means being in a certain state-of-mind, being attuned to the world in a certain way. The whole fact that things can matter to us, is grounded in this state-of-mind. That this is connected once again to our own being always being an issue for ourselves becomes clear in Heidegger's analysis of a specific state of mind, namely fearing. He analyzes the phenomenon from three points of view: that in the face of which we fear, fearing and that about which we fear. That in the face of which, the fearsome is always a being within the world that is detrimental and drawing close. Fearing itself is a state-of-mind which discloses the world in a certain way. That about which we fear is always Dasein, either our own or somebody else's. About this last, important point, Heidegger writes: "Only an entity for which in its being this very being is an issue, can be afraid. Fearing discloses this entity as endangered and abandoned to itself." (1962, 180).

All of this is summed up and comes together in Heidegger's crucial notion of care, the term he uses to denote the Being of Dasein. The notion of care specifies that our relation to the world around us should always be understood in combination with the fact that our own being is always at issue for us. Heidegger explains this, when he says:

> 'Its own being is the issue for Dasein': This first presupposes that in this Dasein there is something like a *being out for something*. Dasein is out for its own being; it is out for its own being in order 'to be' this being. (Heidegger 1985, 294)

What this being out for itself means, is that Dasein has to anticipate itself and its needs in its relation to the world. In that sense, care means always Dasein is always ahead of itself in a world in which it is intimately involved. Therefore, Heidegger formulates the formal structure of care as: "*Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself in its always already being involved in something*" (1985, 294). This structure is of course a temporal one. Out for its own being, Dasein is always already involved in the world with a past and certain existing structures, and has to anticipate its needs in the future. This structure is the necessary condition for both our theoretical and practical relations to the world around us. Hence, Heidegger writes: "'Theory' and 'practice' are possibilities of Being for an entity whose Being must be defined as 'care'" (Heidegger 1962, 238).

Resident Evil VII Biohazard

Now, with all of this in our back pocket, I want to circle back to Dreyfus' question and slightly rephrase it as: what, if anything, would be lost if we were to take leave of our situated bodies in exchange for telepresence in virtual reality? The way in which we answer this question from a Heideggerian perspective can no longer depend on the possibility or impossibility of smooth bodily coping, for as we have just seen, embodied optimal grip itself is only a possibility of being for an entity whose being is defined as care. Rather, the answer to this question depends on whether or not virtual reality plugs us into a significant whole, in which things matter to us in one way or another.

A hint to an answer can be provided by a clip from a Dutch video game journalist playing Resident evil VII Biohazard in VR (Power Unlimited 2017). In the clip we see the journalist repeatedly terrified by his encounters with the horrors in the game. At one point, he even throws his hands up in resignation and curls up into a semi-fetal position due to being overwhelmed by fear. Now what this shows is that the virtual world of Resident Evil VII is significant to the journalist playing this game. The relation he has to this virtual world cannot be understood as the narrow, indirect relation Descartes presumed us to have naturally, for such a relation could never have discovered anything threatening in the first place. The world presents the player with a variety of possibilities to pursue – to open the drawer or not open the drawer, to run away or to engage. Attuned to the world and these possibilities in a certain way, specifically the way of fear in the foregoing example, means that the things in the world matter to the player in a specific way. Taken this way, rather than depending solely on bodily presence, optimal grip rather is a question of how well you are attuned to a situation and the possibilities it offers.

Both in our relation to virtual reality and our regular reality, we are plugged into networks of significance.

To be clear: I have not been arguing that there is *no* difference at all between our relation to virtual reality and – for lack of a better word – regular reality. What I have been arguing is that the fact that we are not bodily present in virtual reality does not mean that our relation to the virtual world we are inhabiting while playing with a virtual reality headset, is not therefore necessarily reduced to the narrow, indirect, representational relation Descartes presumed us to have. Importantly, the point that I *have* been trying to make, is that both in our relation to virtual reality and our regular reality, we are plugged into networks of significance. Qua signifi-

cance, there is no essential difference between being plugged into a network of equipment in wielding a hammer and building a shed, and being plugged into a network of virtual zombies in playing Resident Evil VII VR.

Whether Dreyfus' crucial point that in playing *Second Life*, our virtual avatars are unable to directly communicate our moods to other players denotes an essential difference, is by his own admission an empirical question. Leaving aside the question of whether or not "an avatar's gestures can be made similar enough to ours to cause a direct response in the person controlling the avatar," imagine playing Resident Evil VII VR in co-op and hearing the response from the clip I just played, audio only. Would there be any question concerning the mood the other player is experiencing? Is there any indirectness to this?

In conclusion, what I hope to have shown today is that Dreyfus' claim that something fundamental is lacking from our telepresence in virtual reality as compared to our regular, basic relation to the world around us, is based on an all too narrow understanding of this basic relation. Rather than the embodied optimal grip inspired by Heidegger's analysis of ready-to-hand equipment, the more primordial relation is one of being thrown into a significant whole which presents me with possibilities. Therefore, I have argued that in using a virtual reality headset, we do have a direct connection to the content it offers us. So luckily, Descartes can go back to his slumber; it is not the time (yet) for his last stand.

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