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Editorial

Dear Reader,

Have you ever given the intriguing interplay between our bodies and the concept of embodiment more thought? Join us on our fascinating philosophical journey in this special edition as we explore this relevant topic and uncover its significant consequences for a better or more nuanced comprehension of our self and existence in the world as *embodied beings*. Discussing different kinds of bodies and embodiment is highly relevant in today's society due to its significant societal and cultural implications.

Our bodies are more than just vehicles for getting us through life. In fact, they are intimately woven into the fabric of our life and represent the very core of who we are and the way we experience the world. Our body is the very foundation of every emotion we experience, every motion we make, and every encounter we have. Our bodies are not separate from our minds and souls; they are intertwined with them, shaping and influencing our thoughts, emotions and experiences.

So let us embark on this philosophical exploration with a sense of curiosity and wonder. Together, let us celebrate the significance of our physical selves and the transformative power of our embodiment. As we unravel the interconnections between body and mind, may we gain a deeper appreciation for the beauty and complexity of human existence.

In this theme edition, the topic of Bodies and Embodiment has been covered from several different angles. Max Schmermbeck, Ilse Meijer and Charlie Harden-Sweetnam delve into the notion of art about the body and embodiment. In Max's analysis of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Cézanne, the focus is on the concept of schizoid embodiment in which he examines how our bodies relate to the world around us and influence our perceptions of art. Whilst Ilse's article delved into the concept of the different senses challenging the conventional notion of the five senses. She does so by exploring how these senses, possibly more than five, shape our existence and understanding of art and authorship. Furthermore, Charlie's piece continues the discussion of the experience of the body and embodiment in art. He does so by examining the artistic resistance movement in Eastern Europe in the context of the Ukraine war by highlighting how bodies are not only physical entities but also sites of political and social resistance.

On the other hand, Laura Schranz takes a different approach by inviting us to contemplate the relationship between self-perception and body. The idea that she conceptualises is looking at oneself as an object rather than

embracing one's feelings. Whereas Luca Tripadelli covers the topic of body and embodiment from the angle of discourse and news coverage surrounding the bodies and experiences of IS women.

Hannah Ox's elusive poem adds a touch of artistic mystery to the discussion, prompting readers to reflect on the intangible aspects of the body and embodiment that cannot be easily articulated and are left open for interpretation.

As loyal *Splijststof*-readers know, our publications also always feature interviews. This edition will be featuring three interviews held with Ype de Boer, Aoife McNerney and Bert. For this issue, I (Mireille Kouevi) sat down to talk with philosopher Ype, discussing the process of moving from being a student to becoming an academic. The interview conducted by Hannah and Max with Aoife is centred around her research on Hannah Arendt's spatial ontology, shedding light on how our bodies exist concerning space and the implications of this perspective. And as always, we are also interested in the lives of the people outside of philosophy which is highlighted in the interview by Hannah with Bert from the heart of the FTR faculty, the Coffee Corner on the 15th floor.

Lastly, Sophie's book review tackles the discourse surrounding working-class people in the UK, emphasising the intersection between class, identity, and the embodiment of socio-cultural experiences.

These articles offer a diverse range of perspectives and subjects related to the concept of body and embodiment, inviting you to consider the complexities and nuances of our physical existence and the ways it shapes our understanding of ourselves and the world.

On a more personal note, as you may know, my journey here at *Splijststof* has come to an end as I am about to complete my studies. It is with a mix of gratitude and nostalgia that I write this farewell note to you all. Working at *Splijststof* has been an incredible experience. I have learned and grown both personally and professionally, thanks to the talented individuals that I had the privilege of working alongside. If I am being honest, starting this new chapter in my life is very scary but I am also very excited to put the experiences and lessons that I learned into practice. This farewell feels bittersweet, but I carry a sense of fulfilment and excitement for the future. I will always be grateful for my time at *Splijststof*.

To our readers, I want to take a brief moment to express my deepest gratitude. Thank you for your engagement and the beautiful and thought-provoking pieces that you have sent us! It was truly a blessing to work on behalf of the talented authors and upcoming academics whose articles we have published (and continue to publish). I want to take a moment to express just how essential your engagement has been to *Splijststof*. Without you, our readers, the journal would not be what it is today. Your active participation, feedback and support have been the very fabric of our publication. It has

been an honour and privilege to have the opportunity to write for you, as well as to share your stories and insights. You have played an invaluable role in making this magazine what it is and your presence will be missed.

With deep appreciation and warm regards,

Mireille Kouevi

MIREILLE KOUÉVI



EDITORIAL

The Fragility of the Surface

Reinterpreting Paul Cézanne's Artistic Expression Through the Concept of the Porous Body

Max Schmermbeck

“Nothing is more fragile than the surface”

- Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*

Introduction

When we experience an artwork, our attention tends to center around the intricacies of the artistic mind which created it. We wonder about the underlying intentions of the artwork, discuss its meaning, praise the artists' genius, or ponder over other elements which caught our eye. On this perspective, the artwork becomes the medium through which our mind comes into contact with the mind of the artist; it is through the work that we can grasp some of the ideas and intentions which stood at the cradle of its existence. However, such an approach to art runs the risk of occluding the fact that the artist, like all human beings, uses her body in the act of creation. Whether one is a painter, sculptor, musician, actor or designer, artistic expression is a distinctly *embodied* practice because all artists rely on their bodies to create or perform. Seen in this way, art is not just a creative endeavour carried out by the mind, but also an investigation into the possibilities of the human body.

In this essay, I explore the embodied dimension of artistic expression by offering an original reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on the modernist painter Paul Cézanne (1839 – 1906). In his analysis, Merleau-Ponty brings forth how Cézanne's unique style of painting can provide insights into the nature of human perception, embodiment, vulnerability and trauma. Working within his phenomenological framework of embodied perception, Merleau-Ponty argues that Cézanne's art renders visible our bodily relation to the world and thereby evokes the embodied nature of perception, cognition and artistic expression. However, I argue that Merleau-Ponty does not offer an exhaustive reading of Cézanne's work because he does not investigate how Cézanne's schizoid temperament could have affected his embodied experiences. In this essay, I introduce this element into the analysis and illustrate how this opens up Merleau-Ponty's texts to new interpretations. Drawing on the analyses of schizoid embodiment by Gilles Deleuze and Paul Moyaert, I construct a framework through which the schizoid body can be understood as *porous*. I then use this concept to offer an original interpretation of three elements of Cézanne's artistic expression: his intimate relation to nature, the

lack of contour in his art, and the ways in which his life and work stand in a dialectical relation to each other through the concept of ‘immanent communication’.

My central argument is that the porous body allows us to see how a *lack of distinction between the inside and the outside* underlies Cézanne’s intimate relation to nature, his unique artistic style, and his experience of embodiment and vulnerability. Thereby, I do not reject Merleau-Ponty’s central arguments, but contribute to his philosophical investigation of embodiment and artistic expression by further differentiating how *particular* bodily experiences can acquire *particular meanings* in and through artistic practices.

Embodiment and Artistic Expression in Merleau-Ponty

Working within the tradition of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty starts his analysis from the *primacy of experience*. As he writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), “all my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless” (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 2). Here, Merleau-Ponty describes how the human being is always already immersed in the world before any reflection or abstraction, and experiences the world through her unique point of view. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty continuously emphasizes that this experience is not just attributable to the workings of the mind, but also has a fundamentally *embodied* dimension. As he states, “the body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 165). Here, Merleau-Ponty highlights the fact that perception and experience arise out of the dialogue between the world and our body; the world invites us into its existence and we can welcome her call by moving our body through the environment. This understanding of perception as a fundamentally embodied phenomenon stands in contrast to the dualism between mind and body which has been the dominant paradigm of modern philosophical thought for centuries, where activities such as perception, thought and action are thought to originate in the mind, whereas movement and sensation are thought to be embodied. The novelty of Merleau-Ponty’s approach is to show the falsity of this dualism by emphasizing the fact that neither terms can be understood apart from the other. Rather, our embodied immersion in the world is primary, and concepts like mind and body are the abstractions we make afterward.

In his writings on Paul Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty applies this phenomenological framework to painting and argues that Cézanne’s artworks can provide insights into the embodied nature of perception and cognition (Merleau-Ponty 2007). He posits that Cézanne’s art is unique because it renders visible our bodily relation to the world and thereby teaches us something about

what we, as embodied perceivers, deeply are but seldom consciously grasp. Emphasizing that Cézanne's investigation of reality departs from the primacy of his lived perspective instead of an abstract, geometrical study of nature, Merleau-Ponty writes: "It serves no purpose to oppose here the distinctions



Mont Sainte-Victoire 1902-6, 1902, by Paul Cézanne

between soul and the body, thought and vision, since Cézanne returns to just that primordial experience out of which these notions are pulled and which gives them to us as inseparable" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 75). According to Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne's paintings attempt to capture the embodied and holistic nature of perception by showing that we cannot think of perception as separate from our bodies or distinguish any element of sensation from any other. As such, it runs counter to the dualism between mind and body that Merleau-Ponty consistently critiqued throughout his philosophical oeuvre. Through their unique colours and perspectives, Cézanne's paintings illustrate that we perceive with our whole body, since "[Cézanne] wanted nevertheless to paint the world, to change it completely into a spectacle, to make *visible* how the world *touches* us" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 79). In other words,

Cézanne's paintings do not just start from experience, but remain rooted in it; they visualise the miraculous phenomenon of human perception by bringing forth its embodied nature.

Aside from this aesthetic analysis, Merleau-Ponty also discusses the relation between Cézanne's works and the difficulties of his life. As he writes, Cézanne was a troubled soul who experienced life as painful and tragic, was mean to his friends and colleagues, and spent the final years of his life in almost complete isolation (Merleau-Ponty 2007; Rutherglen 2004). Merleau-Ponty writes that "his nature was basically anxious" and that psychopathological illnesses such as schizothymia and depression can be discerned through his comments and behaviour (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 70).

Merleau-Ponty argues that it is tempting to read Cézanne's art as a representation of the difficulties and vulnerabilities he experienced, but emphasizes that such a reading is too simplistic. Instead, he wants to understand the relation between Cézanne's life and his work without reducing one to the other. As he writes, "it is certain that life does not *explain* the work; but it is equally certain that they communicate. The truth is, that *that work to be done required that life*. From the very start, Cézanne's life found balance only by applying itself to the work that was still in the future" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 80). Through this quote, the relation between life and work can be described as one of immanent communication, where artistic expression is an oscillation between the unique life-story of the artist and the realities of nature, tradition and history into which his creation is thrown. Cézanne's life did not determine his meticulous attention to nature or his art, but was still 'required' for those elements to manifest themselves in the way they did. According to Merleau-Ponty, this interplay between biography and art is the central paradox of artistic expression, since "it is true both that the life of an author can teach us nothing and that – if we know how to read it – we can find everything in it, since it opens onto the artwork" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 84). Here, Merleau-Ponty sheds a light on the relation between Cézanne's unique style of painting and his life; Cézanne tried to render visible his chaotic confrontation with people, the world and the phenomenon of expression by integrating his lived perspective into his artworks.

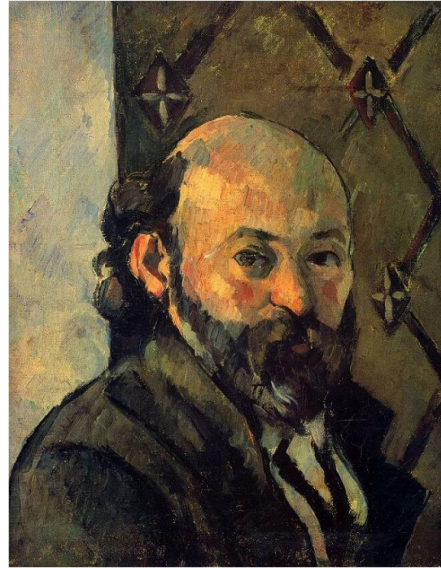
A Phenomenology of Schizoid Embodiment

Interpreting Cézanne's art as an expression of our bodily relation to the world is plausible, given Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological commitment to embodied perception. However, I argue that this reading of Cézanne is not exhaustive, because the phenomenological understanding of the body from which he departs remains undifferentiated in his analysis. Merleau-Ponty asks how Cézanne, as a *painter*, relates his body to the environment in a unique way, but *does not* ask

whether Cézanne's psychopathological constitution might have influenced his experience of embodiment. In short, he does not inquire into the *phenomenology of the schizoid body*, which can open up his texts to new possibilities.¹

To explore these possibilities, I will first show how the schizoid body is phenomenologically distinct from other types of embodiment. Drawing on the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Paul Moyaert, I argue that we can understand the schizoid body as *porous*, a concept which points at the disturbed relation between the body and the outside world characteristic of schizoid temperament.² After having constructed this framework, I return to Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cézanne and use the concept of the porous body as an analytical tool to re-interpret key elements of his texts.

In his analysis of the schizoid body in *Logic of Sense* (1969), Deleuze writes: "there is no longer any surface (...). The first schizophrenic evidence is that the surface has split open" (Deleuze 1969, 86). According to Deleuze, the schizoid 'temperament' is not just a psychological illness, but also has a distinct bodily dimension; the surface which has 'split open' makes it difficult or even impossible for the schizoid person to distinguish between the inside and the outside of his body. This theme is further elaborated by Moyaert, who writes: "schizophrenic embodiment is characterized by an extremely



Self-Portrait, 1879 by Paul Cézanne

1 A conceptual clarification must be made on this point. I use the term 'schizoid' to include both 'schizothymia' and 'schizophrenia'. I am aware that these are similar, but distinct disorders. Since little is known about the body in schizothymia, but philosophical literature on the body in schizophrenia is available, I use these insights to speculate on a more general account of the schizoid body without arguing that differences between the varieties of schizoid disorders ought to be effaced. Moreover, the overall aim of this piece is by no means meant as a retroactive 'diagnosis' of Cézanne; this is not only unethical, but also strictly impossible. It is rather a speculative investigation into the relation between embodiment, artistic expression, and experience based on a variety of sources on the phenomenology of schizoid embodiment.

2 Paul Moyaert's work is only available in Dutch. All translations to English are made by me.

fragile separation between self and Other, between inside and outside. The anonymous Other, forces without name and owner, penetrate one's inner core (...) and the self loses itself in the other" (Moyaert 2019, 38). These statements show that the schizoid body is phenomenologically unique, because it is characterized by severe *porosity*. The porous body is incredibly vulnerable because it becomes a sieve, *un corps passoire*, which is directly exposed to the outside world. The world thereby becomes dangerous, sinister and ominous, because the body loses its place within the world as an anchor point to which one can return. The porous body is no longer "this actual body I call mine," (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 352) but a strange, chaotic assemblage of organs and sensory experiences which bleed into the outside world. Thereby, *it becomes the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside*.³

Cézanne and the Porous body

Having outlined a phenomenology of schizoid embodiment, I will now return to Merleau-Ponty's analysis and show that the concept of the porous body allows new interpretations of Cézanne's life and work to emerge. First, the porous body allows us to reinterpret Cézanne's incredibly intimate relation to nature as a consequence of his distinct embodiment, where the inside has become the outside and the outside has become the inside. Cézanne's bodily relation to nature is so intimate because he is *directly penetrated by it*. As he states: "the landscape thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness" (Cézanne 1912, quoted in Merleau-Ponty 2007, 77). This quote illustrates how Cézanne did not see himself as separate from nature, but rather felt himself *becoming* nature due to his incapacity of marking a boundary between the inside and the outside. Adding to this theme, Cézanne states that "the artist must conform to this perfect work of art [nature]. Everything comes to us from nature; *we exist through it*; let us forget everything else" (Cézanne, quoted in Merleau-Ponty 2007, 77). Again, it is the lack of separation between man and nature, the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which hints at the porous state of the body. When the surface of the skin splits open like a sieve, nature invades the body and the self loses itself in the other. This allows us to see the deeply *embodied* character of Cézanne's statement that "nature is on the inside"; it is nature which pours through the punctured, fractured surface and touches the schizoid body from within (Cézanne, quoted in Merleau-Ponty 2007, 72).

Second, the porous body allows us to speculate on a parallel between Cézanne's schizoid embodiment and the lack of contour in his artworks.

3 For a more detailed analysis of how schizophrenia can be understood as disembodiment, see Fuchs (2005) and Stanghellini (2009).

Merleau-Ponty writes that Cézanne's "painting would be a paradox: investigate reality without departing from sensations, *with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following the contours*, with no outline to enclose the colour, with no perspectival or pictorial composition" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 72, emphasis added). Here, Cézanne's art is characterized by an absence of contouring lines which separate objects from each other. Instead, he used colour to evoke objects and forms. As Merleau-Ponty continuously emphasizes throughout his texts, such an aesthetic analysis cannot be seen as separate from embodied perception. The question, then, is how to understand Cézanne's lack of contour in light of his embodiedness. Here, the concept of the porous body allows us to speculate on an original interpretation: *it is the lack of a border in Cézanne's porous body which runs parallel to the lack of contour in his artworks*. This does not signify a causal relation, but rather one of immanent communication between life and work; it is the fractured surface of the porous body, the inside of the outside, which *opens up* onto Cézanne's artworks. In Cézanne's art, objects are not clearly separated, but bleed into each other and interfuse each other. This runs parallel to the fragility and vulnerability of the porous body, which is no longer distinguishable from nature but *immersed in* and *penetrated by* it. This opens it up to the 'immediate impression of nature', signifying Cézanne's lack of contour as the uncannily materialization of an indivisible unity of being experienced in the porous body.

In the third and final part of my analysis, I explore how the concept of the porous body creates a new understanding of the dialectical relation between Cézanne's life and his work. As I have already outlined, Merleau-Ponty understands the interplay between these two elements as a form of immanent communication, where the artist and the work 'open up to each other'. If we introduce the porous body into this analysis, we can formulate a new interpretation of Merleau-Ponty when he writes:

"there are no longer causes or effects; they are gathered together in the simultaneity of an *eternal Cézanne* who is the formula at once of what he wanted to be and what he wanted to do. There is a relationship between Cézanne's *schizoid temperament* and his work because the work reveals a metaphysical sense of the illness (...) finally, in this sense, *to be schizoid and to be Cézanne are one and the same thing*" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 69, emphasis added).

When we read this quote through the concept of the porous body, a new possibility for interpretation arises; we can think of the ‘simultaneity of an eternal Cézanne’ as the way in which the painter *is simultaneously present and absent in the process of artistic expression*.

This requires explanation. Thus far, I have argued that Cézanne’s schizoid embodiment, as the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, allows us to interpret his comments on nature as being ‘in’ him through the theme of porosity. As I have indicated, the porous body is experienced as a mysterious entity; it is not ‘this body I call mine’ into which I can retreat or fall

This is the paradox lying at the heart of the porous body; a simultaneous presence and absence of the artist in the environment and his work. It seems as though there is a ‘sensing,’ ‘seeing’ and ‘painting’ which, though fully his own, precedes him

back on myself, but an unsafe place, unable to keep outside forces at the door (Moyaert 2019, 38-39). This lack of boundary is what characterizes Cézanne’s incredibly intimate relation to nature; he *becomes* nature, and thereby he, as a subject, is *absent* in the act of painting. The porous body allows us to see that what Cézanne renders visible is not just his chaotic confrontation with the phenomenon of expression, but also his *dissolvment within the act of expression*. This is the paradox lying at the heart of the porous body; a simultaneous presence and absence of the artist in the environment and his work. It seems as though there is a ‘sensing,’ ‘seeing’ and ‘painting’ which, though fully his own, precedes him. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “painting was his world and his mode of existence” (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 69). Through my analysis, we can further specify this mode of existence as the expression of Cézanne’s *direct involvement with nature and the ways in which the inside and outside inter-fuse each other*. Art, nature, and the body are no longer separate, but come together as one in the immanent expression of an eternal Cézanne: “*They are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of sensing makes possible*” (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 356, emphasis added).

Conclusion

The question which remains, is what this analysis ultimately leads to. As I have argued throughout this paper, the porous body allows us to reinterpret Cézanne’s life and work, but this reinterpretation is not meant to reject Merleau-Ponty’s analysis. Rather, I have attempted to show that new paths of

aesthetic analysis can be opened up if philosophical reflections on art critically assess the hidden assumptions on embodiment from which they depart. Even though Cézanne's art might be able to provide insights into the human condition by rendering visible how the world touches us, the introduction of the porous body urges us to keep in mind that experiences of embodiment vary widely along a multitude of dimensions ranging from small to big, able to disabled, or porous to impermeable. When thinking about art and its relation to the body, it is therefore important to specify which *particular* bodies we have in mind and how they relate to artistic expressions in their own, unique ways. In the case of Cézanne, I have attempted to illustrate how his bodily state can be read as one of the utmost fragility, where the lack of a border between the inside and the outside exposes him directly to nature. The concept of immanent communication allows us to see that this vulnerability can function as a requirement for his innovative rejection of contour and his meticulous study of nature. Moreover, the inside of the outside signifies the paradox at the heart of Cézanne's artistic expression; his simultaneous presence and absence from creation, the vanishing mediator between art and nature at the outskirts of existence. This leads to a different understanding of the eternal Cézanne, who managed to find beauty deep within the eternal tragedy of human existence.

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What Gary Lachman Taught me about surrendering to myself

Laura Schranz

Gary Lachman, Rejected Knowledge: A Look At Our Other ways of Knowing, 2015

A few weeks ago, I had the great pleasure to attend a reading group in Arnhem with a dear friend, hosted by the interdisciplinary philosophy platform “future based”. The evening was filled with the laughter of strangers, sitting muddled up on the floor of an industrial looking alleyway house, swirling their minds around modernity and the (apparent) separation between mind and body. The event was centred around medieval witch hunts and the knowledge that was denounced and lost, which inspired many discussions about the underlying assumptions and motives that led to the killing of wise (mostly) women, and the idea that the only valid way to scientific discovery passes through the calculating, rational mind of a Western man.

Descartes’ separation between mind and body, so we quickly agreed, finds its most dominant expression in the way emotions are seen as separate from and subjected to the control of the mind. This theme is present from Aristotle to modern day self-proclaimed alpha males who stress that true power lies in conquering your own emotions, their synonym for weakness.

As the group consisted of mostly women, the gendered dimension of this separation was discussed with great passion and intimacy, moving from a “speaking about” to a “speaking from within”. In Western modern knowledge production and modes of thinking, but also in many spiritualities or religions such as Hinduism, women, emotions, and nature are muddled up into one entity that encompasses wilderness, impulsiveness, untamedness, and must be risen above in order to reach true enlightenment. Nature and humans are thus gendered into opposites, and organized along the lines of a control-obsessed rejection of emotions as valid knowledge.

I was lucky enough to read and discuss texts by various incredible authors that night, but there was one that stood out especially and stuck with me for many days after. Our conversation became deeply personal to me when we discussed an excerpt of the book “...” by Gary Lachman, bass-guitarist of the band Blondie. Lachman writes in such a poetic way that his mere composition of words is already beautiful to me. Lachman argues that we have entered a new mode of relating to the world, which is defined by us placing ourselves outside of it. Rather than recognizing our interconnectedness to the world we exist in, we have created a distance that places us into a position of observa-

tion and separateness. The world, in this case, is everything natural around us, that we dissect, observe, explain, disconnect, and hide away from through what Lachman calls “the scientific mode” or “the new tradition”.

Rather than recognizing our interconnectedness to the world we exist in, we have created a distance that places us into a position of observation and separateness.

This objectification of nature treats it as a soulless machine, it reduces it to mechanical processes.

Probably the most fundamental way in which these two kinds of knowing (“know how” and “know why”) differ is that in the new scientific mode, we stand apart from the world. We keep it at a distance, at arm’s length. It becomes an object of observation; we become spectators separated from what we are observing. With this separation the world is objectified, made into an object. What this means is that it loses, or is seen as not to have, an inside. It is a machine, soulless, inanimate, dead. We object to this when it happens to us, when we feel that someone is not taking into account our inner world, our self, and is seeing us as an object, as something without freedom, will, completely determined. But it is through this mode that we can get to grips with the world and arrange it according to our needs. Whether we are scientists or not, this is the way in which we experience the world now, at least most of the time. There is the world: solid, mute, oblivious, and firmly “out there”. And “inside here” is a mind, a puddle of consciousness in an otherwise unconscious universe.

Lachman argues here that we treat nature in such a way that would feel deeply wrong and hurtful if directed towards ourselves in the same cold, objectifying manner. As already mentioned, nature and emotions, our very own nature inside, have historically been and still are equated with one another. What Lachman misses here is that this objectification of nature does not only stem from the need to justify our domination over it, but also comes from a place of fear.

We dissect nature into its parts and atoms and mechanisms and chemical compounds and whatnot, we understand every tiny process behind majestic phenomena that could only be grasped through myths back in the day. Dissecting nature allows us to subject it to a conception of primitiveness.

That which we understand becomes less threatening, less unpredictable, less wild. It makes nature nothing but a web of calculated mechanical gears and us less small against its forcefulness.

The flipside of this is that we rob ourselves of a sense of awe and the chance to surrender to being but a fraction in an infinite mosaic beyond comprehension. Wonderment and giving up control share a deeply intimate relationship, something that is not compatible with a mode of being that requires constant control and alertness.

The new scientific mode of standing outside is an incomplete comprehension of the world, it is fundamentally lacking something, and I believe that people feel this.

Currently I am partaking in a project at Valkhof museum, where I am helping to conceptualize and curate an exhibition about black holes. This has given me the chance to speak to various astrophysicists and astronomers. The surprising number of these scientists having turned to art confirmed my thought that this purely scientific, cold mode of observing the world is fundamentally lacking something. Engaging with space in this way allows for a sense of wonder to return that cannot be expressed by numbers, statistics, and scientific reports, and it places the human back into a relation with their surroundings.

Lachman claims that we would fiercely reject such a denial of our inner world. I have experienced this differently, in fact, I see the need to control and tame nature even more prominently in the way we engage with (or shy away from) its expression within us.

If we cannot separate ourselves from nature, it also means that we cannot separate the way we engage with ourselves inside from the way we engage with the outside.

Throughout the last year I have greatly dealt with this myself, and Lachman's text made me wonder how the intellectualization of emotions as an escape from their forcefulness is in any way different than hiding from the same force of our surroundings through Lachman's new scientific mode.

If we cannot separate ourselves from nature, it also means that we cannot separate the way we engage with ourselves inside from the way we engage with the outside. Even upholding such categories becomes obsolete. Surely, I can explain *why* I have difficult feelings in a rationally appealing manner, I can choose from an endless number of names to describe them,

read self-help books and relate every negative pattern back to some childhood event, but where in all of this do I just *feel*? Where exactly do we *hold still and experience* in our new scientific mode?

Human beings are a kind of microcosm, a little universe, and we contain within ourselves vast inner spaces, that mirror the vast outer spaces in which our physical world exists. In the rejected tradition, the whole universe exists within each one of us, and it is our task to bring these dormant cosmic forces and realities to life. If in the new scientific tradition we have begun to explore outer space, in the rejected tradition we turn our attention inward and explore inner space.

Exploring inner space in this rejected tradition cannot be successful if done in the same manner that lies at the basis of its initial rejection. Instead of exploring to understand with our mind, we must be willing to give up the false sense of control this rational *modus operandi* grants us and surrender to the nature within ourselves, even if that means to just sit down and cry. You will be surprised at how many might come to sit next to you.



Ype de Boer

Philosopher on the Jobmarket

Mireille Kouevi

Tell me about yourself (nervous laugh)

I am 33 years old, and I just graduated with my PhD-thesis on Agamben, a dissertation that has been in the works for let's say eight years.

Eight years? (flabbergasted)

Yes, I did part of my PhD as an external PhD-student, which means I did it without funding. You earn your living through non-academic stuff but are allowed to set your own deadlines more freely. I did a lot of non-academic philosophy; I gave lectures, I did courses, and I wrote two books intended for a broader audience (*Murakami en het gespleten leven* (2017) and *Het Erotisch Experiment* (2019)). I tried to maintain the academic standard in terms of research, but the style is more suited for people generally interested in philosophy. Sometimes my writing was inspired by my research on Agamben, but overall, these books allowed me to engage more directly with existential topics that I had acute questions about. Writing them also functioned as a certain break from working on my thesis, which ended up working out for me very well. Considered as a part-time PhD, working about half a year per year on my thesis, with eight years in total it is about the same time as a normal PhD-trajectory: four years.

It is quite a bit. I mean, there is a lot of work that goes into a PhD and writing your dissertation. What experiences did you make throughout that time?

It is stressful. The impostor syndrome is a real thing amongst PhD's, and when you work on a difficult philosopher, it is not only the complexity of the thought but also the very style of writing of the author that you have to get used to. You (Mireille) are doing your thesis on Agamben, so you know that his writing is beautiful, but very dense and eclectic at the same time. In addition, he operates at a level I will probably never achieve. I do not know about you but for me it was important to realize my limitations there. But then the question arises of whether you can read the texts and digest them in a way that is profound enough. So, that can be stressful and challenging.

Yeah, I understand. Personally I, and probably many of our readers have or will have to go through this impostor syndrome when working on a huge project such as a thesis, may it be a bachelor's or master's degree.

It is part of it. We work with texts that were written by people whom the professors you find most aspiring are themselves studying and trying to

come to terms with. As with world class sports, there is still a gap between excellent players and those players that actually change the way of the game. It is to those type of texts that we have to find our access to, but that is part of the fun, I guess. At one point, it is important to accept your limits and then value them as well.

What was stressful to me was that, for a long time, whenever I felt like I had something, upon re-engaging with the texts again and again I ended up confused all the same. Working for months, reading and re-reading, consulting secondary literature, and still just not getting it was frustrating. But then, as an external PhD, to focus on a different project, or just a different philosopher whom I was teaching on, either at university or in a public course, offered the opportunity to take a step back. For example, my first book was on Haruki Murakami, a Japanese writer read globally, whose work in terms of style was way more accessible than Agamben. So, it was then just a relief to take a break from the extreme complexity of the research and focus my philosophical energy on something that, at least for me, was more approachable. Delving into that and coming out with theories and insights I still cherish, made me feel refreshed. It also gave me the confidence to return to the Agamben research.

Interestingly, and I had to learn this, in the meantime something had happened. By taking a rest, and then re-starting I felt like I had somehow further developed my ability of understanding: “oh my god, I now see it!”, I now at least see more of it. All that struggling I did and then the frustration of not being there yet, was not for nothing, right? Something happened, but I needed also time away from it to fully digest it all. Those moments kept me going because I learned that although I might not have been there yet, I did make a few important steps forward.

To have the freedom of thought means to be inspired by people who make you look at the world differently and freeing yourself from limiting dogmas and opinions.

Nonetheless this is the stressful part. At the same time, doing philosophy can generate a powerful experience of freedom. To have the freedom of thought means to be inspired by people who make you look at the world differently and freeing yourself from limiting dogmas and opinions. When you are writing, and thus creating something yourself, to feel the flow of ideas through your head is, at least in effect, the freedom that I experience.

I think I know what you mean. I call it the “philosophy-high”, it describes this very present moment of freedom that you were describing.

Yes, that is great. I can relate, and that is what keeps you going obviously. I mean you can speak about philosophy all day, but that is the feeling that you want to hold onto, that is the beauty of it and what makes you work through these crazy texts and then accept the frustration *laughs*.

It comes with it.

Waiting for the high again.

One question that interests me is how did you get into Agamben? Personally, I have been first introduced to him in Biopolitics and have not met many people that took such an interest in Agamben.

Opportunistically. One of my professors during my study at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was very inspiring. Completely esoteric, really hard to please intellectually, but very kind. He helped me to see beyond the superficial by only showing me at what level the conversations in academia take place but also what it takes to be part of the conversation. I was just enchanted.

I wanted to do my PhD with this professor, who was starting a project on the notion of a historical *a priori* based on Foucault, Husserl and Agamben. To work with him, I had to read Agamben. However, when reading Agamben... Yeah, it was a sort of love at first read. Agamben challenges you. You have to find your way in because he will not create it for you. He is very seductive; his thoughts are beautifully written, and it is inspiring but it does not tell you how to read him. It is great in a way, if you want to work for it then it is only for the better because you have to be creative just to read him. I had to experience this. In the end, I wrote my dissertation on ethics. What fascinated me about Agamben's philosophy was his way of dealing with the more general question of what it means to be a human being. However, this also meant that I had to move away from the original topic on the historical *a priori*. It took me a few years to make this transition and find my own project. This is another liberty you have as a PhD student.

At some point, the aforementioned professor offered me to join him and his research in Bonn (Germany) but I just had a kid and decided to stay here. Simultaneously, I met Professor Gert-Jan van der Heijden, who is a great supervisor and great at helping you with developing your ideas for your dissertation. For me, this was not only a pleasant encounter due to our shared interest in Agamben but also an eye-opening one that provided me with a new career opportunity at Radboud University. He informed me about

a small grant that I could request at Radboud University to conclude my PhD and a few courses that I could teach here. The switch to Radboud University has been a very good decision.

Yeah, what I have noticed during research and being a student is that everything just happens at some point and there are lots of possibilities when you find and talk to the right people. However, this becomes a bit harder if you feel like you are alone with your niche interest and you are unable to find someone that shares your interest, turning it rather into a lonely experience.

What made you actually consider a career in academia?

Honestly, I was a bit disappointed with academia as a student and even considered, like almost all philosophy students, to try writing fiction instead. The disappointment had a bit to do with the climate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the climate here [Radboud University] helped me to understand this. As a student at the Vrije Universiteit there was not so much space for continental philosophy, the type of philosophy that I love and was doing myself. Although they were kind to me, I still felt like my research was not appreciated as much as more analytical or practical philosophy is there ... It also felt like there was more of a competitive sphere, while my experience here [Radboud] is of a more constructive sphere in which we do things together and discuss our works. I did not know that academia could also be like that, I thought: "Oh, is this all that academia is like? I just want to write, so I do not care. I love to teach, so I would love to teach academia, but all I truly need is the freedom to write and develop ideas, that's it."

If I am being honest, it has only been 1 ½ years since I have reconsidered this and started putting all my energy into a career in academia. For me, the PhD was not about "I will become a great academic" but about pushing myself by doing all these grand proposals to do my PhD and see whether I have what it takes to continue on a PhD level. That was my way of dealing with becoming or being an academic until I met people from the Radboud here and I thought: "Hey, maybe there is a place for me here in academia?"

Additionally, I had a quite romantic idea of living simply from just writing. I did that for a while and it was great but it was lonely at times and didn't always pay the bills. Now to be part of a group, to be able to teach students and not having to promote myself or my work is great. Being an independent philosopher or writer means constantly promoting yourself and your work, which can be tiring.

Maybe to give you a more positive answer, what I have since working here really appreciated about the academic world is that, if you can find a group that welcomes you and appreciates your work then it is possible to enjoy

this climate. If you work with like-minded people on topics, even if opinions diverge, it still provides a platform for constructive and fruitful discussions that can take the form of conferences, writings and teachings... I really love to teach.

If you work with like-minded people on topics, even if opinions diverge, it still provides a platform for constructive and fruitful discussions that can take the form of conferences, writings and teachings...

Hearing you give your outlook on a career in academia is quite interesting to me because when I talk to other professors and lecturers about how they got into academia, and it was most of the time the most natural and logical step after finishing their master's degree. You, however, are different. You decided to do something else with your passion for writing, figuring out that this might not be for you, continuing to explore your other interests, and ultimately ending up back in academia.

Luck also plays a significant role, if I had not met Professor van der Heijden I would not be in the position that I am in right now. It is maybe also a generational difference, there were other difficulties and more positions in philosophy twenty years ago. Now there is very strong competition for very limited spaces in this field. Since then, considering a career in academia has become a very conscious decision because universities get to offer very few jobs.

This reminds me a lot of me wanting to start philosophy after graduating high school in Germany, which seemed impossible because I did not like their way of philosophy and more importantly their curriculum and their combinations. The requirements to get into a study became higher and higher to the point where it seemed unattainable and then during a university fair, I found Radboud University that has given me the chance to do philosophy in the way that I wanted to do it. So, it was completely by luck that I ended up here.

Another thing that I would like to know is how were you able to commit for so long to one topic for your PhD?

This question has less to do with my capabilities and more with my fascination with this topic. If you have the opportunity to work on a thesis with something that really interests you, you will be fine regardless of the sadness,

anger and frustration that you might experience in the process. You will be fine because there will be enough moments proving to you not only that it is worth it, but also why that is the case.

Did you experience any instances in which the topic of your dissertation started to interfere with your everyday life?

Well, some people are very good at distinguishing between work life and private life, but for me and I think many people who do philosophy, especially continental philosophy, the two spheres easily intertwine. This makes it harder and simultaneously easier to find the balance between work and life. It makes work easy because when the topic you are working on is simultaneously very important to your life in general, it comes naturally to just walk the extra mile. Yet because of this it can be incredibly difficult to separate work from life and then sometimes it feels as though, in your work, your whole identity is at stake. A supervisor should also provide some assistance here when needed: she or he should help you translate the subjective existential engagement into something doable, something with a structure and tangible that is separate from your private life, but relatable enough to keep you going.

He chews on it in such a way as to open realms of thoughts and perspectives. That is something I thoroughly enjoy.

I liked your thought on that one of the hurdles that we philosophers face is that our work and life pretty much intertwine. How did Agamben influence your philosophy, but also your way of life?

When reading Agamben, I thought “Wow, if this is philosophy, I want to do philosophy.” He (Agamben) early on became very important to me for my understanding of what philosophy could be, but also in how you write philosophy. The freedom he uses, also the way he touches on spiritual traditions and dimensions of life, which a lot of philosophers tend to evade, or banish to the realm of superstition, that was the stuff that spoke to me. I loved the way he works with figures from all kinds of traditions such as literature, theology, science, and other information sources such as daily newspapers. He chews on it in such a way as to open realms of thoughts and perspectives. That is something I thoroughly enjoy. In terms of content, it is harder to explain.

It is maybe only now, after I have finished my PhD, that I feel free to take a step back from his work. Of course, I had to take critical steps back to write it, but it's a very immersive thesis. When working on tension and problems in Agamben, I found it incredibly important to search everywhere for possible

solutions before articulating my answers. Agamben is a fragmental writer and the problems you encounter in one text are sometimes solved five books later... Especially on the topic of ethics as his alternative to biopolitics and the form of life and the type of life that Agamben imagines, require a patient and charitable reading. This also meant that I had to develop a charitable attitude towards him, which came naturally.

MIREILLE KOUÉVI

PHILOSOPHER ON THE JOBMARKET - YPE DE BOER

The becoming of art

A cocreative process

Ilse Meijer

Introduction

One of the most unexpected but gravest pains I have perhaps experienced in this lifetime thus far is when a piece of music got, according to me, violently interrupted by applause. The musical performance consisted of a group of people playing large drums. The deep drumming sounds drilled through my bones, and when the last drum had sounded, I was caught off guard by the audience around me that broke out into a loud applause. I remember literally screaming 'nooo, what did you do', but no one else seemed to be as bothered as I was. For me, there was a silence needed after the drumming. The frequencies of the drums were still vibrating in my bones. The silence afterwards was part of the piece of music, it was a critical part necessary to process the intensity that I had just experienced. Until this day I grieve that experience that got ripped out of my body, yet at the same time never had a chance to leave it or calmly die out. It may sound a bit dramatic, but I am sure that there are people that recognize the violation of a piece of music because it got interrupted by applause or screaming before the last notes had sounded, or before a necessary silence sounded. To what extent does silence, as in the absence of played notes, form a part of a music piece? Silences during a music piece are an integral part, there is little ambiguity about that, but how about after a music piece ends?

The question of when and how an artwork is completed is one that various thinkers have written about and forms part of the wider question of what art is. What remains understudied, however, is the role the various senses might have in answering the question of where an artwork begins and where it ends. Based on the five senses, it might seem clear where an artwork begins or ends – a music piece starts with the first sound and ends with the last sound, a painting begins when something becomes visible and ends when the visible object no longer changes, or the painting begins where you can physically touch the canvas and ends where that canvas physically stops for example. If you would regard culinary practices as an artwork, you could say the same for taste and smell. However, these senses do not account for the anecdote mentioned above, or for the fact that an artwork can be interpreted or experienced in various ways by different people. In that sense, an artwork can take different shapes for different people depending on the emotional experience or interpretation that the artwork evokes.

Considering only the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, these emotional experiences cannot be accounted for as part of an artwork. However, whereas in the West we recognize five senses, this is far from universal. On top of that, the specific ordering in which senses are considered and used differs. Some strands of Hinduism, for example, recognize ten senses or Indriyas. That is, in addition to the five sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin) they also recognize the five so-called motor organs (hands, feet, mouth, anus, and genitals) that help humans interact with the world. In many Western African cultures, the heart is recognized as an additional sense based on the belief that the heart has the ability to sense and perceive emotions and spiritual energies in a distinctive way from the other senses. The heart is considered the center of emotion and intuition. The idea of a 'sixth sense' is also recognized in traditional Chinese culture where this sense is associated with 'qi', the vital energy that flows through all living things. Even in Western cultures the term 'sixth sense' is sometimes used to refer to intuition of a psychic ability. With regards to the ordering of the senses, in the West sight and sound are generally seen as the 'higher senses' that are most important since they are most closely related to the mind (Howes 2009, 22-23; Howes 2013, 8-9). However, this is not universal. Songhay shamans in Niger, for example, prioritize taste, smell and hearing over sight and can "taste kinship, smell witches, and hear the ancestors" (Elliott and Culhane 2017, 48).

In this essay, I will look at the beginning and completion of an artwork by focusing on the bodily sensual experience of it as a body of art. In the first section I will look at the ambiguity of the beginning of an artwork by looking at two examples, that of a painting and a piece of music. In the second section I will explore the ambiguity of the completion of an artwork, here I will also discuss the concept of Death of the Author (cf. Barthes 1967). In the third and final section, then, I will discuss who should be considered the artist or creator given the ambiguity of an artwork's beginning and completion. In the conclusion I will shortly summarize the arguments in this essay.

To understand where an artwork begins, we must ask the question of when the process of creating art begins.

The beginning of the artwork

To understand where an artwork begins, we must ask the question of when the process of creating art begins. To illustrate the ambiguity of the answer

to this question and to move beyond an inevitable abstractness when writing *about* art, I will briefly examine two examples of what are commonly considered artworks: a painting and a piece of music.

The conventional painting is mostly a visible experience; hence one might assume that a painting starts with the paintbrush touching the canvas. This moment signifies the first visible sign of the shapes or colors that will eventually comprise the artwork. But as many people who have made a painting will recognize even this is not a self-evident moment of beginning. Sometimes you first make a sketch before using paint or colors on your canvas. This means that in questioning when the creation of art begins, the sketching would have to be included. Now suppose that the sketch is not done on the eventual canvas, but on a separate piece of paper. The sketching on this paper is included in the process of creating the eventual painting, but does it also form part of the painting?

Whether we decide to include the paper sketch in the eventual artwork or not, even the sketches or paint might not actually be the first visible aspect of the artwork. Without a canvas there would be nothing to hold the paint together, which means that the canvas forms an integral part of the eventual artwork. The creating of the canvas, then, would have to be included in the creation of the painting – stretching a canvas, cutting the wooden frame. But we can go one step further. Suppose that we are talking about a landscape painting. The visible experience of the painting is based on a visible landscape, or some aspects of it. This could mean that the process of creating a painting, as a primarily visible experience of art, might even start with the painter looking at landscapes. Or, even more radically, one might argue that the painting as a visual representation of a landscape (or aspects of it) is already somehow present in the landscape itself in the same way Michelangelo famously said that every block of stone has a statue inside it, and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it. This reflects Michelangelo's belief that the job of a sculptor was to reveal something that already existed rather than create something from scratch. But, in the case of the landscape painting, can we then say that the physical landscape forms part of the artwork?

We might come up with different answers to these questions and undoubtedly various people will have different opinions and feelings about them. The point, however, is not to answer all these questions but rather to illustrate in how many ways they can be answered. This means that the beginning of a painting is far from self-evident. I will give another brief example to show this.

Whereas a painting is mostly a visible experience, a music piece is mostly an audible experience. Hence, similar to the painting, we might first assume that the music starts when the first note sounds. But suppose the

music piece is played by an orchestra. Would not the first movement of the conductor then form the beginning of the music piece? After all, without the conductor lifting their hands, no sounds would follow. Now suppose that a group of people, perhaps the orchestra, is practicing a piece of music. You might say that musical practice as an expression of music is art, but when people practice a music piece, is the practice then also part of the artwork? And if the music piece is constantly played differently, whether that is with slightly different improvisations, or the same notes but with a whole different emotionality to it, does that mean that there is a dynamic range of what the artwork is? And when, with what level of adaptations, does it become a new artwork altogether?

If the music piece is constantly played differently, whether that is with slightly different improvisations, or the same notes but with a whole different emotionality to it, does that mean that there is a dynamic range of what the artwork is?

When philosophizing where the painting and the music piece start, I focused primarily on one sense at a time. However, as you may have already thought while reading these examples, neither a painting nor a music piece are solely visible or audible experiences. Some paintings are less of a direct representation of a visible experience in the world (such as a landscape), but rather an expression of a non-visible experience such as an emotion, or they combine visible impressions and invisible emotionality. Similarly, a music piece is not solely an audible experience but also an expression of emotions or a state of being or even thinking (whether that is in lyrics or rhythm). So, taking this into account we might wonder whether these artworks start with the emotionality they are based on or inspired by. And if that is the case, if the same emotional experience creates several artworks, are they truly separate?

What I have attempted to illustrate in this section is that artworks, and thereby the creation of an artwork, cannot be said to have an unambiguous beginning to them. However, this might not be a problem as long as we can say when an artwork is finished: perhaps with the last brushstroke on the canvas, or the last note that has sounded. In the next section I will discuss to what extent an artwork can be considered finished when we consider interpretation of an artwork as integral to the artwork itself.

The completion of the artwork

Whereas on the issue of the beginning of art there is little literature, on the issue of the completion of art there is much more. In this section, I will discuss several authors and point out what I argue is their biggest flaw, namely that they seem to consider an artwork as a merely material, physical object. Instead, I will argue that a crucial aspect of what constitutes an artwork is that it evokes a certain response. This response goes beyond the five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) – it evokes emotions, bodily sensations or a thinking process. In other words, the experience of the artwork creates or comprises the artwork. Since the evocation of such responses keeps happening as long as people experience the artwork, I will then conclude that an artwork is never completed.

A crucial aspect of what constitutes an artwork is that it evokes a certain response. This response goes beyond the five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) – it evokes emotions, bodily sensations or a thinking process

In his text ‘When is a work of art finished?’ Darren Hudson Hick (2008) discusses contemporary philosophers Monroe Beardsley and Paisley Livingston’s works in aesthetic literature. Hick’s discussion focuses on how Beardsley and Livingston consider the issue of art completion by attempting to formulate necessary conditions for a work being finished. Hudson Hick concludes that such necessary conditions are impossible to define, but we should instead look for sufficient conditions. Regardless of the sufficient or necessary conditions, Beardsley, Livingston and Hudson Hick contend that a state of being finished can be attributed variously to the artist with respect to a particular work, and to the work itself. This means that “an artist might not be done until they have decided that the work is done, but if nothing further has been done to the work it seems that the work was finished when the last change was made” (Hudson Hick 2008, 70). I am interested in the latter, namely when an artwork itself is finished. However, I would argue we have to ask to what extent an artwork itself *can* be finished.

Beardsley, Livingston and Hudson Hick all implicitly assume an artwork to be a merely material object. Hudson Hick (2008) mentions examples of when the last word is written, or when the last brushstroke has been made. An artwork seems to be considered as a physical material body. However, the experience of an artwork goes beyond its physical materiality: at the very

least, the physical materiality evokes an experience in the person experiencing the artwork (by hearing it, seeing it etc.). I think we can all agree that one of the most important attributes of art is that it does something *in* our bodies. A work of art can move people, evokes emotions, or other sensations in the body – the frequencies of music even influence our own bodies brain-waves/frequencies (a phenomenon that is known as ‘entrainment’).

This experience is one that goes beyond the five senses commonly recognized in the West as explained in the introduction (Elliott and Culhane 2017, Chapter 3; Howes 2009; Howes 2013). We do not merely hear a song; the song evokes a certain emotion and/or internal bodily response. I argue that this *experience* of the artwork is essential to what constitutes art. Hence, if we look at the sensual experiences of art (beyond the five senses), we understand that what constitutes an artwork goes beyond its material physicality and includes the responses it can evoke. This means that an artwork is changed and created also after its assumed material physicality (last brushstroke painted, last word put on the page) seems ‘finished’. The extent to which an artwork will keep being experienced and hence created means that it may never be completed. But then, if an artwork is constantly being created, who is the artist?

Who is the artist?

Intuitively, an artwork is created by an author or someone I will call the ‘original artist’. As we have seen in the last section, however, part of what constitutes the artwork is the internal responses it evokes in human beings experiencing the artwork in whatever way. In that sense, we can say that the person experiencing the artwork is also at least partly creating it. This concept is often referred to as ‘death of the author’. In this section, I will explore the concept of ‘death of the author’ by looking at its use by various thinkers. Specifically, I will contend with several thinkers that an artwork is determined neither solely by the ‘original artist’, nor solely by the art-experiencer. Then, I will go a step further and discuss the extent to which the artwork itself participates in the process of creation through the practice of agency.

The concept ‘death of the author’ refers to a literary theory that was introduced by French philosopher Roland Barthes in 1967. According to Barthes, the idea of the author as the sole source of meaning in a literary work is problematic. Instead, he argues that the meaning of a text is not determined by or limited to the author’s intentions, but rather by the reader’s interpretation. Therefore, Barthes suggested that the focus of a literary work should be solely on the text itself and how it is interpreted by the reader. The theory

is referred to as ‘death of the author’ because it suggests that once a literary work, or a work of art, is created, the author no longer has control over its meaning or interpretation (Barthes 2016).

In his book, *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot (originally written in 1955) even argues that the author’s disappearance is a necessary condition for the creation of literature. The act of writing involves a kind of self-erasure in which the author must release control over the text and allow it to live a life of its own (Blanchot 2015). Gilles Deleuze made a similar argument when stating that the painter must ‘destroy’ themselves and allow the painting to take on a life of its own in order to create a powerful and impactful artwork (Deleuze & Bacon 1981). Although I indeed find it evident that an artist has to release control over their artwork in order for it to be created, or at least shown, I disagree with Barthes, Blanchot and Deleuze that the original artist (or author in his context) has to completely erase or destroy themselves.

There are thinkers who offer more nuanced perspectives. In his 1969 essay ‘What is an author?’, Michel Foucault critiques the author as a singular, fixed identity and argues that the idea of an author as the sole originator of a text is a relatively recent development in Western culture. He challenges the idea that the author is the source of meaning of a text and instead argues that this meaning is shaped by a complex network of discourses and practices extending beyond the individual author (Foucault 2013). Hence it seems that Foucault does not necessarily erase the author, but rather includes it in a network of creating factors.

Since an artwork can be experienced years, decades or even centuries after the last brushstroke has been put on a painting, or the last note has been recorded, the artwork is never completed.

Jacques Derrida’s work on the notion of ‘deconstruction’ challenges traditional notions of language and meaning. He, for example, states that the meaning of a text is not fixed, but is instead in constant flux based on its context and the various interpretations that arise from it (Bass 2020). Italian semiotician and philosopher Umberto Eco (1979) suggests that the meaning or interpretation of an artwork is not determined solely by the artist or the reader, but rather by the interaction between the two. He states that the reader of a text, for example, brings their own knowledge and experiences to the interpretation of the text, but that the interpretation is always also mediated

by the text itself. I agree with this latter approach that is more nuanced: both the author or 'original artist', as well as the person who experiences art, are the ones creating an artwork.

As argued in the previous section, the experience of art is a subjective one, which means that the artwork stretches out into many people. Since an artwork can be experienced years, decades or even centuries after the last brushstroke has been put on a painting, or the last note has been recorded, the artwork is never completed. But does the artwork *in itself* then also have a sort of agency?

I am not the first to suggest that art has some sort of agency. In anthropological literature, there have been discussions on this for decades. In his book *Agency and Art*, anthropologist Alfred Gell (1998) argues that an anthropological study of art means studying the social contexts in which artwork is produced, circulated, and received. According to him, an artwork mediates social agency. Gell defines agency as being attributable to 'those persons (and things) seen as initiating causal sequences ... caused by acts of mind or will or intention' (Gell 1998, 16). According to this definition, art objects cannot be agents in themselves, but act merely as extensions of their maker's or user's agency (2004, 541). Gell further denies the intrinsic agency of art objects by suggesting that what a person sees or experiences is a function of their previous experience, their mindset, their culture etc. (Gell 1998, 33). In anthropology agency often refers not to people's intentions but their ability to act and make a choice of action. In this sense, agency cannot be attributed to an artwork as it cannot be said to have intentions.

Contrary to these definitions of agency, I would say that an artwork in itself, without being necessarily intended in that way by the artist, has agency in the sense that it has the power to evoke emotions or reactions for both the artist and the audience of an artwork. This agency cannot be separated from the agency of the other artists (the 'original artist' and the people experiencing the artwork). What I mean by this is that the agency of an artwork is still tied to the context in which it is produced. For example, a painting of a red square will evoke different emotions for people that live in a communist regime and hence have certain associations with the color red than those who do not. At the same time, the agency of an artwork is also still dependent on a person's history of experiences, emotions when experiencing the artwork, cultural background, etcetera (Gell 1998) – someone who has experienced a breakup will feel different emotions from hearing a love song than someone who just got engaged. To an extent, then, the agency of an artwork is cocreated by the context and the person experiencing the artwork, and this only becomes clear when we take into account the sensuality of an artwork beyond the five senses.

Conclusion

To summarize, to understand where an artwork begins, I first asked when the process of creating art begins. The answer was that the creation of an artwork cannot be said to have an unambiguous beginning, especially when looking beyond the five senses commonly recognized in the West. This would not be a problem as long as we could say that an artwork can be finished. However, that question too is ambiguous. When we consider an artwork as more than a merely material, physical object and contend that a crucial aspect of what constitutes it is that it evokes a certain response, we see that the experience of the artwork cocreates or comprises it. This means that an artwork is changed and created also after its assumed material physicality seems 'finished'. I then asked the question of who the artist is. On the one hand there is the 'original artist', but on the other hand we can also say that the person experiencing the artwork is at least partly creating the artwork – a concept that is sometimes called 'death of the author'. I contended that there does not have to be a complete death of the original author, but rather that an artwork is a constant cocreative process. In this cocreative process, the artwork itself participates in the process of creation through the practice of agency. The artwork in itself has agency in the sense that it has the power to evoke emotions or reactions for both its 'original artist' and its audience.

In this cocreative process, the artwork itself participates in the process of creation through the practice of agency. The artwork in itself has agency in the sense that it has the power to evoke emotions or reactions for both its 'original artist' and its audience.

However, this agency cannot be separated from the agency of the other artists (the 'original artist' and the people experiencing the artwork). Instead, the agency of an artwork is still tied to the context in which it is produced. Based on this argumentation we can then conclude that the making of an artwork is a cocreative process. In this cocreative process there is not one artist, but rather an interwoven network of the 'original artist', the audience, and the artwork itself. The role of each of these cocreators can only be understood when considering the bodily sensation of an artwork beyond the five (Western) senses. In that sense an artwork might be best seen not as a noun that has a beginning and an end, but rather as a verb: *work* that is constantly in creation.

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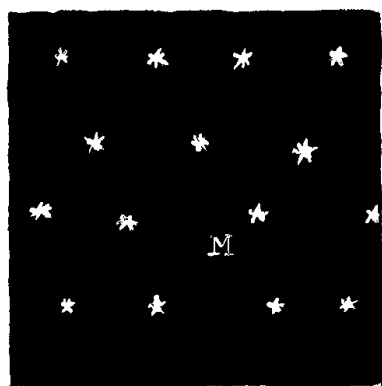
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4.

Epitome

Poem

Hannah Ox

what is to be held concerning the shape of the sky?¹

a figure of Mine

a figure M continues to be
when no one's about to observe me
it's exceedingly odd
that M would be God
and would it just not be a tree?²

a figure of Mind in a world
which is good
starts swelling and swelling and swelling

it keeps on swelling
'till it bursts

the world is good, its fabric is good
and all those places, fixed stars

a figure of Mine
like ourselves and our sun

perfectly
and truly *ein*

1 Question raised in Kepler's *Epitome astronomiae Copernicanae*

2 Inspired by Ronald Knox' limerick about Berkeley's God

Aoife McInerney

Status Quaestionis

Max Schmermbeck
& Hannah Ox

Introduction

How does thinking relate to the world? How do the spaces that constitute our daily lives impact our perception and understanding? How can we communicate different perspectives on the world with each other? In this interview, Max Schmermbeck and Hannah Ox discuss these questions with Aoife McInerney, a researcher and lecturer at Radboud University who wrote her dissertation on Hannah Arendt's 'spatial ontology'. A conversation about the relation between thought, spatiality, and politics.

You recently finished your dissertation on Hannah Arendt's work after having studied her in depth for quite some years. Which elements of her philosophy resonated so much with you that you decided to research them further? Was it love at first sight, or did the affinity with her thought arise gradually?

I came across Arendt's work kind of by accident, and she was just a breath of fresh air. She was doing something I felt was different and provocative. It wasn't systematic, which was challenging, but I felt it was genuine. When I read her, I felt spoken to. And that's not an experience one often has when reading philosophical texts. While Arendt definitely has her flaws, she was just somebody who I thought was a force of good in the world, which was very important to me.

From a more philosophical perspective, I think the most important thing is that her thinking is grounded in experience. Arendt does not do abstract, systematic, universal philosophy, but something much more messy, something that always takes its orientation from what was happening around her at the time. Of course, this complicates reading her. But she's exciting and provocative and intentionally writing from outside the tradition of philosophy. So I found this rebel who really just wanted to think about what was happening and I thought: Hell, yeah, let's do this.

You mention that it can be quite difficult to separate a person from their thinking, which is something Arendt was also very much opposed to. Why did she think that was so problematic? And did her personal experiences with antisemitism and authority play a role in the development of her ideas?

Arendt thought it was a problem to separate thinking from the world and from the individual person. For her, thinking is not an impersonal process that we carry out like machines. Unfortunately, that is what it is increasingly

becoming today; a depersonalized process. But that was not the case for her, because her thinking was deeply personal. She is most famous for being a political theorist, but she was never interested in politics until 1933, when the events happening in Germany at the time spurred her into feeling a sense of responsibility for the world. She felt like she could no longer turn away from what was happening, so she decided to engage with it both politically and philosophically.

What I find interesting is that she considered herself quite unworldly during the earlier period of her life. She was interested in the tradition of philosophy, and that, in a way, was an escape from the world for her. But at the moment she felt an enormous sense of responsibility to be involved with the world, philosophy became something else for her. It became important to be able to think about what was going on and to not just read texts that did not engage with contemporary events. As a result, she constantly centralizes the world in her thinking, which is really admirable and inspiring, because it is not easy to do.

She thinks that when we turn to authority and tradition for answers to our problems, what we are really looking for, deep down, is comfort. And for her, comfort is problematic because reality is uncomfortable.

Following up on that connection between world and thought, I am curious how you think about these two concepts when reading texts by a philosopher who does not share a world with us. This is, of course, often the case; we tend to read philosophers from the past who aren't alive and roaming our world. Why do we read such texts? What can we gain from them, if their times were so different? Is there perhaps a way to bridge that gap?

In a way, we read old texts because our problems are old as well. Living together as people, we face timeless conundrums and paradoxes. We turn to these texts because we hope to gain insights into the nature either of the problem or of the world that we currently live in. However, when we consult Arendt on this issue, we see that she would be cautious to read old texts for solutions to new problems or new events in the world. She thinks that when we turn to authority and tradition for answers to our problems, what we are really looking for, deep down, is comfort. And for her, comfort is problematic because reality is uncomfortable. So texts cannot really give you any of the certainty that you want. When you try to get that certainty from them

anyway, you undermine reality in a way. Not purposefully, but because you refuse to actually engage with what is happening right now. So there is a difference between reading philosophy to gain insight and understanding versus reading philosophy to look for solutions. And I think that this difference, while it is subtle, is immensely important.

I'm curious how this relates to your own research on Arendt. Was there a connection between your own work and Arendt's method of connecting thinking to reality or was your thinking more detached and abstract?

When you write a philosophical dissertation, it's going to have a certain level of abstraction, because you are dealing with concepts. But I really wanted to stay true to Arendt's motivation and her style of thinking. For me, it became a challenge to try and step outside the confines of my dissertation. Because when writing a dissertation, we're in a comfortable kind of space. It's systematic. We know what we have to do. We know we need a strong conclusion. We know what needs to follow from a strict argument. But at the end of the day, the harder question to ask is why any of it matters for somebody who is simply not interested in this. And this was something I kept torturing myself with as I would move through.

You wrote your dissertation on spatial ontology, which is perhaps a rather abstract concept. Could you share a bit more on that specific area of research, and how you explored it in your dissertation?

The concept 'spatial ontology' refers to the spatial constitution of reality, how we experience and understand things because of the kinds of spaces we inhabit. What I found when I was reading Arendt is that she stays true to her phenomenological influence, which is to say that as a thinker, she does not write from an objective stance through which one can make universal statements or have insight into the true nature of things. If you read her, you often find that her sentences start from a certain viewpoint; that of the world, of nature, of the human being, or something else. And then the qualities of the things about which she writes change, depending on which position she is inhabiting.

I can remember the moment that excited me the most, when I had my 'aha moment' with Arendt, although I couldn't articulate it yet. What excited me was that for her, what unites us is the fact that we have to share the same spaces on a fundamental level. And we can make distinctions within these spaces. This was a strong contrast with attempts to unite people by appealing to a shared 'human nature'. Why is that important? Because it is still the defining and the dominant discourse today, and for Arendt it is not about having a human nature. It's not that she denies that there is one, she just says

we can't know it. We could never have access to it in the same way that we can define objects, for instance. Instead, Arendt puts the world at the center. She puts it between us and around us as that which brings us together and separates us. And I thought: Wow, what is going on here? This is beautiful. It resonated with me. And it took me then several years to figure out in a dissertation what that actually meant. And the journey is still not over...

Plus, within the history of philosophy, usually it's not space that we focus on, but time. We are understandably obsessed with the temporal aspects of existence. But this often occurs at the expense of looking at our spatial relationships. So for me, it was a very disorienting thing to do. To move counter to something, not just to be contrarian, but in order to try and find a balance again.

You're not only learning how to write a Ph.D. and how to become an independent researcher and philosopher, but you're also learning about a new world in a way

I'm curious how your experience has been in the spaces of academia and perhaps how the experiences in doing a PhD differed from how you thought that they were perhaps going to be.

Overall, the experience of doing a Ph.D. is tough. Nobody will tell you otherwise. It's a cliché to say, but it's stressful. I guess if it were easy, everybody would do it. You're not only learning how to write a Ph.D. and how to become an independent researcher and philosopher, but you're also learning about a new world in a way. Learning about a career path and how things work within certain spaces. In that sense, when I think about doing a Ph.D., I don't just think about the writing and the reading. I also think about what it was and is like to inhabit these spaces as a young researcher. And it can be difficult and it can be a little intimidating. Because even if you do choose to speak out or become a voice, how you are perceived might not be as somebody who's just having a voice, it might be somebody who is too opinionated or negative. So again, it's how these qualities are perceived in different spaces. Being new, young, and not fully embedded within the system, I personally felt like I should be a little bit more quiet. I wanted to listen at meetings and learn the ropes and try to fit in. To know my place, because it's hierarchical in that sense. And I think, although it is changing, that's a pity, because often these people are the voices that we should be listening to if we want to make these spaces more fair and equal and inclusive.

So that would also be the sort of perspectival element that you have. Because as you say, an appearance that you have in one space can be perceived as a totally different appearance in another space because those spaces do not overlap. They're different, they have different qualities and have different atmospheres. Two questions to wrap up: What would be your advice, if there would be any advice, for young philosophers? And what does the future hold for you?

My advice is certainly short, but it's sincere. I would say, get a kind supervisor because there are some things you can only learn by example. And in an institution or on a career path where we are devoted to acquiring knowledge, I think it's important to remember that certain things can only be solved by a good example.

And what I'd like to do in the future? Having established that we cannot predict the future, nor should we try to... I don't want to give such a boring answer to end with, but I'm interested in exploring degrowth economics from an Arendtian perspective, because I think that's there in her work. I also work part-time at an investment bank and I can see that this concept really freaks some people out. So I want to get in there and freak them out even more.

Basically I'm going to get back out into the world and try to make people feel uncomfortable in a good way, I hope. Other than that, I hope to keep teaching, because I love teaching. And I like it when it comes to being at a university. I also want to say that it's students like yourselves that make the spaces. When I walk into a classroom, it's a very different space than when I'm in a meeting. And I want to thank you guys for that.

Dying for God?

On how Dutch media influences the imagery of “IS women”

Luca Tripaldelli

‘We have an insatiable desire for classification, for through it we create the world. Power, true power, is held not by those with the largest bank accounts or the strongest military, but by those who give us the words with which to view the world.’ (Whitley 2016)

With this statement scholar Thomas J. Whitley aims to highlight the importance of narrative around terrorist acts, claiming that leading narratives have a strong influence on how we perceive the events these narratives are about. In the West, it is especially the narrative of the media by which we attain ‘knowledge’ about certain terrorist events. In line with Whitley, it would hence mean that the media has a strong influence on how we perceive these events (Whitley 2016).

Thus, it is important to at least research this possible influence of the media. This is especially relevant when considering cases like that of the Dutch women who have joined ISIS and are now trying to return to their homeland. Within the Netherlands, the question of whether the Dutch government should allow these women back has indeed become a topic of popular debate. These women were part of an organization that is categorized by the Netherlands as terrorists, but does this make these women terrorists or a danger to Dutch society? As stated above, the media could have a big influence on how we think about this dilemma and therefore also have a big influence on both the lives of these women and their kids, whose faith is usually bound with that of their mothers.

Therefore, my aim for this paper is to answer the following research question: How does Dutch media influence the public image of Dutch women who are or were part of IS? I answer this question by using the first section to give an outline of the situation of the so-called ‘IS-women’ and the response of the Dutch government to the IS-women who want to return to the Netherlands. This section takes a sociological perspective and aims to give background information that is relevant to the remainder of my paper. However, academic research lacks a specific discussion on how media influences the imagery of women who are part of ISIS. Therefore, I use the second section of this paper to analyze existing research about the broader relationship between ISIS and the media in general. This section is mostly from the perspective of the communication sciences. Lastly, I use the third section to analyze Dutch media which have written about ‘IS-women’ and apply the

background information of the first section and the broader research of the second section to this analysis. By doing this I conclusively give an answer to the question of how Dutch media influences the imagery of women who are part of the IS movement.

Ultimately, I argue that the narrative of the media creates a notion that many people take to correspond to reality. What I mean by this is that we all have a certain image of what it means to be a woman who is part of ISIS and tend to believe that this general image corresponds with *all* the women who are, or were, part of ISIS. As the quote with which I opened states, our words determine how we perceive reality. This general image, and the fact that we think this image corresponds to reality, is in a big way influenced by the way the media writes about these women.

‘The Dutch dilemma’

Who are the Dutch IS-women?

In June 2014 the ISIS caliphate was proclaimed. In response, a small group of individuals residing in the West chose to migrate to this new caliphate due to their alignment with the interpretation of Islamic teachings by members of the Islamic state. Mostly, this interpretation refers to a version of Jihadism, which can be defined as a particular version of Islam which argues that violence has to be used to spread the teachings of the Islam.¹ Among them there were also women who can be defined as follows:

A female jihadist is considered a girl or woman who has either considered (and is registered as such by the police) or attempted to travel to ISIS territory; who facilitates or recruits others for travel or marriage to jihadists; has returned from ISIS territory; or has committed acts of violent extremism. (Gielen 2018, 456)

These women can also be ascribed a certain agency because they knowingly and willingly traveled or considered traveling to ISIS territory. This is also shown by the fact that they actively contributed to the recruitment of others.

1 Jihadism refers here to the Islamic term of Jihad which bears the meaning of ‘making an effort’ to achieve a goal. Accordingly, the Jihad is split into two versions: the inner Jihad, mostly referring to the personal struggle to keep up the teachings of the Islam and the greater Jihad, referring to the goal to convert people to the Islam. When people talk about Jihadists, one often refers to this greater Jihad. However, the connection to violence is not a necessary definitional aspect of this term.

A rapport of the AIVD² shows that most of these women are between 15 and 30 years old and are known to be converts with various ethnic backgrounds. However, minors who were taken by their parents are not covered by this definition because of their lack of agency (Gielen 2018, 456-458).

In response, a small group of individuals residing in the West chose to migrate to this new caliphate due to their alignment with the interpretation of Islamic teachings by members of the Islamic state.

Subsequently, to understand these women it is relevant to understand the process by which they are recruited. This process can be proactive, which means that (vulnerable) women are actively manipulated to join ISIS, and reactive, which means that recruiters wait until the women show interest. One must also consider other influences outside this recruitment process, like love, online group chats, and peer pressure within social media. It is also common that these women already had peers involved within the jihadist network. These relationships were further enhanced by social media whereby recruiters anticipated certain push and pull factors (Gielen 2018, 459). An important pull factor is that one can be motivated because of personal or idealistic reasons (Jacques and Taylor 2009, 506-507). Also, it is important to acknowledge the feeling of sisterhood and romanticized narratives as important pull factors (Saltman and Smith 2015, 13-17). Romanticized, in the sense that these narratives are often constructed to paint a perfect picture to overshadow the more negative aspects of joining the Islamic state. As will become clear, this disillusionment regarding the romanticized narrative becomes an important factor in why people want to leave.

Push factors would be revenge or certain key events that motivate these women to join ISIS (Jacques and Taylor 2009, 507). Examples of this are: isolation, the search for identity, having a sense of belonging, a feeling that the Muslim community is being oppressed and persecuted, and aggrievement at the (perceived) lack of international action (Gielen 2018, 458). However, one of the most apparent push factors is the troubled life histories of these

2 The 'Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst' (AIVD) translates as 'General intelligence and security service' and is a secret organization that aims to protect national security.

women. Studies have shown that 60% of the foreign fighters within ISIS have had psycho-sociological problems and 20% had psychiatric problems (Gielen 2018, 458).

Additionally, research exists about the push and pull factors for women *leaving* ISIS. Pull factors are often positive alternatives such as the desire for a normal life or having family obligations. One of the most important push factors is dissatisfaction with other group members, leaders, or the ideology of IS. These push factors can be further divided into three categories. First, there is the ideological category that concerns disillusionment with the ideology. Second, there are the social factors to be understood as dissatisfaction with extremist peers. Third, you have practical factors that 'revolve around the personal life situation, such as feeling isolated, stigmatized or externally pressured to participate in extremist groups' (Gielen 2018, 459).

Also, it is important to acknowledge the feeling of sisterhood and romanticized narratives as important pull factors. Romanticized, in the sense that these narratives are often constructed to paint a perfect picture to overshadow the more negative aspects of joining the Islamic state.

The Dutch reaction

What these women also have in common is that authorities know about their affiliation with ISIS and therefore certain measurements are undertaken. These women were first portrayed as victims and this resulted in the fact that many European countries did not prosecute them nor offer 'exit programs'. These exit programs normally aim at deradicalization and reintegration, but due to the assumption that women were the victims this program was not deemed necessary for their situation (Gielen 2018 454-456).

However, according to Gielen, recent studies have shown different imagery of these IS-women. Research of the AIVD³ stated that IS-women often are heavily armed and are trained to use these weapons. Next to that, IS-women seem to have an active role in recruiting other girls and women online.

3 For the research see: 1. AIVD (2016) *Life with ISIS: the Myth Unravelling*. The Hague: AIVD.

2. AIVD (2016): *Annual Report 2015: A Range of Threats to the Netherlands*. The Hague: AIVD.

3. AIVD (2017): *Jihadistische vrouwen, een niet te onderschatten dreiging*. 17 November. The Hague: AIVD.

IS-women thus seem to have a much more active role within ISIS than previously thought. It follows that it is critical to have an effective policy to deal with these IS-women. This is especially critical because a growing number of IS-women are aiming to return to their home country due to the decline of the IS-caliphate. The need of such an effective policy is especially important for the Netherlands because they have relatively many women who migrated to the Middle East to join ISIS. 100 Dutch women have migrated to this area and at least 80 of these 100 women have actually joined ISIS (Gielen 2018, 455).

II. Media and ISIS

Now that there is an outline to work with, we are one step further in analyzing the influence of Dutch media on Dutch women who have joined ISIS. However, as remarked in the introduction, it is relevant to first analyze the broader relationship with ISIS and the media in general. This is important as there exists no scholarly literature that specifically focuses on Dutch media. Accordingly, this lack of a theoretical framework needs to be complemented by first giving a more general overview in order to apply this theory to the case of Dutch media. I shall give this overview by firstly analyzing two relevant publications, the first being from Moran Yarchi and the second from Archi Mehdi Semati and Piotr M. Szpunar. Secondly, I shall formulate my own reaction to the insights given by these publications.

Using media as a weapon

According to Moran Yarchi the media plays an important role in the war against ISIS. She states that, alongside the actual military confrontation, an 'image war' exists to support one of the main goals of terrorists: to attract attention and to spread fear. Publicity in the media is one of the key ways to achieve these goals. Therefore, many terrorist organizations actually make use of this by considering how the media would portray their actions. Based on this, Yarchi supports the claim of B.M. Jenkins⁴ who stated that terrorism is a theatre: the people watching are far more important in a terrorist attack compared to the actual victims (Yarchi 2019, 53-54).

Additionally, Yarchi claims that this 'image war' within the media has its roots in the fact that, in general, conflicts have changed recently since the War on Terror. This is because the rise of this conflict is connected to a couple of major changes. The first major change is that contemporary conflicts are mostly fought between *state* and *non-state* actors. The second change is that conflicts gain much more attention through media compared to other

4 Jenkins, B. M. (2006). The new age of terrorism. In Kamien, D. G. (Eds.), *The McGraw hill homeland security handbook* (pp. 119). New York: McGraw Hill Professional.

means. The media coverage has come to play an important role in conflicts because media influences political actors and these in turn influence other fronts, like public opinion. Hence, the media becomes the weapon of modern warfare because terrorists can *influence public opinion* (Yarchi 2019, 53-54).

Next, Yarchi states that terrorist organizations and especially ISIS have numerous methods of *how* they aim to influence the public. To understand their methods, we have to keep in mind that these organizations are usually less powerful compared to the states they wage war against. Consequently, by 'promoting' their violent acts and spreading fear within the media these terrorist organizations aim to reverse this public image of an asymmetric power relation. In other words, they aim to appear as evenly powerful as their enemy (Yarchi 2019, 55). Next to that, organizations like ISIS try to gain more support from other Muslims by glorifying the war. Both aspects are especially relevant now that ISIS is losing power; they still want to come across as a powerful foe and at the same time hope to make up for their loss by trying to influence Muslims to joining them (Yarchi 2019, 63-65).

Beyond the spectacle

Likewise, Mehdi Semati and Piotr M. Szpunar agree with the importance of media within the conflict between ISIS and 'the West'. They, however, disagree with the statement that it is purely ISIS that tries to weaponize the media. For this, they refer to an earlier publication by Barbie Zelizer who states that the U.S. media and ISIS propaganda share a journalistic style: both frame 'the conflict in a simplistic us/other binary' (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 3). Thus, despite being very different, both try to construct an insurmountable divide between the U.S. and ISIS (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 3).

Zelizer also states that some aspects of ISIS are 'hyper-visible'. According to Semati and Szpunar she argues that: 'much of the conflict remains unseen, with any information gaps filled in through phantasmagorical, speculative and imaginative registers' (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 3). In other words, only a part of the conflict is shown in the media, but it is portrayed as the main part of the conflict and thus given more visibility compared to other aspects. Due to this, many people come to understand these aspects as being the whole conflict, with the aid of their 'speculative imagination.' She claims that both sides are using this tactic so that they can portray the conflict as they see fit (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 3).

Semati and Szpunar illustrate this point by referring to the work of Rebecca Adelman who states that Western media uses the weapon of imagery to 'locate and contain the phantom enemy of the war of terror' (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 3). What she means by this is that the media is being used to construct the idea of 'the other' as the enemy. The reason for the U.S. to do

this is that by framing an image of the enemy they hope to control how we perceive these terrorists. However, ISIS uses this technique against them by aiming to portray the West as evil in (local) media. Thus, while both try to create a distinct ‘other,’ they do so by applying the same tactic and thus being more alike than they make it seem (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 3).

Thus, while both try to create a distinct ‘other,’ they do so by applying the same tactic and thus being more alike than they make it seem.

However, according to Semati and Szpunar, ISIS does not create a ‘spectacle’ by only reinforcing its violent image. Here they draw on the arguments of Maran Kraidy, who claims that ISIS also tries to promote the ‘good life’ within the caliphate. Semati and Szpunar contrast this with the radical position of Francois Debrix and Ryan Atrip who make a distinction between reality and non-reality. According to them both ISIS and the U.S. use media not to present truths, but rather a simulation, a non-truth (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 4). This is in line with the research of Friedrich Kittler, who states that ‘states create their own terrorists.’ (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 5). What is meant by this is that people from ISIS paint a more positive picture on what we would call terrorism, instead claiming that these actions make you a pious Muslim. As such, this non-truth is also used to create a romanticized narrative in order to gain more followers.

Nonetheless, Western media focuses much on the violent aspects of the IS-caliphate and therefore much of the public attention goes to this aspect of ISIS. This shows that *how* we perceive ISIS is very much influenced by how they appear within the media. Such appearances can however be nuanced according to Semati and Szpunar. Some claim, for instance, that ISIS is ‘a ‘transnational multiethnic state’ that moves beyond racism in a way that America never could (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 7). This shows the ambiguity surrounding narratives around ISIS and therefore Semati and Szpunar invite readers to keep problematizing Western narratives by keeping into account different narratives concerning these conflicts (Semati and Szpunar 2018, 6-7).

Discussion

To conclude this section, both articles have important insights that I will use for the next section and ultimately answer my research question. Yarchi argues that the aim of terrorist organizations like ISIS is to spread fear through the media because they aim to influence the public image into

thinking they are as powerful as their enemies. Semati and Szpunar add that the West also uses a similar tactic because they aim to control the perception of the conflict and to create a further divide between ISIS and the West. The media does this by focusing on one part of the conflict and ignoring other parts. Hence, they create hyper-visibility, which is thickened by the speculative imagination of the public.

However, I do want to criticize these articles by claiming that it is unjust to the situation to only focus on the responsibility of ISIS and the U.S. What this overshadows is that the media is its own entity. Of course, the media is influenced by the courses that ISIS and the U.S. take. Despite this intertwining, we should not underestimate the individuality of the media. Hence, we should not only look at how the West and ISIS influence the media but also the other way around. Therefore, I am now to approach the relationship between Dutch media and IS-women by considering this individuality and how the media influences the West and ISIS.

Thus, what all these media articles and videos have in common is that all of these make general claims about 'IS-women,' regardless of which normative stance they take.

III. Dutch Media and the women of ISIS

The perspective of the Dutch media

After having undertaken this more general analysis concerning the relationship between ISIS and the media, it is now time to apply these theories to the way 'IS-women' are being portrayed in Dutch media. As a start I want to give an enumeration of headlines:⁵

- To get IS-children (and their mothers) back or not?⁶
- 'IS women are very happy.'⁷
- Yezidi community afraid of the return of IS-women.⁸

5 I will immediately give the English translation. However, for each translation I will give the original Dutch in the corresponding footnote.

6 IS-kinderen (en hun moeders) terughalen of niet? See: (Nu.nl 2019).

7 'IS-vrouwen zijn heel gelukkig.' See: (Telegraaf 2016).

8 Jezidi-gemeenschap bang terugkeer IS-vrouwen. See: (NOS 2019a).

- IS-women from Syria want to return to the Netherlands.⁹
- These are the two IS-women who have returned: ‘Prove atrocities are hard to find.’¹⁰
- They want to return to the Netherlands, but how dangerous are the women of IS?¹¹
- IS-women helped fighters rape our women.¹²
- Two returned IS-women in the Netherlands: May be difficult to prosecute them¹³
- How dangerous are the Dutch IS-women?¹⁴
- Should we pick up ISIS women and children or not?¹⁵

This selection is made by simply googling ‘Nederlandse IS-vrouwen’ (‘Dutch IS-women’). What this selection makes clear is that almost every headline seems to imply that they do not write or talk about specific cases but about ‘IS-women’ in general, with the exception of a WNL video (WNL 2019) and an RTL article (De Goede 2019).

This also seems to be the case when taking a closer look at these articles. Let’s take, for instance, the 2019 video of Nu.nl. Within this video, people talk about the dilemma surrounding IS-women and how some people in the parliament think it’s too dangerous to let these women return. Others in the video think it is safer for these women to be judged in the Netherlands. Within the rest of this video, two activists, who both claim to have talked to IS-women, make their say. These activists claim that ‘they’ (the ‘IS-women’) have chosen to be a part of the dangerous IS-organization. Hence, these women should not be allowed to return (Nu.nl 2019).

The most prominent argument for this statement concerns the crimes that IS-women committed against the Yezidi women, whose homes were conquered by ISIS (Nu.nl 2019). These crimes especially became apparent during an NOS interview with a Yezidi woman and her family. This woman

9 Rosman, Cyril. “IS-Vrouwen uit Syrië willen terug naar Nederland. See: (Het Parool 2019).

10 Dit zijn de twee teruggekeerde IS-vrouwen: ‘Bewijs gruwelijkheden lastig te vinden.’ See: (De Goede 2019).

11 Ze willen terug naar Nederland, maar hoe gevaarlijk zijn de vrouwen van IS? See: (RTL Nieuws 2019).

12 ‘IS-vrouwen hielpen strijders bij het verkrachten van onze vrouwen.’ See: (NOS 2019b).

13 Twee teruggestuurde IS-vrouwen in Nederland: ‘Mogelijk lastig om ze te vervolgen.’ See: (WNL 2019).

14 Hoe gevaarlijk zijn de Nederlandse IS-vrouwen? See: (Argos 2019).

15 Moeten we IS-vrouwen en kinderen ophalen of niet? See: (EO 2019).

claims that she has a hard time seeing ‘them’ (women who joined ISIS) because they reminded her of the gruesome things these women have done to her and her people. Hence, she and her family claim that these women should not be allowed back in the Netherlands under any circumstances. According to this Yezidi family, the women were worse than the IS-men (NOS 2019a). This is also claimed by another 2019 NOS article and by some people within the 2019 Dutch EO-documentary translated as: *Should we pick up ISIS women and children or not?* According to both, ‘IS-women’ helped the ‘IS-men’ in beating and raping Yezidi women.

Some of the media articles and videos do however conduct interviews with individual Dutch women who were part of ISIS. Despite this, general claims are still being made. For instance, in a 2016 interview by the Telegraaf, an ‘IS-woman’ claims that all ‘IS-women’ are still happy within the caliphate. In the previously mentioned EO documentary, a mother states that she cannot accept that her daughter might be allowed to return. According to her, all ‘IS-women’ are terrorists. In the same documentary, a journalist states that all women from ISIS are innocent and that their only task was cooking. A Dutch CDA¹⁶ politician reacts to this, claiming that it does not matter and that ‘they’ (IS-woman) all tell lies. According to him, all IS-women are guilty of collaborating with ISIS (EO 2019). According to a 2019 article in Het Parool, the Dutch state indeed claims that they do not intend to bring back women from ISIS. These women have chosen their own fates and the state does not see them as any less dangerous than their husbands.

Some media articles and videos do, however, try to take a more positive stance against this dilemma. A 2019 article by RTL Nieuws claims that the migration of IS-women can perhaps be explained due to a bad childhood and as an attempt to give new meaning to their lives (RTL 2019). A NOS article of the same year claims one can make a divide between women who had active and passive roles within ISIS (NOS 2019a). However, the first article ultimately claims that women did know what they got themselves into. According to this article, these women must have known beforehand about the beheadings and other crimes committed by ISIS. They chose to maintain this system (De Goede 2019). The second article also warned that we should not underestimate these women (RTL 2019).

Thus, what all these media articles and videos have in common is that all of these make general claims about ‘IS-women,’ regardless of which normative stance they take. They constantly refer to ‘them’ and make statements such as ‘they are all dangerous’ and ‘they should not be allowed to come back to the Netherlands.’

16 Christian Democrats.

The simulation of the Dutch spectacle

In line with the article of Semati and Szpunar, I claim that this trend is problematic from an epistemological point of view. What I mean by this is that all these articles make claims based on induction. Based on an enumeration of singular events, they make general claims by stating that all women of ISIS are applicable to these events. Even when articles claim that not all of these women are the same, they all still make general claims in the end. In other words, conflicts are made up of singular events and certain actors who acted in these events. It is therefore problematic from an epistemological point of view to claim that all of these women were active in the conflict, that all of them are terrorists and, therefore, ought not to be allowed to return to the Netherlands. By doing this, the abstract notion of 'the IS-women' that is being fed by the media becomes the leading influence in how people think about IS-women in general. Instead of considering each case individually, the media let many of us think that all the women of ISIS have the properties that are written or talked about in the media.¹⁷

Moreover, in line with Semati and Szpunar I claim that this kind of journalism causes a 'simulation' which is made up by the generalization of the media and the reactive speculative imagination of the Dutch people. What I mean by this is that the media lays a big focus on certain aspects or properties surrounding the situation of IS-women and makes it seem as if these are all applicable to every woman of ISIS. For instance, however horrible the crimes committed against Yezidi women are, the claim that *all* ISIS women are guilty of this cannot be known. Due to this statement, it is, however, very easy for the speculative imagination of the reader to create a false narrative that indeed all of the women are guilty. This is also strengthened by the fact that these news items use the general label of 'IS-women' instead of talking about (particular) Dutch women who joined ISIS.

However, one can argue that the women who did not have an active role in these crimes, have still had an indirect role in them by maintaining the caliphate and, therefore, making these crimes possible. But when we analyzed the media, we have seen that some of these articles or videos claim that 'IS-women were worse than the men' and 'IS-women' helped rape the Yezidi women.' This makes it at least seem as if all of these women had an

17 Next to that, this generalization is problematic from a juristic perspective. Legally, we cannot judge them all in the same manner. Instead, the judge has to consider the complexity of each individual case. Thus, it is too easy to just say that none of these women should be allowed to return.

active part in these crimes. And despite that, the first and second sections of this paper both showed that assuming these women had full agency is problematic.¹⁸

As a final remark I want to highlight that this paper is not a critique of the policy of the Dutch government. By no means am I trying to argue here that we should or should not allow Dutch citizens who joined ISIS to return to the Netherlands. Instead, the point of my paper is that the general statements by the media can very easily influence people into agreeing with this generalization and, therefore, ignore much of the reality of the conflict. As Semati and Szpunar have shown us, the conflict has much more ‘reality’ than what the media portrays. Next to that, the first section has shown that not all Dutch women who joined ISIS are doing so because they want to be terrorists. Instead, research by the AVID has shown that numerous complex sociological (push and pull) factors exist and thus the motivation for Dutch women to join ISIS can vary per person.

However, the media is the main way by which we gain ‘knowledge’¹⁹ of these events, as stated in the introduction of this paper. This could prove to be problematic because we live in a democracy and people can choose our government and the government decides how to deal with the women who joined ISIS. It is very likely that these votes are being influenced by fallacies fed by the media. Hence, like Semati and Szpunar claim, we should keep problematizing this narrative. This is because not only the lives of these women depend on it, but also the lives of their children whose current faith is intertwined with that of their mothers.

Of course, one can aim to counter this generalizing narrative by looking at more in-depth media coverage concerning IS-women. However, I argue that this would miss the more important insight that language itself has a generalizing tendency. In the 20th century, philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida already argued that our discourse about the world has certain epistemological limitations that cannot be overcome by language itself.²⁰ Consequently, they argued that we should acknowledge that there is a part of existence that *transcends* our understanding of the word. Put differently, existence is too complex to fully be encompassed by our linguistic

18 In line with this, we can also ask ourselves to what extent citizens, in general, are responsible for the crimes of their government. Should the person who voted for Bush, Obama, or Trump be held accountable for the war crimes committed by presidents? But more importantly, do we think differently about these questions if they question the crimes committed by our own government?

19 As I have argued, no real knowledge but rather a simulation.

20 See, for instance, Derrida's *Violence and Metaphysics* and Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*.

framing of the world: there will always be something that escapes our words. What their point makes clear is that it is perhaps a better solution to acknowledge that we can never fully understand the situation of IS women, instead of reproducing our generalizing understanding at a more in-depth level.

What their point makes clear is that it is perhaps a better solution to acknowledge that we can never fully understand the situation of IS women, instead of reproducing our generalizing understanding at a more in-depth level.

Some might think that this kind of ‘thinking’ would amount to a standstill, which in philosophy, we would call an *aporia*. However, as early as Plato, such a standstill is not seen as wholly *unproductive*. In *Meno*, this take on the *aporia* becomes clear when Plato writes about a discussion between Socrates and Meno concerning the idea of knowledge. At a certain point, Socrates argues for the benefits of an *aporia*:

Socrates: So he is now in a better position with regard to the matter he does not know?

Meno: I agree with that too.

Socrates: Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?

Meno: I do not think so.

Socrates: Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to find out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before the thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said it must have a base twice as long.

Meno: so it seems.

Socrates: Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he know though he did not before he fell into perplexity and realized he did now know and longed to know?

Meno: I do not think so, Socrates.

Socrates: Has he then benefited from being numbed?

Meno: I think so.’ (84 b-c)

Here, of course, being numbed referred to how Socrates’ questioning caused someone to arrive at a state of not-knowing [*aporia*]. What this dialogue tries

to teach is that it is sometimes better to question everything one thinks to 'know' in order to arrive at truth as separated from knowledge. As such, the *unknowable* transcendence within our world can be seen as an aporetic truth that cannot be aligned with our knowledge of the world. Perhaps further research could instead indicate that it is precisely by not speaking that we can have a more *open* stance toward the transcendent existence of IS-women. As Levinas and Derrida would claim, it is only then that ethics could begin.²¹

Conclusion

Summarizing, in the first section I have given background information surrounding Dutch women who joined ISIS. Here we saw that a complexity of push and pull factors exist that explain the motivation of these women. In the third section, the article of Yarchi showed that ISIS in general uses the media to spread fear and to reverse public opinion around the asymmetric power-relations between ISIS and its enemies. The article of Semati and Szpunar has shown that both ISIS and the West use media to control the public image of their conflict. They do this by letting the media focus on certain aspects of the conflicts and making these hyper-visible. However, I argued that we also should account for the individuality of the media and thus should not only look at how the West and ISIS influence the media, but also the other way around.

That is what I analyzed in the third section. I started my section by analyzing some media videos and articles which took IS-women as their topic. Based on this analysis I argued that all of these articles made general statements about these women and thus did not consider their singularity. I argued that this is problematic from an epistemological point of view because you cannot make general claims without considering the singularity of each event and the person who participated in these events. I closed this section by stating that this paper does not function as a critique of the policy of the Dutch government, but simply is a critique of how the media uses false statements to influence public opinion on Dutch women who joined ISIS. Therefore, we should always keep problematizing these statements. Thus, let me respectively restate and answer my research question: How does Dutch media influence the (Dutch) public image of Dutch women who are or were part of ISIS? My answer is that the media uses general statements about ISIS women and therefore influences us into thinking that every Dutch woman who has joined ISIS is the same, while in reality, 'they' are not.

21 Further elaboration on this alternative is beyond the scope of this paper as this paper mainly concerns itself with the problem of media.

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SPLITSTOF



Bert from the Coffee Corner

Off the Record

Hannah Ox

From the moment I enter the 15th floor's coffee corner, I am welcomed by the ever-warm and comforting smell of coffee. On the table lies a crossword puzzle, glasses and an empty cup. "Can I get you something?" Bert asks, holding a small stick of liquorice in the left corner of his mouth. "Coffee, please," I answer. He pours us both a fresh cup of hot black coffee and while we settle down at the table next to the bar, the great view of Nijmegen accompanies us.

Bert works on Mondays and Thursdays at the coffee corner on the 15th floor of Radboud University's Erasmus building, which houses the spirit of Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies. Since the thinking mind needs a lot of coffee to process all that has been read and written, it seemed like a good idea to interview Bert who, together with Yolande, takes care of this precious place we all need in our daily lives.

"So, Bert, can you tell me something about yourself?"

"Well, I am Bert, originally a carpenter. Previously, I did maintenance for student housing. And my hobbies are birds and working with wood to make things."

When I ask Bert what he likes to make, a whole story unfolds in the morning of a regular but quiet day. He has just created a couple of parrot-trees from wood for his volunteering job at an elderly home where he is creating a birdhouse. Apart from doing all kinds of activities with the elderly, he also likes to cook. Right now, he is experimenting with spices from Greek cuisine, a very relevant region to the 15th floor. He is also very interested in antiquities. He tells me he owns a few massive books containing catholic illustrations which he absolutely loves. And that is not all. In his earlier days, he worked at what is now called Orientalis, the former biblical open-air museum, where he created museum pieces based on Roman archaeological excavations. Moreover, he is very skilled in renovating pieces of furniture, and in the past, he restored playgrounds to construct any furniture that his family had ever dreamed of.

"Need to check if there is still enough coffee."

While greeting the incoming personnel, Bert heads off to the bar. When he returns, I ask him how many cups of coffee he drinks during the day, and what his favorite coffee is. He answers: "I think, well, it is a little bit less right now, but on average, 12-14 cups. I used to drink fresh filter coffee, but now we have Senseo at home, the dark Senseo. Nice, with a layer of foam on top." And when I continue to ask for his favorite pastries on the side, he adds: "Just cookies. Regular plain waffle cookies. The only pastry I really like is *schuimgebak*." Freely translated, it is a foam-pastry (again, the foam!).

We talk about all sorts of subjects, but a very important part of Bert's life has not yet been addressed, so I return to the subject of birds. His eyes begin to sparkle when I ask him about his favorite birds. "Colored canaries. And a *putter*. Well, actually, it is a goldfinch, but here, we call it a *putter*¹. Beautiful bird to look at." He shows me some pictures and videos of these beautiful, tiny creatures. His favorites are the red colored ones, mosaic-like, and we both listen to the charming, bright whistles of these birds. An amusing fact: because of his elaborated whistle-hearing abilities, Bert discovered that he was a little hard of hearing. "At one time, I entered the shed and I wondered, why don't I hear the birds? Those sharp tones were just gone." We both laugh. "Let's see if there is enough tea left." Whistling to himself now, he makes sure that everything is always in place and taken care of.

Next year, Bert will retire, and because he doesn't have a yacht to run off to Dubai with, I ask him what he plans to do. He wants to continue his work as a volunteer at the elderly home, touring around on his moped, and specifically, he would like to spend his days fishing. He adds: "Then... I completely relax (...) I personally prefer the 'old-school' solid stick, which is far more beautiful to use, because then you have a sort of feeling with it (...) and when I am tired, I will buy some coffee and a meatball for my friend and I, and all of it is just very relaxing."

Bert is a morning person, a listening ear, a calm and friendly man. He has found his way at the 15th floor and he stresses the feeling of involvement he experiences during his working days which is created by the people at the coffee corner. When I stop my recording at approximately fifty-five minutes, we continue chattering for another forty-five minutes about movies, his family, and all sorts of things. Serving ourselves a final round of hot coffee, we discuss the missing cups problem while the sun breaks through the clouded, rainy morning. Just another day at the coffee-corner...

1 'Het puttertje' is famously known as a painting by Carel Fabritius and the book cover of Donna Tartt's 'The Goldfinch'.

Culturicide in the Shadows of the USSR

Philosopher Abroad

Charlie Harden-Sweetnam

Please be aware of a trigger warning for cultural genocide and war.

The war in Ukraine is entering its 16th month, and the terrifyingly destructive battles show no sign of relenting. With the Russian army launching a slaughter in their ‘fraternal’ nation, other peoples of the former Soviet Union find themselves at odds with each other. I want to describe the differences in how the general public is reacting to the war.

In order to illustrate my argument, I will draw from my experiences travelling across the former Soviet Union. By giving you an illustration of the contrast between Kazakhstan and Lithuania, I hope to convince you that culture can be turned into a weapon of resistance, and that we must use culture as a weapon of resistance to support Ukraine. My three principal reasons are that it brings hope, it brings truth, and it embodies Ukrainian defiance itself.

I am going to do this in two steps. Firstly, I will analyse how art and symbolism is valuable in times of war. Secondly, I am going to describe the contrast in art and symbolism in Kazakhstan and Lithuania to illustrate the merits and needs for the weaponisation of art and culture. I will focus on public, grass-roots artistic and cultural activism, as a way to engage in the war. I am talking about individuals and groups making public phenomena in solidarity with Ukraine.

Throughout this paper, I refer to Russian fascism, or Ruscism. The use of the term fascism is not done lightly, and I justify this having studied Putin’s ideology and the ideology of the invasion. This includes, among other things: irredentism and a cult of violence, hyper-masculinity and authoritarianism, the denial of Ukraine as a national identity and the justification of ethnic cleansing. For Putin, this fascism ultimately justifies war because “we are one people” (Putin 2022).

Culturicide, or cultural genocide, can be defined as a systematic destruction of a culture. It can take many forms but aims to undermine and root out national and cultural identities and specificities. It is widely seen as a war crime and a crime against humanity. My experiences have found that the way that some groups take a silent position in the face of culturicide is a dangerous precedent. To stay silent in the face of any form of culturicide or oppression is tantamount to complicity. I hope to convince you not be silent in the face of fascism of any form.

Culture and Symbolism as Resistance

In order to back up my argument that ordinary people should be showing signs of support for Ukraine, I will first discuss the value of art and culture in times of war. I maintain that art can be weaponised in three ways: it is a form of documentation, it can be weaponised in this war as a form of defiance itself, and because art and culture can bring solidarity and unity.

Firstly, art and symbolism for Ukraine demonstrates solidarity. It is a binding agent that can unify peoples. Ukrainian art and culture are not only important motivators for the defence of the nation, but as a unifying factor it is also politically valuable. Like many national anthems, “Ukraine has not yet perished” has a role in binding peoples. This happened at Nijmegen4Ukraine demonstrations in March 2022, as an international crowd began to sing in Ukrainian, highlighting this power to bind people behind a common cause. But the ultimate power of cultural works like this is the use of a simple symbol to designate solidarity with a plight. For Ukrainians home and abroad, this is a powerful and hopeful message, albeit sad for the same reasons. As one Ukrainian told me: “[the symbols] make me smile. Because I know we’re not alone [which is important because] wars aren’t won alone anymore.”

During a war of information, reality is distorted. Putin’s post-modern truth is a dangerous political technique to rewrite the histories of Ukraine, Russia and the war. Art and culture can depict history and events from either side and do a lot of work to spread the truth. This is the second way that art can serve in war: as an account of history. For this reason, Putin tries to destroy museums and cultural institutions, in order to re-write history, according to the Ruscist vision and the Russian World ideology. But art and culture can undo this disinformation, as it is the “material evidence of the existence of a culture” (The Canvas 2022, 4:34).

One such attack on Ukrainian cultural institutions came in February 2022, when Russian bombing targeted a museum near Kyiv that housed the works of a celebrated Ukrainian folk artist, Mariia Prymachenko. As the building was engulfed in flames, a local man ran inside to save some of the art and managed to save 10 pieces (The Canvas 2022). Putin and Ruscists tried to destroy Prymachenko’s art because art has the power to embody a culture.

The ideology behind the war is the denial of Ukrainian national identity. Subsequently through violent methods “all symbols of Ukrainian statehood have been methodically removed [in occupied territories] and a new Russian imperial identity imposed on the civilian population” (Dickinson 2022). Any manifestation of Ukrainian cultural identity is thus a rejection of the Ruscist ideology. Ukrainian art and culture are embodiments of resistance, in that their very existence represents a denial of Putin’s claim that Ukraine as a nation does not exist. This is why that man ran into the museum to save the

art. Because the very existence of this artwork is an embodiment of defiance of Ruscist ideology. Mariia Prymachenko's uniquely Ukrainian art is a testament to the very existence of Ukraine.

The man who was willing to risk his life to save the art of Mariia Prymachenko did so for the resistance of Ukraine. Because art is more than just oil on canvas; it is culture. And in this fight against cultural cleansing, the disposition of art is itself an act of defiance.



A Dove Has Spread Her Wings and Asks for Peace. Mariia Prymachenko, 1982.

Lithuania

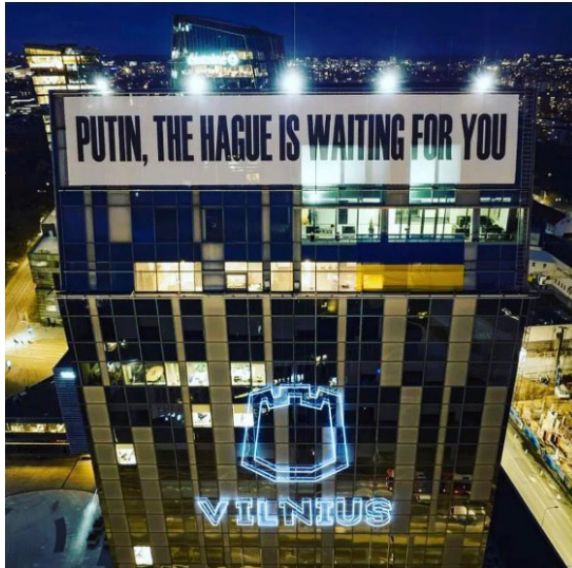
The skyline in Lithuania has been transformed since the war; you cannot escape its impact. Lithuanians take the symbolic fight to Putin, and the messages of solidarity make me feel inspired. But I strongly feel Lithuanian artistic activism is something we should emulate.

Lithuania's public activism has become a weapon of information, trying to directly combat the narrative pushed by Moscow. Vilnius tries to dispel the falsified Russian propaganda. One striking example of this is the huge billboard on a skyscraper testifying 'Putin, the Hague is waiting for you.' Long before any international court sentenced Putin, Lithuanians were making their feelings known about the culturicide in Ukraine. Or another example is 1K fund, a private, 100% volunteer-driven activist group. Their mission statement says:

"Our third field of interest is information warfare. We conduct public relations campaigns that combat Russian misinformation and help us gather donations for the fund." (1Kfund.org)

Lithuanians are directly contradicting the disinformation disseminated in Russia. They are providing as much sport as possible for the defence of Ukraine in the name of the defence against fascism. Through cultural and artistic activities in public spaces, Lithuanians are taking the fight on information to the Russians. They do not sit idly by but take a firm anti-fascist narrative.

A second key feature of Lithuanian pro-Ukraine activism is unwavering solidarity. With the constant presence of activism, Lithuanian public society clearly signals its support and determination to help. This has many positive impacts. For example, it provides space for public grieving and trauma



Credit: @LithuaniaMFA on Twitter.

recognition. It increases awareness and boosts dialogue. It can even begin to humanise the conflict. But most of all, it provides hope through solidarity.

Furthermore, I believe that this solidarity has a positive impact on donation for support through grass-roots fundraisers and public events. Lithuania has one of the highest ratios of GDP to donation to Ukraine ratio in the world (Statista Research Department 2023) and is often linked to cultural and artistic movements like Radarom that provide Ukraine with vital equipment. I have found that the omnipresence of Ukrainian symbolism boosts a sentiment of solidarity, but also seems to be helping with vital contributions.

A final valuable part of Lithuanian artistic activism is how it is producing Ukrainian culture and expression. Since the war, many Ukrainians have fled to Lithuania, and this is producing a vibrant diaspora. By providing a

space for this cultural expression, Lithuania helps Ukrainians abroad live their nationhood, and in a sense, embody resistance against Ruscism. This sort of artistic-cultural expression can be found across the capital: one of my favourites is seen below.

These intercultural projects among Ukrainians in Lithuania represent the embodiment of the resistance to the Ruscist ideology. By producing Ukrainian culture, you defy the claim that Ukrainian culture does not exist. It is through the display and the creation of new and old symbols of Ukrainian culture and resistance that art becomes a weapon in this war.

Kazakhstan and Ukraine

By contrast, public spaces in Kazakhstan almost never exhibit public symbols of solidarity. During my four months in the cultural capital, I saw one Ukrainian flag. There is an atmosphere of wilful blindness, of solicited ignorance. While there are some interactions with Ukraine on a state level, there is almost a complete lack of ostensive pro-Ukraine artistic culture. This section focuses on this neutrality in the face of culturicide in Ukraine.

My first point about art in war, concerns documentation. In Kazakhstan, the absence of interaction with the war in Ukraine means that Russian media has increased power among the populace in Kazakhstan. Consequently, the Ruscist narrative on the war has a greater impact on society.

During my conversations and interactions, I have noticed a disturbing reluctance to even mention the war. When I have mentioned it, I feel like I tripped a mine. Fear of upsetting others, a perception of being unable to understand complex political issues and feeling too uneducated are recurring excuses that seem to stifle public debate surrounding the war and Ukraine. This pervasive tradition of silence, perhaps in part due to the generations of Soviet oppression and the subsequent suppressive effect on political engagement (Zhukov 2018), means that politics seems to occur around people. Kazakh society seems to allow Moscow to control the political narratives.

Indicatively, people tend to use delicate language to describe the war, such as “circumstances” or “situation.” Even my university professors called it a “military operation.” This kind of delicate language, stemming from a neutral position, tends to avoid explicit claims about the war, because it is essentially silence. But that silence plays into the hands of Russia, because not only does it fail to recognise the culturicide occurring, but because of the continued influence of Russian media in Kazakhstan today. Moscow’s pro-war narrative has a pervasive effect on public opinion, especially among Russian speakers (Kumenov 2022), who constitute around 95% of the population. This evidence suggests that by staying neutral, Kazakhstan is vulnerable

to the fascist ideology pushed by Russia. Thus, we can see how the official line of neutrality has dangerous consequences in Kazakhstan. Through this passivity, Astana allows Moscow to put their lens on current affairs, and the silence of their neutrality creates an eerie indifference towards the war crimes in Ukraine.



Credit: Euromaidan Press. <https://euromaidanpress.com/2022/08/01/a-gigantic-mural-depicting-olena-titarenko-who-works-for-the-volunteer-center-appears-in-vilnius-to-support-ukraine/>

Secondly, the general reluctance to anger Russia means that Kazakhstan's neutrality allows for the Russian war economy to continue to fire, which could endanger Western support. And this has a damaging effect on hope. Kazakh society has an understandable fear of Russian aggression. The relationship between Astana and Moscow is deep and complicated, and the centuries of history mean their peoples are close, with Astana very much at the whim of Putin. This I have found evidence of during my interviews and discussions with Kazakh people here in Almaty. There is an understandable motivation behind this since Kazakhstan is economically dependent on Russia, does not benefit from the security of NATO, and has received threats from their former colonial overlord. This fear promotes a policy of placating their northern neighbour.

The policy of placating by staying neutral benefits Russia because it allows for the continued mechanisation of the post-soviet integrated economy. This could endanger long-term Western support for Ukraine because the economic cost of such support is growing in the face of an ever-operative Russian war machine. Operative in part thanks to 'neutral' states enabling the evasion of sanctions (Burna-Asefi 2022). What this means, then, is that the war will draw on. Ukraine will liberate all of its territories, but the question is when, and at what cost. As long as Kazakhstan and other nations stay silent, they prolong the bloodshed.

Finally, by ignoring culturicide, Kazakh society has a tendency to legitimise the destruction of national identity in Ukraine. I say this because the indifference towards the destruction of another, while deeply treasuring one's own culture, implicitly makes a value judgement on these two different cultures. I think Kazakhstan can be described as a fairly nationalistic and patriotic country. There is no shortage of flags here, and people are rightfully proud of their identity. But for Ukraine, there are no flags, no symbols of solidarity, despite the fact that the evidence of the destruction of Ukrainian culture and nationhood is widespread (Dickinson 2022). Yet, many in Kazakhstan refuse to publicly criticise this; according to a poll in November 2022, 95% of respondents claims to be neutral to the war (Dumoulin 2023). This is seen in the lack of symbolism of solidarity for Ukraine through artistic expression in public spaces.

Kazakhstan's passionate nationalism and pride of its own culture, while silently witnessing the destruction of another, implies a lack of equality between these cultures. This norm of favouring one culture while ignoring the extermination of another culture creates a dangerous precedent of value judgement toward the 'cultural other.' It is by ignoring the culturicide, while propagating your own nationalism, that you normalise the destruction of what could only be, according to this logic, a lesser culture.

To conclude my findings on Kazakhstan, I have identified that on the superficial level, the society generally forms a neutral perception. I had an interesting conversation with a taxi driver, and in response to my asking why there are no flags of Ukraine here, he stated that the Kazakh people are vehemently against the war. And I believe him. But my point is that the surface paints a different picture. The streets seem silent in the face of culturicide in Ukraine.

Conclusion

It is easy during a violent conflict to ignore the value of non-violent resistance, especially when what Ukraine needs most is military and material equipment. But the importance of solidarity should not be forgotten.

I have tried to illustrate one difference that I have found during my year abroad, and the disturbing effects of the war in Ukraine. Kazakhstan and Lithuania are, of course, wildly different societies, and I would not suggest that Lithuanians are in any way inherently better than Kazakh people. And as I have stated, I am aware that Kazakh people support Ukraine in the conflict. It is true that neutrality and solidarity towards culturicide are not opposites. Meanwhile, the difference between neutrality and solidarity should not be understated. One of the problems of this neutrality is that it enables the continuation of Russian fascism.

Aimé Césaire, writing about Imperialism and Colonialism in the 20th century, argued that those who passively allow for the bureaucratic machine to continue, are responsible in part for the violence done (Césaire 1972, 54). This is because this system of exploitation and fascism required a hoard of unquestioning and obedient civil servants to keep the wheels turning. While Ruscism and European Colonialism are a far cry from one another, it is through this same mechanism of the obedient or 'neutral' performance of functions that the violence continues. As one Ukrainian respondent wrote, there is no such thing as neutrality; you cannot hide in the shadows. And this is necessary for any of the intersections of fascism. Silence is violence.

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Слава Україні!

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Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class

Book Review

Sophie Ingle

Owen Jones' *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. New York: Verso, 2012. 320 pages.

While discussing unfortunate misrepresentations within British society, Jones' *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* is highly applicable to the media coverage of working-class people in many Western societies. Jones uses the term "chav" (Jones 2011) as symbolic of the most common portrayal of the working class - comparable to the derogatory Dutch epithet, "tokkie". These distasteful terms can be understood as relating to anti-social behavior and raise negative connotations of less affluent members of society as lazy, criminal and rude, among other depictions. The terms ultimately result in the harmful stereotyping of the working class and - as Jones puts it - their "demonization" (Jones 2011).

As he writes on a subject rarely tackled in mainstream media, Jones provides an effective entry-level analysis of the representations and realities of the British working class over the span of the last thirty years. It is important to consider that his argument does not concern the act of labelling the working class as "chavs", but instead targets the underlying mechanisms that created such class contempt. Using a range of examples including interviews and case studies, he demonstrates that working-class organizations and communities have eroded.

One of many striking cases seen within the titular *Chavs* concerns the broadcasting of the BBC televised program *The Future of the Welfare State*, presented by well-known interviewer John Humphrys. The show claimed that "Britain was living in an 'age of entitlement'" (Jones 2011, 24), alongside other controversial claims. This statement in question reinforces the connotations surrounding the working class as greedy and reliant upon the welfare state to avoid employment. As the program was later found to have violated the *BBC Trust's* regulations of impartiality and accuracy, Jones illustrates the media's indulgence of biased sources. This indulgence includes the broadcasting of overemphasised cases of working-class individuals faking health conditions to claim welfare benefits. The sad truth is that these cases are far more uncommon than the media portrays. From decreases in payments given to the unemployed and sick to the reduction of industrial and mining

sectors, *Chavs* sheds light on the ever-growing narrative of the “lazy” chav that “lacked aspiration” (Jones 2011, 28), despite the reality of incomes falling behind in an ever-growing social housing crisis.

In addressing the complexity of the working-class struggle, Jones places significant emphasis on Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government of the 1980s. As Jones puts it, “Thatcher’s assumption of power in 1979 marked the beginning of an all-out assault on the pillars of working-class Britain” (Jones 2011, 10). Hence, his analysis illustrates the deindustrialization of Britain under Thatcher’s government, marking the dissipation of the traditional working-class community. While she worked toward an ideological campaign for a consumer-based, individualistic population, as seen in the initiation of marketized education, Jones’ analysis allows readers of all backgrounds to understand the impacts these ideals had and continue to have on industrial and welfare policies today.

Illustrating the reality that lies behind the data on wealth disparity and the relations between immigration and wages (to name a few), Jones tackles the ineffectiveness of both Conservative and New Labor governments that have maintained and created a commonplace for the narrative of the lazy unemployed.

Despite Jones’ approach lacking an academic nature, the text opens the arena of discussion to the general reader while employing statistical evidence in explaining his main arguments. Illustrating the reality that lies behind the data on wealth disparity and the relations between immigration and wages (to name a few), Jones tackles the ineffectiveness of both Conservative and New Labor governments that have maintained and created a commonplace for the narrative of the lazy unemployed. A similar notion is seen within Katz’s *Undeserving Poor*, where the American titular portrays the view of poverty as personal failure (Katz 1989). However, unlike Katz, Jones pays particular attention to the media’s representation of outrageous events - from child disappearances to the collapse of trade unions - and the role it played in the fragmentation of communities. While both critically acclaimed works approach issues of blame-the-poor politics, cases such as the afore-

mentioned *BBC* violation of accuracy allow *Chavs* to draw an unforgettable image of elitist media representation, thus bringing the issues closer to home than Katz's analysis from 33 years ago.

Overall, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* is persuasive and passionate, alongside being accessible to a wide range of viewers within and outside of the political and academic arenas. This insightful work, although focused on the realm of British government, is applicable to societies beyond the UK. By bringing the prominence of middle-class-centered policies and media coverage to light, Jones tackles processes that maintain misrepresentations of the working class while illustrating the reality of struggle hidden behind the curtain.

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