



TIINA RÄTTILÄ

In Your Face!

Analysing Public Political Performance as Communication



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of
the board of the School of Management of the University of Tampere,
for public discussion in the Paavo Koli Auditorium,

Kanslerinrinne 1, Tampere,
on December 14th, 2012, at 13 o'clock.

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

University of Tampere
School of Management
Finland

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Distribution
Bookshop TAJU
P.O. Box 617
33014 University of Tampere
Finland

Tel. +358 40 190 9800
taju@uta.fi
www.uta.fi/taju
<http://granum.uta.fi>

Cover design by
Mikko Reinikka

Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 1781
ISBN 978-951-44-8968-6 (print)
ISSN-L 1455-1616
ISSN 1455-1616

Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 1255
ISBN 978-951-44-8969-3 (pdf)
ISSN 1456-954X
<http://acta.uta.fi>

Tampereen Yliopistopaino Oy – Juvenes Print
Tampere 2012

Foreword

Not unusually, working out of this doctoral dissertation has proved to be a long journey and adventure with many turns. And, as many soon-to-be doctors know, the beginning and the end of the research process rarely match up. When I started out many years ago, I did not know that I would end up writing about political performance (I was working with theory of deliberative democracy at the time). I first ran into the concept, in the context of political action, in 1999, and it has not let me go ever since. I have been intrigued about the theoretical-analytical possibilities of looking at politics through ‘performative’ binoculars. In this manuscript I have wanted to say something about how performance works as political communication. My study is, however, only a surface scratch, and I believe that performance lends itself for much more in analyses of political phenomena. I hope that this work, in small part, inspires other scholars in Finland (and elsewhere) to take up research on the performative aspects of politics.

The job has been long and arduous. The end product does, however, look like me, with all its inaccuracies and absences. I would like take this opportunity to thank all of you who have supported me, over the years, in this process which almost became a life’s work.

Professor emeritus Olavi Borg first invited me to presume post-graduate studies in the early 1990s and acted as my first supervisor. Thank you, Olavi, for encouraging me to finish the project, no matter what. My chief advisor, docent Pertti Lappalainen has patiently guided me through the deepest pitfalls of the research process, even when I turned out to be the most hard-headed of doctoral students. Thank you, Pertti, for your indulgence.

Towards the end of the process, especially the advice and suggestions for improvements by professor Sinikka Sassi proved crucial. Sinikka, I would not have had the courage or the skill to finish the manuscript without you. My two preliminary examiners, Benjamin Shepard and Anne Koski, presented a number of exceptionally informed critiques on the manuscript. I value them greatly.

Jarmo Rinne and Tapio Häyhtiö, you have been the best of colleagues. Our discussions on theory, politics, and life over the years have been an important inspiration. Jarmo, more deep political-philosophical ruminations await us in the future. Let’s get on with some fantastic theorizing!

My very special thanks from heart belong to Seija Ridell. Seija, I cannot imagine my life, academic or everyday, without our years-long civic spirited partnership and sympathy of souls. I love you dearly as a friend and as an ingenious scholar. Seija, Kati and Tuuli: long live our forum-spirit!

Behind my interest in art and aesthetic theory is the influence of my father-in-law, painter and graphic artist Ossi Toikkanen. Thank you, Ossi, for all the knowledge and wisdom you have provided me on both art and society. Whatever odd ideas I present in this work on aesthetics are, however, entirely my own fault.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my work community in the old ‘political science department’ which, under each leadership, most recently under professor emeritus Heikki Paloheimo and professor Tapio Raunio, allowed and encouraged me to go on with my work even when it seemed never-ending. A joint warm thanks to you, as well as to all my other wonderful colleagues in the political science unit. You are such an enjoyable bunch to work with! To all other fantastic colleagues outside Tampere political science: thank you for your support over the years. I don’t quite understand how you managed to maintain your faith in me even when, at the darkest moments (which were many), I had lost mine.

The following institutions have supported my research project financially: Emil Aaltonen Foundation, The Finnish Cultural Foundation, Academy of Finland, the National Graduate School in Political Studies (VAKAVA), and University of Tampere. My work has also been facilitated by two Academy funded research projects, The Changing Forms of Finnish Civic Activity (2000-2002) and Participation and Modes of Democracy: Finland in a Comparative Perspective (2007-2010). Empirical research for chapter six was carried out while working in a project on Blogs, Wikis, and Mobile Devices (BLOGIPÄIVYRI), funded by The Foundation for Municipal Development and the Journalism Research and Development Centre of the University of Tampere (2006-2007). With the support of Fulbright-scholarship I was able to study in New School for Social Research in New York City 1995-1996. My ideas concerning Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action were developed, for the most part, while studying (and enjoying it tremendously) in New School.

Above all, my family is my most important partner in life. Lauri, Ville, and Väinö, I love you more than anything. You are my best achievement, ever!

Mom and Dad, I wish you were here to share this moment with me. I send my kisses to you over the universe. Yet, I am thankful that I have my two brothers, Tapio and Markku and their families, to share this experience with me, here and now.

Finally, Tuula, thank you for keeping my body (and, therefore, my mind) going.

This work is dedicated to my boys, Ville and Väinö

In Kangasala, November 8, 2012

Tiina Rättilä

English abstract

In your face! Analysing public political performance as communication

In this doctoral thesis I study a phenomenon which I have titled as *public political performance*. By public political performance I refer to a public event (a 'show', display, demonstration) the purpose of which is to expose in public and challenge those social-political norms, practices, and relations of power which usually remain invisible in the sway of routine political life. I am interested especially in how performance works as a form of non-linguistic, or wider than linguistic, political communication. I theorize and analyze, through several illustrative examples, performances from three perspectives: as corporeal (bodily), visual, and aesthetic communication. In construction of theory I use and partly rework ideas from thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Rancière. The study shows that public political performance is a sensitive, even volatile phenomenon because it often manifestly exposes the fundamentally violent power structure of society and puts this order under critical public scrutiny. Political authorities do not take such challenges lightly, which is why public performances sometimes instigate serious political controversies.

The key theoretical ideas of the study relate to performance as something *done* and *en/acted*. On the one hand, performance discloses the nature of politics as a 'doing.' This means, in simple terms that, in order to subsist, the political world needs to be done and 'iterated,' every time anew. The term *performative* describes this social-constructivist side of politics. That the constitution of the social and political power is based not on any 'natural' ground but on continuous re/iteration of certain ways and routines is often revealed only when it is visibly and noticeably disrupted. This is what political performance typically does. On the other hand, performance signifies a particular *kind of* public show which resembles but does not equal theatrical shows. Performance is theatrical in being an 'art-like' communicative act, yet it is more surprising and unpredictable compared to regular theatre and, because of this, usually more difficult to approach and interpret. Political performance as a contingent and sometimes oddly appearing public event with a surprise effect brings forth the importance of *disruption* for politics. It alerts us to situations where the normalized political performatives are being *visibly* questioned by bringing into public space, 'in your face,' diverse disrupting elements like resisting bodies, parodying images, and carnivalism. The relationship between these two, performatives and performances, creates an edgy and 'chiasmatic' political space from which much of political life gains its driving force. This basic idea and relationship constitute the key starting point for this study's theoretical reflections.

Political performance is an important subject for political studies for several reasons. The purely knowledge-based reason is that that in directing attention to the corporeal and visual aspects of politics and political communication, performance brings into view phenomena and conceptual possibilities which are too often ignored by political researchers and theorists. The relevance of performance for the field can also be justified from another perspective, through reference to its political and democratic significance. The discussions carried out in the study show that there are political circumstances where citizens see public performance as the only available means of participation in political communication, with other channels of communication forbidden or marginalized. Political performance as a way of contesting existing political realities can therefore have special value for political freedom.

Keywords: political performance, performative, publicness, political communication, body argumentation, visual politics, aesthetic communication, protest, demonstration, resistance, liminal, chiasma, virtual performance, media, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Rancière

LIST OF ERRORS

- pp. 29-31 feature the name Dwight Conquerwood -> should be Dwight Conquergood
- p. 196, second paragraph, last sentence should read as follows: "This was also what Habermas thought informal deliberations and their 'dramatic activities' should do, and what we basically referred to in chapter two and five when we discussed the possibilities of performances to produce 'enlarged mentality' and other-regarding attitudes."
- p. 216, the following reference should be added: **Young, I. M.** (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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“In the end everything is theatre which is meant to speak to people. -- The world doesn't change all at once but so that somebody does something clever, someone else sees it and learns from it.

Ville Komi, former MP of the Greens of Finland¹

1. Introduction

1.1. The central idea and questions of the study

Let me start by recounting the incidence which took place in the City of Tampere, Finland, in May 1999. There were around 25 of us, residents of Tampere, seated in the City Hall visitors' balcony following a meeting which was to discuss a citizen initiative against the plan to construct a new motorway bridge in the historical city center. We had struggled for months against the plan that we thought would ruin the historical city center and increase private trafficking and therefore pollution in the city. We had tried to initiate a public discussion on the issue with the city government, with faint results. The government and the local media were uninterested in, and sometimes openly hostile to, our arguments. We had gathered an address signed by nearly 10 000 residents suggesting a local referendum on the issue, but the city board had taken a negative stand to the initiative. We had argued that developing the city was an issue of public interest and residents should be allowed to participate in discussing it. The responses of the city government to our initiatives were negative on each occasion, as the city officials tended to see us as a small but an annoyingly loud group of people who deliberately protested any plan and obstructed the government from performing their job efficiently.

The atmosphere in the balcony was therefore intense when we followed the meeting and waited for the citizen initiative to come up. Then something unexpected happened. Somebody in the balcony passed on a note suggesting that we all stand up when the discussion on the bridge started. The suggestion was greeted with quiet agreement and we waited anxiously to be able to show the councilmen that 'we mean business.' Finally

¹ ”Kaikkihan on pohjimmiltaan teatteria, jonka tarkoituksena on puhutella ihmisiä. -- Maailma ei muutu kertarysäyksellä vaan siten, että joku tekee jotakin fiksum, joku toinen näkee sen ja oppii siitä jotakin.”
 “Aktivismi Euroopassa: Ympäristökettinkä.” (Activism in Europe: Chains of Environment.) TV documentary, Channel Teema (YLE, Finland), April 15, 2009. (Translation TR)

the item was called on, and we all stood up, leaning against the balcony railing, watching down attentively on the councilmen as they began the discussion.

Our act was a silent demonstration since we were not bold enough to interrupt the meeting with verbal commentary. Yet, the effect of the act was astonishing. Councilmen quickly took notice of our act and looked up in the balcony with surprise. Some were seemingly startled, as if expecting us to jump down on their backs. There was something very corporeal about the event. It was as if we had a physical contact with the councilmen, even if over a distance. Some councilmen got ostensibly angry and responded to the act by demanding that the council not be intimidated and that the decision makers must remain calm and reasonable.

In just a few minutes the act was over. A City Hall concierge appeared as from nowhere ordering us to sit down. Standing in the balcony was prohibited, he claimed. I wondered whether such a decree actually existed or whether he had invented it at that moment to ‘discipline’ us back to behaving appropriately.²

To me the act was oddly stimulating and had an almost elevating effect. For once I felt like a true citizen being concerned with a public issue and having the guts to *show* it in the ‘face of power.’ But while the civic hubris was still on, my academic curiosity stepped in as well. What did the act really mean, what did it communicate as an event? Why did it have such a strong effect both on us and the councilmen? Why, for instance, the reaction of many councilmen to our act was so startled? What was the significance of our quietly but visibly resisting bodies to the communicative effect of the act? What about our ‘gaze’ down on the councilmen, what did that ‘play of looks’ given and received signify? And further, as a post-graduate student working on democratic theory, I could not help but wonder whether our act was democratic or non-democratic. Can such expressions contribute something to the democratic process or are they destructive to it? Our prior experience had showed that public space for discussing policies publicly and ‘rationally’ was extremely scarce (local newspapers shunned us). Given, then, the

² There are no recorded accounts of the performance on May 5, 1999 but the council meeting and the civic resistance related to it has been discussed in Ridell 2005 and 2009. The meeting was preceded by a demonstration outside the City Hall which was reported in the local newspaper *Aamulehti* the following day (*Aamulehti*, May 6, 1999).

very limited access to the public, what means and channels of public expression and action were we left with?³

This study originates in this event and my experience of it as a citizen and a researcher. I recognized the event as an instance of *political communication*, as a desire to express our stand on a political issue by *showing* it to the decision makers. This originally intuitive and later theoretically reflected perception has guided the whole research process. The event itself was not in any way singular or unique. It was but a tiny indication of a much more general phenomenon of political actors frequently showing and acting out their political views and objectives to other people (and often specifically to political authorities) through public displays, or to use the terminology adopted in this study, through means of *public political performance*.⁴ The objective of this study is to learn to understand and grasp theoretically political communication through such performative means.

Politics as showing, demonstrating, and acting is by far new in the history of political thought and theory. Such features of political life have been discussed under a number of terms, including politics as theatre, politics as aestheticized action, or more lately, as part of the action repertoire of the new social movements (but only rarely in terms of performance theory). Yet, what is often prevalent in these discussions is their underlying normative-critical tone. In brief terms, their argument is that when politics turns into theatre or is aestheticized, it loses its touch with reason and risks descending into the world of political passions and mimicry (I will address this critique in chapter five). This suspicion has a long history and it still influences discussions around such current themes as individualization of society, political alienation, and ‘mediatisation’ of politics. My argument begins with a different premise. I see performativity as a characteristic feature of politics which should be analysed and theorised more deeply instead of taking it off-hand as a cause for despair (as modernists tend to see it) or for celebration (which is the typical post-modernist counter argument).⁵ My approach to

³ The bridge as originally planned was never built. Later the city government made a decision to build a light traffic bridge in its stead.

⁴ For a definition of the concept, see chapter 1.3.

⁵ Recent literature on new social movements shares the premise that performativity is an important characteristic of political activity, especially protest action (see e.g. Eyerman 2006; St John 2008). There is, however, a difference here between American and European literature on social movements.

political performance is hence more analytical and oriented to increasing understanding than normative.

This is my basic argument in this study:

1. Public political performance is a public event ('a show,' a demonstration, etc.) which interrupts everyday routines and brings into 'the public eye' political criticism, questions, and new ideas. Political performance is a form of communication which utilizes a wide communicative register including, most importantly, the bodies of the performers and other visually impacting markers to provoke response and feedback from the public. – This part of the argument addresses the 'what' question, seeking to describe what the phenomenon is basically about.

2. The purpose of public political performance is to expose and critique those social-political norms, practices, and relations of power which usually remain invisible in the sway of the routine life of a community. What we must carefully understand here is the expressly *public* (open, visible for all who can and care to look) nature of political performance. Performance is taken to the public space purposively in order to be noticed by the wider public; call it eye politics, if you like. Political performance is a very sensitive and volatile phenomenon because it often manifestly exposes the fundamentally violent power structure of society, as when, for example, street demonstrations induce strong counter reactions from the police and the political decision-makers. – Here the argument tackles with the 'why' question, attempting to construe an interpretation and explanation of the phenomenon.

3. Performance is an important subject for political studies for several reasons. The purely knowledge-based reason is that in directing attention to the corporeal and visual aspects of politics and political communication, performance brings into view phenomena which are too often ignored by political researchers and theorists. The relevance of performance for the field can also be justified from another perspective, through reference to its political and democratic significance. The discussions carried

American scholarship has for years worked actively with performance related concepts and approaches (see. e.g. discussions and literature in Shepard 2010 and 2011) while in European movement studies these are still rather rare (this difference in scholarship is understandable considering the much more performative/artistic nature of the American movement culture).

out in later chapters show that there are political circumstances where public performance is seen as the only available means of participation in public communication, with other channels of communication forbidden or marginalized. There are also situations where citizens create, through setting up a performance, space for public communication and action where it has not existed before. Subsequently, performance can play an important role in the political empowerment of citizens and civil society.⁶ – This third part of the argument addresses the 'what for' question, pondering why and how the phenomenon is scientifically meaningful.

1.2. The context: performance as communication

The relationship of this study to prior studies is framed by the fact that its problematic does not arise from research literature but from my personal experience and attempt to make sense of it in an effort which I see as a fresh political-theoretical opening in the field of political science. From this effort to reach out for something conceptually new, follows certain theoretical eclecticism. However, the ideas I use to configure my theory are limited and intimately connected. The literature I exploit in this intellectual voyage can be roughly divided into two categories: literature operating explicitly with the concept of performance (and *performative*, the meaning of which will be explicated later), and philosophical and political theoretical literature which shares an interest in corporeality, visibility, and aesthetics. I will come back to these sources later in this chapter, but let me first make a few notes on how I understand political communication in this study.

When approaching political communication through performance, I have had to take distance to how communication is commonly understood in the fields of politics and political communication. To be sure, communication has been an important notion in political and democratic theory, yet it has been rarely thematized and theorized from the point of view of its different modalities and functions. Political scientists have tended to be driven by normative questions, such as how informed citizens are of political issues

⁶ We should note, however, that even if performance can act as an important source and channel for public communication, there are no guarantees that the performance itself endorses democratic ideals. Performance can communicate, say, xenophobic and chauvinistic stands as well as democratic ones.

and how they could become better informed (through better education, is the typical argument); how efficiently citizens' and voters' political opinions are channelled into political decision-making (which is required for a political system to stand as democratic); and how democratic or elitist public discussion on political issues is (in a positive case it is inclusive, multi-voiced, and balanced, in a negative case exclusive and driven by powerful interests). The scholars of political communication – of the more specialized field that goes by that name – have, on their part, mainly focused on the techniques of persuasion through which political elites seek and succeed in 'selling' their messages to the public and affect or even manipulate public opinion through modern media techniques.⁷ In both fields the explicit (or sometimes implicit) assumption is that communication is verbal and that politics revolves around the art of speech and argumentation (albeit in the more recent study of political communication also pictorial-visual communication is accounted; see e.g. Domke & Perlmutter & Spratt 2002; Rice 2004). There is, of course, a long tradition of understanding politics as speech and rhetoric, but behind this emphasis we can also detect the influence of the so called linguistic turn in the 1950's and after, in the wake of which language became one of the, if not *the*, most important object of research in human sciences, including semiotics, language philosophy, pragmatics, psychoanalytic theory, and (parts of) political studies. Although language-oriented research approaches are by now extremely prolific, generally speaking they all share the belief that language is the chief mechanism through which social reality is constructed.

Hence the overall understanding of the human subject in human sciences has for a number of years been linguistically circumscribed which, in turn, has led to the tendency to exclude other perspectives to understanding the 'make-up' of the social and political reality. This problem touches political studies too. Anne Koski (2005, 9) notes indicatively that: "In practice the so called serious political issues and on the whole what politicians say are still taken as more important objects of research than what is not said and is shown instead."⁸ I start from the premise, and join the multidisciplinary research community which shares it, that man as subject and agent cannot be reduced to

⁷ See Chaffee 1975 and 2001 for a definition of the field and the evolution of its research interests.

⁸ "Käytännössä yhä edelleen niin sanotut poliittiset asiakysymykset ja ylipäätään poliitikkojen sanomiset koetaan tärkeämmiksi tutkimuskohteina kuin se, mitä jätetään sanomatta ja sen sijasta näytetään". (Translation TR)

the use of language. I am, rather, with those philosophers, performance theorists, and social theorists who think that all senses mediate our relationship to the world, and corporeality on the whole plays an important part in the construction of subjectivity (see Seppänen 2002, 21). Accordingly, I understand communication not only as social-cultural use of linguistic symbols but also as *physical* activity through which people build and sustain a common world. In a sense of such world-making communication encompasses two aspects. On the one hand, it functions as an element of the social construction of the world, contributing to the production and re-production of shared norms and practices. Here communication means ‘doing’ the world, not merely ‘trading’ thoughts and meanings through language. Or, to use the terms discussed later, communication works as an *iteration* of common *performatives* (speech acts, gestures, etc.) which sustain the social world in its familiar guise. On the other hand, sometimes communication turns into forms which de-construct the world rather than sustain it. This may happen accidentally, as when familiar performatives are iterated differently and people see that the world could be different. The other scenario is that communication as de-construct is carried out knowingly and wittingly through performance so as to disrupt performative routines and communicate that there is something wrong with them. My attention in this work is in pondering what goes on especially with the latter.

Political communication involves, then, the common world as constructed, negotiated, and struggled over through showing and acting. If this aspect is not taken into account, our understanding of politically relevant communication remains too narrow. It should be pointed out, however, that my approach is not meant to depict ‘flesh-and-blood’ forms of communication and language as opposites or alternatives. Rather, these are all intimately linked dimensions of human psyche and sociability (see Seppänen 2002, 21-22). Still, my focus here is in trying to learn to understand communication ‘through other means.’

It is fair to point out at the outset, however, that approaching politics from visual, corporeal, and aesthetic perspective is by no means easy. Such an emphasis can put the researcher in quite a difficult position. After all, political thinkers in the West have since Plato felt both fascinated and extremely doubtful about the possibilities of vision and other senses to lead the way to the ‘true’ understanding of the world. In the 20th century

critique, scholars have moved from the mere fallibility of the human senses to probing and theorizing the objectifying power of ‘the gaze,’ as well as to analysing the effects on the individual psyche and social life of the over-pouring visuality of the modern commercialized culture. I will address such critiques later (especially in chapter four) and attempt to clear out space for rethinking the relationship between visuality and politics. My claim is that, in political terms, visuality should not be understood as a simple and one-dimensional phenomenon but, rather, as a field of interplay, negotiation, and struggle. The interplay of looking and being looked at in public is an important mechanism through which social-political power is constructed and reproduced or, conversely, challenged and changed. Understanding this mechanism should be one of the basic contentions in the field of political studies.

1.3. Performance and performative as working concepts

As noted, performance has been a conspicuously underused concept in political studies.⁹ We can refer only to a few interesting political uses of it. Through Judith Butler’s work, the idea of gender performance has taken a strong foothold in feminist theory, where it is used widely to describe and conceptualize the problematic of identity and gender construction. (I will come back to this literature in a little while.) The concept also figures to an extent in the new social movement studies, especially in those which draw parallels between strategies of political activism and avantgardist art (e.g. Eyerman 2006; Hersch 1998; for an example of studies working in the intersection of sociology, political activism, and art, see Schlossman 2002). Performance has, moreover, occasionally come up in studies on democracy and political participation as a way of describing the new ‘postmodern’ style of political action (Kulynych 1997; Villa 1992a). What may also be regarded as interesting for political analysis is the critical, post-

⁹ As a curiosity, I searched for the term performance in article titles in the following science journals: American Political Science Review, Political Theory, Political Communication, and (for comparison with political studies journals) Media, Culture & Society between 2000-2009. The results showed that ‘performance’ did not appear at all in the titles of the first three, and only once in Media, Culture & Society. Full texts feature performance infrequently, but since the term is very generally used in English, it is not easy to determine whether its usage conforms to how I understand the concept. My estimation is, however, that in practice the perspective I employ in this study is nearly non-existent in politics journals. (Media, Culture & Society is partly a different case; there especially the term performative comes up on several occasions; not, however, in the same sense as I develop the concept here.) A glance such as this is, however, fractional and only suggestive.

structurally influenced cultural studies literature, which deals with the construction of resistant subjectivity and occasionally uses performance-related concepts in its theorizing. But there is no treatment that would in any *systematic fashion* develop performance as a *political-theoretical concept*.

My argument in this study is that performance works well for an attempt to outline the characteristics of the kind of communication that I am exploring in this work.¹⁰ I find performance a profitable concept because it signifies effortlessly in its everyday uses some of the central ideas of this study.¹¹ First, performance refers to a *public act or show*. This is a helpful signification for political analysis because, after all, politics is characteristically about public appearing and showing. For instance, in order to be effective, social and political power needs visible markers (institutions, practices, and symbols) which represent and reproduce the political world. Such markers function as publicly circulated figurative reminders of who ‘we’ are and what we are expected to do to carry on that ‘we-ness.’ Political activism too is typically visible. Parties as well as social movements strive for public visibility in order to strengthen their existence and to attract supporters. Moreover, political resistance requires visibility to be able to politicize existing norms and present alternatives to them.

The second important connotation discloses performance as something *done and acted* (or *enacted*).¹² This feature of politics has been almost universally criticized and

¹⁰ Cf. arguments especially within theatre and performance studies, according to which performance has become even too popular in recent years to be able to maintain its former analytical force. See e.g. Strine et al. 1990; Phelan & Lane 1998.

¹¹ We should note, however, that performance communicates differently in English and other European languages (which is an obvious source of confusion when a non-native researcher writes about performance in English and understands it from the context of her own lingual and cultural background). In English the connotations of performance are wide and varied (denoting both ‘doing something up to a standard’ and ‘putting up a show;’ there are a host of other referents as well), some of which are clearly lacking in other languages. In the latter, e.g. in Finnish, French, and German, performance is immediately associated with an activity which in English is usually described as ‘artistic performance.’ In these languages performance bears the connotation of a public show outside of and in distinction to regular theatre. This show can be artistic but it can be political as well. On the other hand, other languages make conceptual distinctions that are lacking in English. For instance, we can make a useful distinction in Finnish between ‘esitys’ (presentation, or sometimes an act of make-believe) and ‘performanssi’ (a non-theatrical public ‘show’ which includes some kind of surprise element), both of which translate in English as performance.

¹² Steven Connor (1996, 108) notes: “The difference between the two meanings of performance corresponds closely to the difference between ‘acting,’ in the sense of doing something, and ‘enacting,’ in the sense of playing out, or impersonating. The word ‘performance’ therefore points simultaneously towards immediate, spontaneous and ungoverned action on the one hand, and the act of doubling, and the doubling of action, in imitation, repetition or citation on the other.” (See also Wolfreys 2004)

downplayed in the 20th century political theory and public opinion. In this understanding, politicians should avoid all kinds of performance gestures when ‘performing’ in public and, instead, reveal to the public their ‘authentic’ (intimate) selves. I think this view is most unfortunate (see the argument in chapter six). I would rather posit that acting is a *constitutive* feature of political action. Think, for instance, about the various political positions and roles which come with rather specific expectations as to how their holders should behave and which require from politician-performers (and other political actors) at least some measure of ‘acting skills.’ Should a politician lack such skills, he or she is likely not a very good politician. Or think about the numerous ‘scripted’ political processes and events from elections to state or royal ceremonies, diplomatic protocols, parliamentary routines and so on, which construct the known political realities (they are something all communities need, to some extent, to hold together). Political action is, moreover, an evident home to stories, plotting, and drama, which is fully understood by rhetorical and discursive perspectives to politics (e.g. Burke 1945). I do not find it an exaggeration to claim that it is such performative and theatrical aspects which define politics in the first place (this is what the Renaissance people well understood when ascribing to the notion ‘*theatrum mundi*’; see Sennett 1977, 313; Apter 2006). I will return to this point soon.

Through approaching political performance from this second connotation we can sketch out two important theoretical ideas:

a) On one hand, performance brings into relief the nature of politics as a ‘doing.’ Quite simply, in order to continue to survive, the political world needs to be *done*, performed, and iterated, every time anew. And if it ceases to be so performed (e.g. in times of political upheaval), that world is no more, or at least its traditions are altered and it begins life as a reformed political entity. The term *performative* describes this social-constructivist side of the political world. That the constitution of the social and political power is based not on any natural ground but on continuous re/iteration of certain ways and routines is often revealed only when it is visibly and noticeably disrupted. This is what political performance does.

b) On the other hand, performance signifies a particular *kind of* public show which diverts from regular theatre in putting forth a more surprising and unpredictable kind of

public act and which, because of this, is more difficult to approach and interpret than theatre is. Political performance in this sense, as a contingent and sometimes odd public event with a surprise effect, brings forth the importance of *disruption* for politics. It alerts us to situations where the normalized political performatives are being visibly questioned. The relationship between these two, performatives and performances, creates an edgy (or 'liminal,' as explained later) political space from which much of public political life gains its driving force. This basically simple yet sometimes uneasily communicable idea constitutes the background horizon of my theoretical ruminations. It explains why performance as 'communication by way of showing' is important for politics.

Two conceptual elucidations are in place before we move on. First, in this study I am interested specifically in *public* performances.¹³ Not all political performances are public though. Political performances may be covert, as for example in the activities of underground resistance movements. Performances may also turn up in political processes like in negotiations between political groups in parliament which are not open to public eye. But here under study are public acts which are political by virtue of showing up in the public field of visibility; that is, in spaces where actors can be seen but where they can also 'look back' and thereby politicize the power of the dominant 'gazer.'

We may note that the category of the public/ness is usually not accounted for in performance studies. Understanding public/ness is, however, crucially important for this study, and I will come back to the concept on several occasions in this study. At this point suffice it to note that by publicness I refer, on the one hand, to the topographical aspects of political performance, to performances being displayed on a physical public space (or on the internet, which is a different kind of public space) with an open and basically unrestricted visibility. On the other hand, publicness refers to participation in

¹³ We can distinguish between several kinds of political performance, like the ones related to the enacting of political roles (of, say, the Prime Minister or the opposition leader); performances concerned with constructing political communities (these are often ritualistic events such as independence day festivities or royal spectacles); style sensitive political performances through which political parties, citizen movements, and other political actors distinguish themselves from other actors; performances related to political rhetoric (like campaign speeches), and so forth. 'Public political performance' in my sense of the term is an event which aims to break routines and generate public space for staging and addressing social-political issues.

the common world which emerges between people when they come together in some political capacity.¹⁴

I understand *political* likewise in two ways. First, as common sense politicality in a sense that public performances present critique and take political stand on common social problems. They are therefore concerned with judging and changing society and are often linked to struggles of citizenship and democracy. Second, political is related to the category of the public, to the coming together of people in a public field of visibility. This means that political actors have to be seen in order to be recognized, and they need to ‘show’ their political ideas and critique to be accounted for. This is the main reason for political performance being so intimately linked with visibility and aestheticity.

1.4. Performance in research literature: central ideas

Studies around performance constitute today a tremendously wide multidisciplinary field which cannot be introduced here in all its facets. I will therefore concentrate on a brief discussion on three research traditions: the anthropological-sociological tradition, the Performance Studies tradition, and the language theoretical tradition, by way of eliciting from them ideas which have played a constructive role in this study.

a) In anthropological and sociological perspectives performance has been approached as norm governed role-taking social activity and ‘everyday theatre’ (e.g. Goffman 1959; Turner 1969). Performance Studies pioneer Richard Schechner (2002, 22, 28) calls performance ‘twice-behaved’ or ‘restored’ behaviour, where the performer chooses an appropriate role or model of action from pre-existing repertoire to be applied in a particular social context. According to Schechner, daily life as well as ceremonial and artistic life consists largely of routines, habits, rituals, and the recombination of already

¹⁴ Hénaff & Strong (2001, 2-10) make a useful distinction between four types of social spaces: private, sacred, common, and public. Public space is endowed with three characteristics: it is ‘open in the sense of it being clear where one is;’ it is a human construct, ‘an artifact’; and it is ‘theatrical’ in that it is a place where one is seen and shows oneself to others – here the human faculty of sight is predominant. Sight is important for publicness because “[i]n seeing someone or something, I create a space that is ours.” (Op.cit., 6) The authors also point out that the qualities of this common space are not given; they are often the subjects of contestation. This understanding corresponds point by point with my understanding of the public (it also Arendt’s understanding, as we will see in chapter four).

behaved behaviours. Even what is seen as new, original, or avant-garde, is usually either a different combination of known behaviors or the displacement of a behavior from where it is acceptable or expected to venue or occasion where it is not expected. Alfred Schutz, the father-figure of social constructionism, makes the same point with a bit different emphasis. He argues that the actors of the social world navigate the world by using a patchwork of ‘recipe knowledge,’ in which distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures, suppositions, and prejudices across well-proven evidences (Schutz 1964, 72-73; cited in Carlson 1996, 44). Social constructivist thought assumes that social life and practices are not cultural givens but result from constant negotiations and re-constructions. (Carlson *ibid.*) If Schechner’s conception of performance is ritualistic, Schutz’s understanding is more pragmatic and in a sense more political.

In either case (and in other similar approaches) social life is seen as reciting and reenacting existing models or codes. The twist that we ought to be aware of here is, nonetheless, that those sociologists and anthropologists who are interested in performance do not believe that such models work mechanistically. Instead, many of them understand that rituals and conventional practices exist only because – or as long as – they are truly *performed*. Deeply reflected or not, people are at some level conscious about acting beside themselves and ‘pretending’ to be someone other than oneself (Schechner 2002, 28). They are able to make the distinction between the ‘everyday-me’ and the ‘performative me,’ without finding the latter as somehow extraordinary or out-of-place.¹⁵ Moreover, because performative conduct is socially marked and framed, it can always be worked on, played with, and turned into something different (*ibid.*).¹⁶ Hence, framed social performances come with at least the possibility of change. The terms of the frames and the rules of the game can be challenged and

¹⁵ Robert Ezra Park (1950, 249-50) makes an interesting observation: “It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role -- It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. -- In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves - the role we are striving to live up to - this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be.”

¹⁶ E.g. Erving Goffman has referred to the frame concept as a psychological device used by people when absorbing into the fictive space of play and performance. Within the play frame, all messages and signals are recognized somehow as ‘not true.’ Through such frames participant spectators are able to understand the ‘make-belief’ character of performance and are therefore free to interpret it more imaginatively than in the case of non-framed, casual activities.

participants can demand that they be renegotiated. Social situations may in such cases turn into drama, be politicized, and end up challenging social norms in a deeper sense.

I am not interested in roles and rituals in this study, but I find crucial the idea itself that social and political life comes with a 'natural' inclination to acting and drama. People are aware of the possibilities of drama and know how to play with them in social situations. Another important idea and concept inherited from this tradition, one that plays a key role in my thinking, is the *liminal*. Made known by anthropologist Victor Turner, the liminal (which Turner borrowed from Arnold van Gennep) is used to describe particular social-cultural situations where people, through temporary play or social disorder, take distance to their everyday roles and conventions and create an 'in-between space' (Turner calls it 'anti-structure') which permits them to go through some kind of social transformation. (Turner 1969; see also Turner 1982)

There are two aspects to liminality. On the one hand, it signifies a ready-coded procession of change, a trip as it were, from one known state to another, like in initiation. The trip can be wild, mystic, and catharsis-like, but it is still about a culturally predefined process instead of a political one (if it was political, its end result would not be known in advance). On the other hand, a liminal situation may unexpectedly open up a window to subversivity, so that instead of 'repeating the old system,' people end up figuring out a new, different way of doing things (new rules, roles, frames etc.).

If the first represents culturally administered change through occasional letting out of steam, the second represents the possibility of politicization. Turner, for example, was interested in liminality because he recognized in it a possibility for ritual to be creative, to make the way for new situations, identities, and social realities by means of anti-structure (Schechner 2002, 61). The case illustrations of this study show how public political performances play with such possibilities. By creating disorder and anti-structure, performances generate a liminal in-between space where the existing system and relations of power are *visibly* exposed and questioned (cf. Alexander and Mast's, 2006, critical discussion on Turner's conception of liminality).

b) The second area of research literature which I have found useful is the relatively new tradition of Performance Studies and its discussions on the relationship between theatre

and performance. The development of Performance Studies gained momentum in the early 1970s from engagement with experimental performance art. Performance artists criticized traditional theatre for being too strongly committed to Western representational traditions which emphasized (at the expense of personal authorship) plot, character, and referentiality (Reinelt 2002, 202). Performance art was also influenced by leftist art critique which saw theatre as coopted into the capitalist system of cultural production and marketing, which had led to its reduced ability to present radical social and political critique. Performance artists and scholars were interested in more situational, momentary, and unrepeatable forms of expression, allowing within the performance more space for improvisation, surprising turns of events, and participation by the audience. There were especially two things that performance art emphasized to distinguish it from traditional theatre (see Auslander 1992, chapter three). First, performance artists were intent on staging the *process* of making the act. It was not the 'result' that mattered. In this process the central means of expression was (at that time) the performer's own body. Through her body the performance artist aspired to communicate 'for real art' which lacked the element of pretence and make-believe; that is, elements which had blemished the expressive power of traditional theatre. (Carlson 1996, 111-114; Fischer-Lichte 2008; Auslander 1992 and 1997)

Another distinguishing feature was the fading aspect of performance. For example Peggy Phelan (1996) has famously argued that performance's only life is in the lived moment. It cannot be saved, documented, or circulated, like cultural representations usually can. And, when reproduced, performance changes into something else. The special *Wesen* of performance is, then, in its waning character. What we are left with after the experience is not an object but a memory of the act.

Even if discussion on the differences between theatre and performance has, more lately, become largely passé, I think it continues to bear relevance for political studies. Namely, those differences can be used analytically to point out the double nature of political action as theatre-like and as performance-like action. In this line of analysis, theatre works usefully as a metaphor for institutionalized politics. It opens up the performative nature of politics, yet in a way which emphasizes politics as following commonly accepted social-political norms and practices (or if not accepted, followed *de facto*). As theatre, politics is principally role governed activity which iterates the rituals

of power, i.e., political performatives. Performance, on the other hand, is a different kind of artistic act, one in which the performer emerges as a doing, not iterating subject.¹⁷ And for who, moreover, her own body and its personalized experiences function as the central communicative medium.

Likewise, in political performance actors deviate from the established system of representations and create a public show or act in which they characteristically use their own bodies to communicate. Political performance is a liminal, anti-structure situation and as such characteristically unpredictable. This is why political performances are often difficult for the general public and the authorities to approach and understand. Performances may strike people as odd, even dangerous, and may stir great uncertainty as to how people should react to them. This is to say that performance, artistic as well as political, constitutes an undecidable performance-audience relationship and interaction which differs notably from that in regular theatre or in established political order.¹⁸ Namely, in theatre it is not only the actors on stage who enact roles. The audience, too, has its own role in the production, a role that is well familiar to all theater-goers. This implies that going to theatre and watching a play is a social situation well marked and framed. All parties know what is expected from them when participating in it. In an artistic performance, in contrast, the relationship between performers and the audience is put into question and neither party knows exactly what their role in the situation is supposed to be (cf. Kokkonen 1999¹⁹). For instance, if the performance artist treats his/her own body in the act violently and the audience sees the body clearly in agony and pain, are spectators expected to intervene and end the act? Artistic performance often plays with this relationship and its undecidability. The same idea goes for political performatives and performances. In normalized political routines the parties know their

¹⁷ It is questionable, however, whether the performance act in this sense can be 'non-representative.' Nevertheless, what we can say is that its representativeness is innately more open than in the case of theatrical acts.

¹⁸ Performance theory has usually stressed the non-repeatable nature of performance in comparison with theatrical productions which are scripted and can be 'copied.' In my view, this theoretical idea does not carry very far. Namely, performance can be scripted in advance as well (and it usually is, to an extent) and, conversely, each individual theatre performance can be regarded as a unique situation which cannot be iterated exactly the same way twice. (See the discussion in Auslander 1992, chapter three)

¹⁹ According to Salla Kokkonen (1999), in performance art the performer and the spectator do not entirely lose their roles but these are different from the traditional performer-audience relationship. In a performance, both parties become participants, tied together through sharing the experience at the very moment of the act.

roles (of a political decision-maker, civil servant, citizen, etc.) and act accordingly. Political performance, on the other hand, tries to confuse these roles and routines. This is when also the performance-audience relationship turns insecure and capricious.

Political and artistic performances should not be equated, however. Several differences could be delineated, but one of the main points is this: theatre and performance art are both ‘pieces of work,’ they create an object which the audience can observe as if from a distance, knowing that ‘it is only art.’ Political performance, on the other hand, is *political* communication and action which includes all people in its sphere of influence. In other words, politics and political action are universal phenomena which define and determine everybody’s social position and possibilities for action. Nobody can really exclude himself from this sphere (people may be uninterested in and unmoved by artistic objects but they are always one way or another ‘moved’ by politics). Another way to put this is that the experience and judgment of theatre and artistic performance follow a different ‘paradigm’ compared to politics (see the argument in chapter five). However, we have to take in the possibility that a theatrical or an artistic performance may successfully politicize some issue in which case it ceases to be ‘only art’ and enters the contingent realm of politics. (Whether, then, expressly ‘political theatre’ really is political depends on its success on this point.)

c) The third tradition from which I employ ideas comes from a very different background. It is related, most importantly, to language philosophy, literary theory, and feminist theory. This tradition deserves our attention because it introduces and develops the concept of the performative which in this study works as the counterpart of the performance concept. These two make a dyad which I use as my key theoretical tool throughout the thematic discussions in the following chapters.

Let me introduce the theoretical background here only briefly. The term performative was coined in the mid-1950s by linguist J. L. Austin as part of his speech act theory. Austin (1975) developed the idea and theory of speaking as acting, making famous the dictum that ‘to say something is to do something.’ According to Austin, utterances, especially verbs, when pronounced in certain ‘felicitous’ contexts make things happen instead of simply stating them. For example, when in a wedding ceremony the minister pronounces a couple as man and wife, it is the pronouncement which ‘makes the

marriage happen,’ to take legal as well as social force. Without going into the details of Austin’s rather intricate analysis of speech-use²⁰, I would like to point out that what is significant for our purposes here is the overall thought underlying the theory, likening to the aforementioned sociological and anthropological takes on performance, which understand social reality, language notwithstanding, as concretely done by ‘acting’ it. Theorists working on performance and performatives in any field have been interested in how social reality is being produced through such live-acting. This starting point is important because it helps direct attention to politics as concrete, physical action and interaction. Dwight Conquerwood (1998) notes that understanding human action on this level has traditionally posed a difficult challenge to human sciences. I believe that, in this respect, performance theory has much to offer to a host of social science fields, including political studies.

Austin’s speech act theory generated a great amount of interest in various sciences and gained many noteworthy followers. For example Jürgen Habermas, whose theory of communicative action will be discussed in the next chapter, was highly influenced by Austin’s ideas. There was however one notable problem in Austin’s theory which especially the post-structuralist critics like Jacques Derrida have been eager to jump on. Namely, Austin made a deliberate distinction between normal and ‘parasitic’ speech acts, such as fiction and acting, and so doing accepted the old Platonian distinction between authentic and mimetic representation. We could say that of the two meanings of performance, Austin accepted only the ‘doing’ not the ‘acting’ part. Therefore, in order to be successful, speech must on each occasion be authentic and sincere. Derrida, on the other hand, does not believe that the power of performative speech acts is based on the context and the speaker’s earnest motives to say what he means (and mean what he says), but on the *iterability* of the speech act. His argument is that it is only by virtue of such iteration or citation that any performative utterances can succeed. (Derrida 2003, 274-300) For instance, the illocutionary effect of the minister’s pronouncements in a wedding ceremony does not arise from any particular context but from an existing linguistic pattern which has been iterated long enough to have turned into a code and

²⁰ In the course of his lectures on speech acts Austin came to acknowledge that other expressions besides certain verbs functioned performatively. To separate the various ways in which ‘to say something is to do something,’ he then distinguished between three types of verbal ‘actions’ (which can all be involved in a single utterance): the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary speech act.

‘de facto’ followed social institution. The speech act is successful, then, even if the minister in his own mind uttered it ‘inauthentically’ (e.g. ironically).²¹

Derrida’s idea has had plenty of critical potential. In emphasizing social facts being based on iteration he has at the same time established that they have no action independent origin. Speech acts have power only for as long as their citing goes on. This idea has been vital also for the gender theorist Judith Butler who introduced the concept at the turn of the 1990s with her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Applying Derrida’s idea, Butler argued that gender, too, has no social or cultural essence but is constructed performatively through citation of particular (‘feminine’, ‘manly’ etc.) ways of moving, gesturing, dressing, speaking etc. Therefore, there are no original performances or pre-existing identities by which acts or attributes might be measured. Every performance is an imitation, a form of mimesis, ‘a copy of a copy.’ And because gender is ‘merely’ the sum of the cited performatives, gender citation can be disrupted for instance through gender parodies (drag performances, cross dressing, gay-identified dressing etc.; see Ojajärvi 2004).

As noted already, I am not interested in performance as role guided behavior or as culture. What is important, instead, is the idea embedded in these approaches that social life is imbued with various sorts of performance, acting and drama, and I think it crucial to allow that such performativity may be an essential part of politics as well. This idea can be sharpened theoretically by taking into account the Derridean and the Butlerian understanding of the performative and the idea of the citational, non-foundational nature of social and political reality. The citational chains in speech and social practices carry notable power by creating ‘organization by habit,’ as Alfred Schutz (1964) has argued. Yet, it always remains possible that citation-as-performace be altered.

²¹ More specifically, according to Derrida, there is a structural gap between the citation and its context. The speech act iterates or cites its familiar form but the context is each time different. This means that the meaning of the citation cannot be tied to anything; it has no foundation or original point of reference. It is this *différence* which Derrida thinks the power of performatives is based on. I see a kinship between Derrida’s *différence* and the concept of the liminal as I use it in this study (denoting a space which opens up when a performance breaks up the practical power of a performative). The two are not exchangeable, though. Later a third concept will be introduced which also refers to a kind of ‘gap’ in experience and expression. This *chiasma*, which I borrow from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, refers to a politically charged space which opens up in the field of public visibility between crossing looks. I find all three concepts interesting for political analysis (politics is, after all, in many ways an ‘in-between’ phenomenon; see the argument in chapter five).

Now, what I have wanted to say with the above concise review of literature, and what will be elaborated in the coming chapters, is this: from the perspective of performative politics, politics appears (quite concretely) as a dynamic relationship between performative citations, which sustain political routines and norms, and political performances, which try to disrupt those routines, catch attention, and provoke reactions. The main purpose of performatives is to fix meanings and thereby produce regularity and ‘sameness’ in political life, while the purpose of performances is to mix, play with, and interrupt that sameness. There is a liminal space between the two, a moment when a performative ceases to appear ‘natural’ and is opened up for critique and alteration.

To close this section, let me make an important analytical point. My purpose is not to define political performance once and for all and thereby produce criteria according to which a particular event can be judged as a performance or as a non-performance. Rather, I think of performance and performativity as interpretative perspectives which can be used to analyse more or less any political event and its ‘performative features.’ Other perspectives to the same events may be as legitimate. The kind of public events I look into could well be approached as civic disobedience, free expression of opinion, communication of group-based interests, extra-parliamentarian political participation, and so forth, all of which evoke their own ideal-conceptual frames of interpretation. As Schechner (2002, 30-35) points out, it is difficult or impossible to define exactly what performance *is*, but events can be looked at *as* performance. We can therefore see in political action and communication performative features and construct a different kind of political theory upon such notion. Yet, because theories and concepts are always only *suggestions*, not truths (see the methodological notes below), these features may not ‘appear’ to all who take a look.

In this section I have described those research traditions which directly exploit performance concepts and contemplate, should I say, the performative construction of reality. Another theoretical plane on which I move is the kind of social theoretical and partly philosophical literature which shares an interest in the body, visibility, and the aesthetic. In my theory these themes are closely connected to political performance as communication. Through these ideas and the discussions that utilize them we will be able to see what practically goes on with performative situations and why/how they are

politically significant. My main discussants in this voyage will be Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Ranciere. I will describe my use of these thinkers more in detail in the last section of this introduction along with an overview of the contents of the coming chapters.

1.5. Methodological notes

The methodology of this study builds on two starting points: first, on the use of my personal experience as a key to an interpretation of what political performance is about, and, second, on an effort to conceptualize and theorize this experience; not in its singularity, though, but in a backdrop of a host of other examples introduced and discussed in the following chapters.²² More specifically, the methodology of this study can be positioned by referring to Dwight Conquerwood's (1998) discussion on the state of performance studies' methodology.²³ Conquerwood notes that there has been a remarkable constellation of thinking in recent years around performance, which has "become a rallying point for scholars who want to privilege action, agency, and transformation." This upsurge of interest in performance is something Conquerwood wholeheartedly celebrates, yet he faults performance research for its textualist bias. (Op.cit., 25)

Conquerwood makes a distinction between two research paradigms, the 'textual paradigm' and the paradigm of 'performative ethnography,' and argues for the benefits of the latter. He challenges the tendency of most culturally oriented research to ignore differences between the actual performance and the text and the tendency to use them interchangeably. What Conquerwood finds wrong with the textual paradigm is that it is

²² Experience as understood in this study, in a sense of *revelatory opening to something new*, can be clarified by referring to a distinction between two conceptions of experience in German language. There, *Erfahrung* refers to a knowledge or skill gained from engaging in a certain practice for an extended period of time, a sort of learning by practice (like when saying that "I have experience of working as a waitress"). *Erlebnis*, on the other hand, denotes something 'lived through,' a lived experience and conscious encounter with the world that affects one's body and mind (this is the sense of experience when someone says e.g. that "I went skydiving and it was one hell of an experience"; see Wibben 1998). In my understanding, *Erlebnis* is a bodily experience first and only thereafter a reflected experience. The sensibility or 'sensuousness' of *Erlebnis* implies that it has certain unavoidability to it, that we have to take in, signify, and judge our lived *Erlebnisse*.

²³ Conquerwood's discussion is contextualised in cultural studies, but I find it illustrative of the recent years' methodological emphases in human sciences more generally.

not a sensitive register for the nonverbal dimensions and embodied dynamics that constitute meaningful human interaction (or what Bakhtin, 1984, calls 'bodies of meaning'). (Op.cit., 26) The textual paradigm privileges distance, detachment, and disclosure as ways of knowing in a way that moves knowing above immediacy. Moreover, there is something more fundamental at stake than mere epistemology. Namely, the textual paradigm assumes upon itself the position of authority to define 'otherness' and interpret the others' experiences. It is no coincidence, he claims (following Edward Said's known argument), that subjugated cultures and people have often been denied access to literacy and writing skills. Power is the privilege of those who have knowledge, and knowledge is typically, in the West, put in writing.

Conquergood argues for another style of knowing and doing research, performative ethnography, in which understanding is reached through participation in shared experience. Performative paradigm centers on immediacy, involvement, and intimacy of modes of understanding, in a sense of knowledge as a mode of being-together-with (op.cit., 26). Conquerwood points out that, in studying for example the performances of marginalized people, attention needs to be given to messages that are not spelled out, to indirect, nonverbal, and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings can be nurtured and hidden from the sight of overseers (Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 1990, illustrates this perfectly). Their communication can thus be more tangible and visual than linguistic, the 'observation' of which works only if the researcher gets to participate in this mute play of touching and looking. Conquerwood's performance paradigm struggles to recuperate the 'saying from the said,' to put mobility, action, and agency back into play. He approaches performance, like I do in this study, as transgression, "that force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle" (op.cit., 31, 32).

Now, on the one hand I have worked in the spirit of Conquerwood's methodological premises where the researcher's personal experience and concrete, corporeal 'participation in the phenomenon' are taken as an important facet of understanding. This sort of participation does not work for all kinds of research projects, to be sure, and not all scientific knowing can be corporeally founded in this sense. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher's own experience is not a constraint to knowledge, one

that ought to be accounted for in order to avoid bias, but that it can distinctively work as resource for research and theoretical thinking.²⁴

On the other hand, I think Conquerwood's methodological endorsement is problematic in that he seems to completely bypass the question of conceptualization. Experiences are not in themselves communicable but require conceptualization and theoretical thinking. We must therefore ask: how do I know what it is that I experience? How do I put my experience in words? How do I mediate my experience, observations, and understanding to other people? I believe that there is an unavoidable gap, a *différence* between the experienced and the said, their relationship being foundationally ambiguous and mutually constructive. Hence, I start from the idea that concepts do not *describe* their objects as much as they *open them up* to be grasped from some (always partial) perspective. Concepts partake in the construction of the phenomenon they describe by 'bringing it into existence' so that also other people are able to 'see' it. (Ridell & Väliäho 2006, 10) One of the fundamental points of contemplation in any study concerns, therefore, the choice of appropriate concepts.²⁵ Doing science requires constant interplay and dialogue between experience and conceptualization in which both corporeal and social ways of knowing and (inter)textual, theoretical ways of knowing each have their own place. That we cannot get rid of *this* undecidability need not be taken as an obstacle for theory building, quite the contrary. Because of the lack of definitive meanings there are endless possibilities for new intellectual-theoretical constellations, the contours of which the researcher can then suggest (and only suggest) to the science community. Now, in this study my experience of political performances has induced me to suggest that at least sometimes showing and acting serve important

²⁴ Conquerwood's methodological standpoint is by no means new in sciences. A similar kind of debate between subject oriented philosophy of science and the one that stresses objectivity has waged in the human sciences for decades. In recent years, especially the feminist methodology has carried on the discussion by turning attention to the situatedness of all knowing (see e.g. Harding 2009; Naples 2007; Hekman 1997). For example, the feminist researchers' way of utilizing autobiographical material in the research process is based on acknowledging and exploiting this situatedness (Kyrölä 2010; Saukko 2002). On the other hand, we should maintain that the use of personal experience in research not lead to the endless repeating of confessional and emotional revelations. Paula Saukko warns that this kind of 'emotional autoethnography' may risk losing sight of the wider discursive tapestry that interlaces any experience of the self (Saukko 2002 and 2003).

²⁵ The etymology of the word 'concept' leads to the Latin *concupere*, to beget, to give birth, to make visible. Compare it with the Finnish word 'käsittää,' the root term of which is 'käsi,' a hand, implying that something is being made possible to take into hands, to handle. Compare it also with the Swedish *begrupp* and the German *Begriff*, to catch, to take a hold of something (see the interesting conceptual discussion in Ridell & Väliäho 2006).

functions in political communication. I have chosen performance as my main conceptual tool to describe this phenomenon, because I think it opens up meanings which allow us get a grip of what political communication as showing really amounts to.

My research orientation can also be portrayed, to an extent, as phenomenological. Let me put it in this way: the personal experience, the *Erlebnis*, that acted as this study's origin, came with a sense of having encountered a phenomenon which called for an explanation and which available political theoretical perspectives did not help make sense of. This insight has been central for my methodology since it induced me to question the existing conceptual angles to 'public shows' and feel out for a different kind of approach to them. This goes well with the 'phenomenological methodological attitude' (see Rinne 2011, especially chapter three), which posits that the reflection following *Erlebnis* should be carried out in openness, and that the already existing assumptions and theories of the phenomenon should at least temporarily be bracketed (in a sense of Husserl's 'epoche'). Only this way the researcher can truly contemplate what the phenomenon 'as itself' is about and how it might be interpreted.

Yet, there are several differences between my methodological understanding and that of phenomenology. For example, I do not follow the Husserlian kind of phenomenology in thinking that phenomena are already there in the world (as '*Sachen selbst*') ready to be found and encountered, or that through *epoche* those phenomena can be comprehended in a sense of true knowledge. How phenomena under study expose themselves to the researcher and, especially, how she understands and conceptualizes them is culturally, politically, and theoretically mediated. Therefore, social phenomena simply 'are' not, but are always constructed 'as something' and exist only by way of such construction. Another difference is that the phenomenological approach to science starts from individual perception and consciousness, from Cartesianism of a sort, and looks into how the world is meaningfully construed from the standpoint of the individual. What is central for political theoretical approach, instead, is to identify and analyze social phenomena as they appear to and are acted upon by people collectively.

Yet, the chief aim of this study concerns conceptualization and theory building. Let me state very briefly, how I want to go about doing it. I see theory as dialogical and

intertextual activity within the science community (see Forsnäs 1998), and I do not think that theory can ever (or at least hardly ever) really be ‘thought alone.’ Theoretical ideas typically build on something already-thought, and where they do not, they are in danger of communicating badly to other researchers. Subsequently, when engaging in theory-building in this study, I will use many available ideas and concepts in order to ‘textualise’ it (cf. Conquergood’s methodological argument above). In the beginning of each chapter, I first give a short introduction to the chapter’s theme and then discuss a few theoretical ideas by prominent theorists that I find valuable for understanding performative communication. After these theoretical ponderings, I take up in each chapter one example of public political event or series of related events and discuss their performative characteristics. Proceeding this way, I explore the defining features of performance, corporeality, visibility, and aestheticity, each in their own chapter and construct, step by step, my argument about the constitution of performative communication. I should point out, however, that the theory discussions in this work are not meant as authoritative introductions to the themes of performance, corporeality, etc. Instead, like Forsnäs (op.cit.), I regard my study as a new contribution which makes use of the echoes of the earlier theories in order to produce a novel interpretative constellation.

It should also be noted that I am not engaging in advanced *case research* here. My foremost interest in this study is to develop a theoretical argument. Empirical discussions in the following chapters are meant to illustrate and concretize the various elements of this argument. My empirical illustrations do, however, exploit a level of phenomenological meaning-giving, as referred to above. Accordingly, I will pay attention to how political actors themselves describe and interpret their communication(s), and connect those interpretations with my personal experience. Last, by taking in several examples (instead of, say, making a close inspection of the ‘anatomy’ of one), I have wanted to demonstrate that political performances are a frequent, perhaps even a ‘universal’ phenomenon.²⁶

²⁶ All examples share similar performative features. Hence, they could be exchangeable. This poses no methodological problem, however, since my purpose is not to categorize and compare different performances or their social-political contexts.

1.6. The study chapter by chapter

I will proceed in the following manner:

I start by discussing, in chapter two, the meanings and theories of communication and building preliminary theoretical understanding of what communication entails in this study. I will tackle especially with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action which is one of the most influential social science theories of recent years. Habermas's theory is important because it represents a widely shared conception of communication as the art of civilized discourse and social cooperation (an idea with appealing democratic implications). I will then contrast (but partly also utilize) Habermas' model of communication with the characteristics of performative communication. I will bring up and briefly introduce those characteristics by discussing in the last section of the chapter the *Clothesline Project*, a series of public displays of T-shirts put up in different locations around the world, portraying and commenting through text and image the survivor experiences of domestic and sexual violence.

The next three chapters develop the study's key analytical-theoretical arguments. Chapter three discusses the body as the primary marker of political performances. I start from Michel Foucault, arguably the most influential body theorist of the 20th century. Foucault is significant in that he was able to concretize the mechanisms of modern power on the level of the body, demonstrating how power entails the bodies' compliance. Power is most effective when social norms have been internalized by the subject, so that in the end she surveils and controls her own behavior. Yet, while Foucault's insights have proved invaluable, I concur with his critics that this understanding of power and subjectivity is too one-sided and Foucault's well known idea of political resistance too underdeveloped. I will then refer to more recent body theorizing which has stressed that in the postmodern world the body has turned to a space of individualized expression and play, i.e., to a 'project,' which is constantly worked on and remade. According to this line of thinking, the postmodernly adorned body in its plurality of changing subject positions is able to resist (in distinction to the compliant modern body) hegemonic cultural valuations and thereby also able to challenge the power of normalization.

I will argue, nonetheless, that the new body theory does not, any more than Foucault did, pay attention to a perspective which sees the body as a site and media for *public* action and communication. Both theories lack conception of publicness, which has to be taken into account if we really want to understand body's communicative power. I will move towards this direction by turning to Hanna Arendt's political theory. Arendt is not, to be sure, a typical suspect for body theorist. Yet, as I will show, her insistence on the *public visibility of acting in the world* necessarily anchors political actors in the common world of bodies. As an example of political performance which notably uses bodies for communicative purposes, I discuss a confrontation between *Tute Bianchi* activists (the White Overalls) and the police during the 2000 demonstrations against neoliberalist globalization in Prague, the Czech Republic. The discussion shows the political possibilities of body communication as well as its dangerous 'undecidability,' which make bodies a very precarious means of political communication. The example should help us understand better why and how collective body-acts like public demonstrations so easily produce tensions between demonstrators and other parties, especially political authorities.

Chapter four continues the argument by pondering why performances find it so important to show up and appear in public, why they're sometimes ready to go to great lengths in order to be seen and reckoned by the wider public. One of the chief claims of this study is that performances strive to expose and challenge existing norms and relations of power through one very particular means, by challenging the dominant *visual regime* of power, that is, those perceptible structures and practices through which political order is routinely kept going. What political authorities in any society seek to do is to control *what* and *who* can appear and act in public. Political opposition, in turn, seeks to challenge the dominant visual regime and break its power. In chapter four, I approach the implications of this kind of 'visual politics' through three theoretical sources. I will first return to Foucault, who was not only a theorist of bodies and power but a keen theorist of visibility. Again, while Foucault has presented powerful arguments on the intertwinings of visibility and modern power, he also tended to overemphasize the objectifying power of the gaze over the subject and downplay the possibility that the subjects might 'look back' and thereby resist their objectification.

In order to explore this phenomenon, the mutuality of looks given and received and their political implications, I then turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's and Hannah Arendt's more intersubjective conceptions of visibility. Both stress the construction of the common world via crossing looks, not through one-directional gaze of power. From Merleau-Ponty, I employ a valuable concept, *chiasma*, to describe that public political betwixt-space in which actors' looks cross, struggle, and negotiate, but in which they can never entirely meet and fuse into a shared understanding of society and its power relations. I will then place this philosophical-political idea in the context of Arendt's understanding of politics as public appearing.

After these theoretical inversions I will turn to an examination of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, a movement of Argentinian mothers and grandmothers who since 1977 have struggled to find out what happened to their children 'disappeared' during the late-1970s military dictatorship. The discussion pays attention to the intricate tactics of visual communication used by the Madres in their struggle against the repressive politics of the junta. This example, too, illustrates the potential power of visual politics, which is all the more important in conditions where an oppressive regime controls public channels of communication. What makes the Argentinian case very intriguing is the way in which the visually arresting action of the Madres was able to establish (or rather, struggle into being) public space for women's political agency where it had never existed before.

Chapter five continues where the two previous chapters left off. Because performances challenge the public field of visibility and the terms set upon it by the political order, we should begin to understand the very practical importance of what performances actually do and show in the public, what kind of experiences, critique, and alternatives they make visible in the public arena. What I want to say with this is that political performance is not simply visual but, more precisely, *aesthetic* communication. I say that performances are aesthetic expressions because they give 'visible shape' to performers' experiences and ideas. Moreover, performances are aesthetically intensive communication when and because they're played out in the sensitive chiasmatic realm, in which it is under constant negation who gets to appear and act in public, whose ideas are allowed public presentation, and which practices become dominant. The chapter

addresses criticisms against aesthetic politics and argues that we have good reasons to save aesthetics, as a conceptual tool, from complete denunciation.

My first stop in the chapter is John Dewey, a rare political theorist in a sense that he fully endorsed combining aestheticism and everyday action. There are several interesting ideas we can take with us from Dewey when inquiring into what makes political performance aesthetic action; yet we must also pay attention to some of the problems in his theory. Next, I will turn to a more detailed conception of aesthetics as ‘form giving’ by reference to the work of a French philosopher Jacques Ranciere, noticing especially his notion of politics as aesthetic ‘partitioning of the sensible.’ Thirdly, I will look into Hannah Arendt’s understanding of aesthetic judgment, which eventually helps us close the argument as to what is, or can be, valuable about the kind of aesthetic communication that political performances typically engage with.

In the last part of the chapter I will engage in a discussion of the 1990s political protests in Serbia against the regime of President Slobodan Milošević. This Serbian example is interesting because the protestors themselves used to refer to political events of that time as ‘theatre of the absurd.’ With this astute expression they alluded both to the ‘sheer theatre’ of Milošević’s nationalistic policies and to the opposition’s own resistance which was frequently communicated through theatrical means. In this constellation, the image of politics as theatre became political reality in a very graphical sense. Via our discussion we should gain an insight into how performances work as aesthetic communication, as a means of exposing the boundaries and the constraints of the prevailing political order, and at least occasionally outlining alternative political landscapes, like when performances bring into view different identities and seek public recognition for them. Political action is aesthetic because it defines and determines (or ‘partitions,’ as we shall argue in chapter five) the borders of common political reality, that is who/what is allowed public visibility and, thereby, social-political existence and who/what is shunned to invisibility. I regard this as an intriguing way of defining and understanding the meaning of ‘aesthetic politics.’

In chapter six the argument takes on a new path by staging this question: are we really justified to take performances seriously as a political phenomenon in conditions where public re/presentations are increasingly mediated (framed, interpreted, and sometimes

deliberately invented) by the global, institutionalized media with strong economic interests behind them? In other words, how far is performative communication conditioned by the fact that it is so closely related (in case it is) to the 'media logic' of our times? After all, critics have argued for some time that mediatization has led to an overriding individualization and 'entertainmentization' of politics and, subsequently, to general disenchantment with it. Another new factor which has changed the political scene and forms of political action is the explosive growth of the internet-mediated communication. It seems legitimate to wonder, then, whether these changing structures and values of the mass mediated society are leading to increasing inauthenticity and even corruption in political action, political performances notwithstanding.

While questions and critiques of this kind certainly have their merits, my position starts from a rather different kind of premise. Instead of faulting current politics and political performances for being too 'theatrical' and 'inauthentic,' I will maintain that it is these 'actorly' kinds of aspects which actually make politics. Therefore, even if current media conditions certainly affect political action in many ways, the communication of politics and political performances are not determined by the globalized, commercialized media. Performances continue to have relevance both within and beyond the structures of the modern mass media.

The other thing is that we are often misled by views like the above because of the very narrow way that media itself is conceptualized and understood. I will try to show that performances, too, are one kind of media which in the modern media structures work from within other media and overlapping with them, so that no media can entirely reduce them under their power. At least some of the bodily, visual, and aesthetic elements of performances 'come through' the media coverage in, say, the TV evening news. This kind of perspective helps us to understand the problems of discussions and analyses which too one-dimensionally believe in the mediatization of politics and, related to this, in the fading of political authenticity. If we accept that politics is theatre-like and performance-like action in the first place, this sort of interpretation loses at least some of its force.

Moreover, I will claim that even if politics moves increasingly to the internet, it does not mean that public political performances would become extinct. Actually, we can

make the argument that public political performances continue to have important political relevance *also because* they nowadays resonate so strongly on the net when ordinary people pick them up in the streets and report them online with pictures, videos, and commentaries. This is a growing trend in the global net politics. Furthermore, the internet features a number of characteristics which invite users to communicate performatively. In order to create interesting profiles of themselves and their goals in an environment in which competition for viewers and readers is hugely intense, political actors are required to put up distinctive visual and graphic (but also argumentative) ‘shows’ on the net that can be likened to offline public political performance. Consequently, the internet does not make performances wane as much as it offers them new possibilities to appear and influence.

The example discussed in chapter six deals with a confrontation between a male Iranian-American student and the campus police in an UCLA library in 2007. A fellow student filmed the incident and uploaded it on the net immediately after the event. The video clip then circulated around the blogosphere, immediately stirring an extensive critical outburst against the violent actions of the campus police towards the student. The example demonstrates in many ways recent changes in mass mediated political communication. It shows the potential and significance of the net as a fast and horizontal ‘from-below’ arena of communication and participation which challenges many familiar views of the practices of political communication. At the same time it illustrates what performative politics on the internet can mean and look like (not altogether positive, as I will argue). The confrontation itself turned into a spontaneous on-the-spot political performance, but it received significant political weight only after starting to circulate on the net. Moreover, the way in which the event was publicized and commented on the blogosphere was in itself highly performative.

Let me finally point out some of the limits of this study. There are many issues that I do not address and conclusions that cannot be drawn on the basis of what I do. For example, I am not trying to compare different modalities of communication like speech, pictures, and ‘showing.’ I also do not present a historical-sociological argument about the origins and development of political performance or discuss differences between performative politics across cultures. And one more limitation: my thinking on performance originated in working with normative democratic theory and in discovering

problems in how it tends to understand communication. Yet, my aim in this study is not to make a normative argument about which form of communication is democratic and which is not. My disposition is, rather, theoretical-analytical. This being said, my study does show that public political performance can act as an important channel of public communication, especially in political contexts where other communication possibilities are limited or extinct. This finding comes, to be sure, with normative implications. In the concluding chapter, I will first rehearse the main points of the work and thereafter come back to discuss briefly the relationship between political performance and democracy.

“I think the saddest thing I saw today, the one thing that hit me the hardest, was a T-shirt made by a mother for her child. It was a tiny newborn T-shirt no bigger than the palm of my hand.”

A viewer's comment in a Clothesline display of T-shirts for survivors of domestic violence, Columbus, Ohio (McWhorter-Finney 1996)

*“Society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist **in** transmission, **in** communication.”*

John Dewey (1916, 5; emphasis TR)

2. Performative communication

2.1. Defining political communication

As pointed out above, in this work I am concerned with studying political performance as *communication*. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the meanings and theories of communication and build preliminary theoretical understanding of what it entails in this study. I will tackle especially with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, which is one of the most influential social science theories of recent decades. Habermas's theory of communication is linguistic and rational, and it has offered a tempting model for many observers in that it seems to promise a peaceful and reasonable way to solve social and political conflicts in a democracy. Initially, what motivated my research on performances were the problems and gaps I found in this theory. In this sense, my study is characterized by an overall interest to engage critically with Habermas' theory and aspiration to develop a more nuanced understanding of communication. In the following discussion I will contrast (but partly also utilize in a way explained later) Habermas' model of communication as rational argumentation with the communicative forms of political performances. I will bring up and briefly introduce those forms in the last section of the chapter by discussing the *Clothesline Project*, a series of public displays of T-shirts portraying and commenting the survivor experiences of domestic and sexual violence.

We can start by noting that especially two conceptions of communication have dominated understanding and research on communication throughout the 20th century, the *transmission view* and the *ritual* or cultural view of communication (Carey 1975; Peters 2000; Ridell 1994). The transmission view has governed the way communication

has been approached in the study of modern mass media and political communication, while the ritual view has represented the hopes and aspirations linked to communication by various spheres of life, from the construction of social relationships in the modern media to the therapeutic discourses of psychology and education to (what concerns us here most) political and democratic theory.

The transmission view is by far the commonest and has dominated thinking around communication throughout the 20th century. In this conception communication is defined by terms such as imparting, sending, transmitting, and giving information. In the 19th century, when the new ways of transportation developed and expanded rapidly, both the movement of goods and people, *and* the movement of information were conceptualized as communication. (Carey 1975, 3-4) Respectively, the focus of political communication scholars has been in examining how political elites ‘transfer’ their views on voters and audiences. Modern study of political communication in this sense originated in Harold Lasswell’s analyses of the First World War propaganda techniques and he was also the first to use the term political communication. Lasswell and his colleagues developed ‘the hypodermic model’ of media effects which assumed that “a political message acts on the individual like a hypodermic syringe or billiard ball, producing a direct effect which could be measured and predicted” (McNair 2003, 30). Lasswell, Walter Lippmann, and others argued that industrialization, urbanization, rationalization, psychological research, and new instruments of communication had provided unprecedented conditions for manufacturing consent among dispersed populations in modern societies. Moreover, according to Lasswell, manipulation as a principle of modern social order was both inevitable and superior in its effect to the earlier brutal forms of social control: “If the mass will be free of chains of iron, it must accept its chains of silver” (cited in Peters 2000, 8).

Even though later empirical studies proved this model too simplistic and researchers’ attention gradually moved to those factors and conditions, such as opinion leaders and political agenda-setting, that intervene between the message and its recipient, the field has maintained its focus on the functions and effects of persuasive *cum* manipulative political communication on individual behaviour (see Chaffee 1975; Chaffee 2001; McNair 2003; Sanders 2009) and, relatedly, on the conditions of democracy. The major weakness of this conception is that it tends to lose sight of the intersubjective character

of communication. There is very little two-way about communication-as-transfer which is why it has apparent difficulties in understanding the complex social and the creative aspects of communication or, in the words of James Carey (op.cit., 18), “the extraordinary phenomenological diversity of communication,” with which we are dealing in this study.²⁷

The ritual view, growingly influential in the recent decades’ social theory and practice, approaches communication in terms like sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of common faith; in terms of culture, that is. This view, which is not directed as much toward the extension of messages in space as maintenance of society in time, exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms ‘commonness,’ ‘communion,’ ‘community’ and ‘communication.’ (Carey op.cit., 6) It derives from a notion of religious origin which, Carey notes, downplays the role of the sermon, the instruction, and reproach in order to highlight the role of the prayer, the chant, and the ceremony. The highest manifestation of communication lies in this understanding in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world which can serve as a control and container for human action. According to Carey (ibid.):

“This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form – dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech – creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order which operates not to provide information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.”

However, when taken to an extreme, the ritual view may end up dispensing talk altogether and positing something like a *consensus in idem*, a psycho-semantic sharing of ideas and sentiments in a community. (Peters op.cit., 14) Such a vision of (non-complicated and unproblematic) communication has for long intrigued political philosophers and theorists of democracy, albeit assuming different articulations and degrees with different theorists. For instance, John Rawls has presumed it in a thin and

²⁷ From my point of view it is interesting that Brian McNair (2003, 221) should use the term ‘performance politics’ to describe the modern mass-mediated communication processes as they take place in the hands of professionalized media actors including politicians, political parties, PR- and marketing experts. However, what McNair clearly implies with ‘performance’ in his discussion is the routinely executed ‘make-belief’ production of messages and images by the established actors of media society rather than the sort of disruptive art-like political performances which I explore in this study.

the communitarians in a thick sense. Of the pre-20th century thinkers, Jean-Jacque Rousseau more or less epitomized it.

If the problem of the transmission view was its one-sidedness and omission of the social and creative aspects of communication, the ritual view in turn lacks understanding of communication's political element. The more it moves toward taking communication as a 'natural' communion which need not reflect on its own premises and practices (not to mention struggle over them), the more unpolitical and dangerous it becomes. Habermas's strength in this respect is that his theory stresses communication as an active give-and-take process through which people can express and discuss their concerns in public. This view is profitable for the study of political communication because it implies that communication takes place in public as the sum of many actors and many communication processes, not only in the hands of media and politics professionals.

In the next section I look closely into the view which understands communication as interaction and rational dialogue by way of conversing with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action and deliberative democracy. I will be critical, yet will also bring up some interesting openings in Habermas's later theorizing which have received only scarce attention from the scholars of communication and democracy. Nevertheless, we will come to see that there remains one crucial aporia in Habermas's thinking, his anxiety about the role of aesthetics in politics, which continues to exclude a variety of alternative forms of communication from serious theoretical consideration. We need to overcome this problem in order to be able to understand properly what political performances as communication are about.

2.2. Habermas's theory of communicative action

Communication is one of the buzz concepts of the 20th century in sciences, everyday life, and, especially, in the media. It is also one of the pinpoint questions of the discussions and debates around democracy. Many theorists have found good reasons to suggest reviving democratic culture through more open and equal communication between citizens, as well as between citizens and politicians. This aspiration is

conveyed already by the names theorists have bestowed on such models of democracy, such as ‘communicative democracy,’ ‘discursive democracy,’ and ‘deliberative democracy.’ However, communication has not always been at the forefront of social research and public attention. It arose to the scientific and social agenda in a large measure only in the 19th century, although the issue at the bottom, people’s capacity to communicate meaningfully, has interested philosophers for centuries. Peters (2000, 2) argues that while humans were dubbed the ‘speaking animal’ by Aristotle, communication is a typical registry of *modern* longings. For modern optimists, it evokes a utopia “where nothing is misunderstood, hearts are open, and expression is uninhibited.”

Jürgen Habermas as a philosopher and social theorist can be said to exemplify this kind of modern longing and belief in the power of consensual-dialogical communication. His significance as a theorist of communication cannot be overstated in this context. The next discussion presents the basic features of this theory, but it should be noted that I can touch only on some key elements of it. The complex nuances of Habermas’s work have to be left aside.

To start with, Habermas’s theory of communicative action must be understood with reference to his overall argument about the development of modernity and modern rationality. The main story line of Habermas’s argument is that, as Western societies drew away from premodern mythical society, the traditional cultural, social, and political bases of thinking and action lost their status of self-evidence. This development brought out the need for a more ‘artificial’ construction of social understanding. In modernization, the spectre of communicative action emerged with an implicit promise to carry out important functions of integration and socialization where traditions were disintegrating.²⁸ The core of this form of communication rests in its innately rational character. It induces acting subjects to consider reasons-for and reasons-against for different claims when conflicts arise between actors about the appropriate definitions of situations and the meanings of common norms (such conflicts were bound to arise in modern conditions). Rationality has different guises but, in Habermas’s understanding,

²⁸ Habermas’s theory of modern rationalization and its relation to specifically communicative rationality can be detected in his re-working of Max Weber’s historical narrative. (Habermas 1984, parts 2-3; and 1987, part eight, section one)

this is the meaning of *communicative* rationality. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 397) he points out:

“If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication – and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement – then the reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality inherent in communicative action.” (Italics in orig.)

Communicative action has a universal core in the way symbolic language is being used to create and reproduce a common social world, but this inherent structure and its democratic potential became apparent only in the modernization process via which ‘reason became conscious of itself.’ Communicative action is predicated on the idea of communicative competence into which subjects are socialized when they grow up as members of their community. That is, competent members of a social group are capable of taking relationship to the objective world, the social world, and the subjective world, and when doing so, they constantly make ‘validity claims’ related to them. “The concept of communicative action presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested” (op.cit., 99). Communicative action is rational to the extent that, when such claims are challenged, they can be discussed, evaluated and, in the end, redeemed in a process of give-and-take argumentation the power of which lies solely in the ‘force of the best argument.’ Such action is necessarily linguistic and argumentative.²⁹ Otherwise meanings and definitions could not be sufficiently clarified and understood to be able to maintain a basic consensus about the core facts, values, and norms of the community. There are other types of action, like teleological, norm governed, and dramaturgical,³⁰ but communicative action has primacy in providing the process, procedures, and

²⁹ Here Habermas builds on J. L. Austin’s speech act theory, stressing especially the role of ‘illocutionary’ (interpersonal) speech acts for communicative action. See Habermas 1984, 293-305.

³⁰ In delineating the dramaturgical model of action, Habermas relies on Goffman’s idea of the presentation of self in everyday life, which we referred to in introduction. Dramaturgical action in Goffmanian sense denotes ‘the management of impressions’ of the social actor in front of an audience. “A performance enables the actor to present himself to his audience in a certain way; in bringing something of his subjectivity to appearance, he would like to be seen by his public in a particular way.” (Habermas 1984, 90) This is a very different, individualized, conception of performative action compared to how I understand it in this study (as a public political phenomenon).

argumentative means for settling social and political disputes rationally. (Op.cit., 85-94; 1990, 133-146; McCarthy 1984)

Yet, Habermas, too, is engaged with problems of communication ‘gone sour,’ which takes regularly place in the hyper-capitalized and over-bureaucratized world. He describes the rise of the system world to a position of autonomy from which its imperatives, ‘money and power,’ wield destructive influence on the lifeworld. (Habermas 1987a, especially part six) The crucial point to Habermas is, however, that this very consequence of rationalization was never inevitable. Things could have gone differently. In fact, modern capitalism and bureaucracy are imbued with inherent crisis tendencies which demonstrate that their power is not carved in stone. In the decades after the Second World War such crises have frequently given impetus to protests within the lifeworld, especially by the new social movements. Movements have struggled against the system imperatives and the loss of meaning, putting up their fights in the fields of social and cultural (instead of material) reproduction, trying to secure at least some degree of autonomy. Habermas’s argument is that, in modern conditions, the protection of communicative life requires certain institutional safeguards, most importantly the possibility of citizens to take part in public deliberations over the common good. This communicative power, in turn, necessitates the existence of a free and vibrant public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*), the qualities and conditions of which Habermas has speculated and debated over ever since the publication of his *Strukturwandel* (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 1989, orig. 1962).

One of Habermas’s most controversial suggestions has been that communicative rationality has a universal core through its linguistic and argumentative practices. The question that has vexed many critics then is: are we to assume that in some ideal social, cultural, and political conditions, communicative action as linguistic interaction suffices to guarantee equality and inclusiveness of democratic participation? Let us note that this is not an innocent question. It has practical relevance considering that Habermas’s assumptions have often worked as a critical yardstick in democratic reforms. How that question is answered subsequently bears concrete consequences for the kind of participation and communication that reformers expect from political actors. Critics have worried that should the rational model be applied too unwaveringly, actors who cannot or will not take part in it may get increasingly excluded from the public sphere.

This leads to another question which has direct relevance for the subject matter of this study. Namely, if rational model is privileged, where does it leave the protestors and the alternative forms of communication? Can they be legitimately ignored or even suppressed? And if yes, what does this do to the idea of open and inclusive democracy?

It is never Habermas's explicit argument, but his theory would seem to imply that ideally a well-communicating society, with a sufficient level of 'consensus in idem,' could manage without politics (see Mouffe 1999) which, in Habermas' thinking, tends to equal 'manipulative power.' Another way of putting this is that, to Habermas, power is ideally an empty place which should be 'filled' with speech and abstract reasoning. It is clear from his discussions on the public sphere that he thinks power should not be represented by any concrete object or institution. Habermas feels as negatively about the embodiment of power by the king as by any kind of modern markers. In its place there can be nothing but the word, the critical-rational debate of the citizenry, guaranteed by just procedures. (Peters 1993, 565)

While Habermas has won a number of proponents among democratic theorists endorsing his theory of communication as a key element of their reformed models of democracy, others have discarded Habermas's theory and its understanding of politics as pretty much nonsensical (see discussions and debates e.g. in Calhoun 1992; Elster 1998; Bohman & Rehg 1997; Saward 2000; Mouffe 1999). One need not be a devout postmodernist to succumb to the fact that social differences and power struggles, which Habermas tries to argue away, are an ineradicable aspect of the life of the *zoon politikon*, with or without modern predicaments. Actually there are good arguments to defend the kind of politics Habermas disdains. We might for instance conjecture that politics as pluralism and contestation between different ideas and policies is profitable for healthy social life *per se*, perhaps even a necessary aspect of 'the preservation of the human species.' Or, if this argument appears too foundational, we might still contend that social and political contestation carries with it qualities of creativity, playfulness, and imagination without which social and political learning and change would be more or less inconceivable (see the argument in Tucker 2005).

But Habermas's communicative ideal can be tackled critically in its own terms as well, as especially postmodern critics have done extensively. Here I shall reiterate only four

points.³¹ First, many critics have addressed the problems of the sort of ‘ideal speech situation’ that Habermas’s normative theory postulates and the kind of deliberative or discursive democracy it purports. It has been pointed out that the idea of universal communicative competence rests on untenable gender and power blind assumptions about human subjectivity. Research shows, for example, that girls and women systematically speak less than boys and men, especially in situations which value confident opinions and competing argumentation. And when women speak, they prefer asking questions and giving information, avoiding the enforcement of their own opinions upon others or starting debates (Young 1996). According to another observation, well-educated, white, middle-class discussants tend to assume (often unconsciously) that their speech and opinions carry ‘natural’ authority and competence (see Sanders 1997, 364-369). Young (op.cit.) points out that such contestative and argumentative speech style effectively silences other kind of voices, especially in contexts where culturally and socially unequal groups are involved. This problem is particularly difficult because dominant groups tend not even notice this logic of undervaluation and silencing while subordinate groups lose too easily confidence in the legitimacy of their own voice (the dominant/subordinate relation is also closely intertwined with ‘body politics’; see Henley’s, 1977, classic exposition on this).

Second, the rational-consensual communicative style typically prefers speech that is formal and general. Logical and abstract reasoning and argumentation is viewed as more appropriate than ‘talkative’, more unorganized discussion. Accordingly, it also privileges disembodied and dispassionate speech that associates calm and self-control with objectivity while speech that expresses identity, cultural ways, and emotion is not considered as part of a legitimate political discourse. Thus, expressions of anger, hurt, and passion may be taken to discount the claims and reasons they accompany (Young, op.cit.). In result, where rational criteria are imposed, participants acting unruly and passionately may be judged as incompetent and immature communicators who need not be taken seriously (cf. Dryzek 2000).

Third, Fraser (1992) makes the interesting argument that when communicative action is defined procedurally it is particularly unsuited for addressing issues of speech content.

³¹ This part of the critique draws on my previously published article (see Rättälä 2000).

Consequently, in most deliberative accounts the entangled relationship between procedure and content goes unnoticed and unthematized. Jessica Kulynych (1997, 325) illuminates this point by noting that:

“A procedural approach can require that we accommodate all utterances and that we not marginalize speaking subjects. It cannot require that we take seriously or be convinced by the statements of such interlocutors. In other words, a procedural approach does not address the cultural context that makes some statements convincing and others not.”

We can suppose, then, that for example the women’s movement(s) might not have been as successful as they have been, had they not been able to pose their concerns effectively on alternative political arenas and in unconventional communicative means, all the while exposing the limits of the dominant rationalized discourse with its normalizing images of what are generally accepted as ‘women’s issues’ (see Kulynych *op.cit.*, 336–41).

Finally, there is the inevitable question of power. According to postmodern critics, rational and deliberative communication cannot effectively address issues of power because power does not necessarily or typically appear as visible relations and hierarchies. Sanders (1997, 353-354), among others, points out that power, prejudice, and privilege do not appear in deliberative settings as ‘bad arguments’ that could be argued away with better ones. Rather, power works through ‘disciplinary technologies’ that within the practices of everyday life produce new objects and subjects of knowledge, incite and channel desires, generate and focus individual and group energies, and establish bodily norms and techniques (Sawicki 1991). In this context, civil society and the public sphere cannot be thought of as free and autonomous. What citizens are up against are not just or even mainly such external forces as coercive institutions (e.g. the state apparatus) or self-interested politicians but power mechanisms that permeate the whole structure of their life-contexts. In conditions like these it may be less meaningful and effective to use ‘public reason’ than to seek innovative ways of resisting the productive power of such mechanisms.

These are the kind of struggles that Habermas and deliberative democrats are insufficiently equipped to address. Habermas does in principle recognize and appreciate

the attempts of the lifeworld actors to resist systemic power. Yet, he is very reluctant to portray clearly what *kind of* resistance this is. No wonder, we may note, as long as he wants to define communicative action as rational speech.

2.3. The later Habermas: a cautious performanceist?

It is interesting that in his later work Habermas has moved, as part of his reconsideration of his original theory of *Öffentlichkeit*, towards a fuzzier model of democratic communication. In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) Habermas presents a thorough conceptual and sociological analysis of the infrastructural features of the public sphere where public is understood as a special kind of *communication structure* rooted in the multiplicity of overlapping communicative and associational networks of society. The central difference between Habermas's old and reconsidered conception is that, in the latter, he sees the public sphere in terms of a plurality of subcultural publics whose communicative actions, furthermore, are only 'more or less' rational. In this section, I will engage in a bit of conceptual gymnastics to tease out those elements in Habermas's reconsiderations that arguably open room for performative communication.

Habermas now understands the public sphere in terms of space, not as an institution, organization, or system. It is "a social phenomenon just as elementary as action, actor, association, or collectivity" (1996, 360). In their least complicated form, publics emerge in simple, episodic encounters between social actors. They become more complex and abstract the more these encounters and interactions expand to constitute larger networks of communication within and between associations and other actors of the society. Here "the public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view" (op.cit., 361). More specifically, the political public sphere refers to processes of informal opinion- and will-formation separated from decision-making institutions and effected in an inclusive but unstructured network of overlapping subcultural publics. It plays an important role as a mediator between civil society and the administrative power of the procedurally regulated public sphere (the parliament and the judiciary; Habermas 1994, 8). The special function of informal deliberation is to generate public discourses that "uncover topics of relevance to all of society, interpret values, contribute to the resolution of problems, generate good reasons, and debunk bad

ones” (Habermas 1992, 452). Informal public opinion acts as a political signal, communicating and thematizing problems to be further processed by the political system.

As noted above, Habermas understands (alike John Dewey and Hannah Arendt, as we will see later) the public sphere as a social space that is opened up between social actors when they engage in a dialogue. It can therefore be characterized by its ‘performative’ character. It comes into existence in and through the public encounters of actors and, in order to persist, needs to be reproduced in a sequence of performances (it does not automatically remain in place after being generated). Now, let me be explicit about the value of this idea. At least conceptually this definition is more indulgent to different forms of communication than Habermas’s earlier theory was. Moreover, it differs interestingly from most versions of deliberative democracy in which communication in the public sphere is defined procedurally (e.g. Benhabib 1994; Cohen 1997). The problem of the procedural notion is that it sets *a priori* terms to how things should go and how participants should act in the process. It therefore also defines in advance what the right and acceptable kind of politics looks like, in effect closing spaces from other forms of political action. The implication here is that non-discursive acts and expressions that take place outside the process are not appropriate political acts, or at least not ones that need to be taken seriously by the participants in a deliberative discourse. Because of this structured picture of a discursive process it is difficult to conceptualize and account for those unexpected elements of politics that appear outside rational and ‘normal’ discourses, for example acts that resist such boundaries in the first place.

On the other hand, when we conceive of the public as a contingent space we open it up for different and unpredictable forms of action. What that space will become in the process depends on how the participants themselves exploit it. Here Habermas implies the possibility of extending the idea of democratically meaningful communication to include different kinds of political manifestations, as can be read from this comment:

“From the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must amplify the pressure of problems, that is, not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt

with by parliamentary complexes.” (Habermas 1996, 359; see also Habermas 2005)

As Kulynych (1997, 327) sees it, Habermas’s demand that public discourses be both attention catching and innovative, convincing and dramatizing, requires more than mere rational argumentation. It presumes a kind of political action that can effectively disrupt cultural common sense and provide alternative ways of thinking and acting.

Another point where Habermas differs from most other deliberative democrats concerns the rationality of deliberative processes. For the latter, rationality is related to the procedural conditions and to the transformational effects of the deliberative process on participants. Now, Habermas, too, thinks of informal deliberations as discourses ‘more or less’ fulfilling the procedural conditions of practical discourse. But there is a difference between the strict proceduralism of formal deliberations and the more relaxed proceduralism of informal deliberations. Habermas’s view of informal public deliberation as free, unregulated, and disparate communications by participants in anonymous publics that present, thematize, and criticize norms potentially radicalizes the way rationality is perceived within such discourse. Here rationality is not taken to be a quality of an actor, such as his or her capacity to offer good reasons in public debate. Rather, rationality is a feature of a certain communication structure. The positive potential of this formulation is that rationality in this sense cannot be used as an exclusionary principle or to justify the assumption that some are more capable than others of presenting good, generalizable reasons.

This is all rather well. But there remains a question that has always been difficult for Habermas, one of great importance for the study of political performance. Namely, if Habermas allows ‘participants in anonymous publics’ communicate in ‘innovative and attention catching’ ways, should he not accept, *ipso facto*, aesthetic communication as well? After all, new social movements, which Habermas accepts as legitimate and important actors in the public sphere,³² are well known for their use of cultural-aesthetic activism such as theatre and carnivalism. If these movements and other new

³² In his “Further reflections on the public sphere” (1992, 438) Habermas admits that at the time of writing his *Strukturwandel* he was “too pessimistic about the resisting power and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public whose cultural usages have begun to shake off the constraints of class.”

‘subcultural publics’ are really important for inclusive public deliberation, should we not only accept but appreciate and encourage their participatory actions and artistic forms of communication?

It would, in principle, be a logical step for Habermas to accept such an argument, but it is doubtful that he is willing to do so.³³ As John Durham Peters (1993) points out, issues of aesthetic representation have always had a very curious place in Habermas’s theory (see also Duvenage 2003; cf. Gripsrud’s argument, 2008). As we have seen, Habermas values conversation, reading, and plain speech as worthy forms of democratic discourse. Conversely, he does not really trust communication forms like theatre, ceremony, the visual (e.g. avantgardist art), and rhetoric, at least not for the purposes of democratic discourse. Like for the bulk of twentieth-century social and political theorists, for Habermas, too, art and aesthetics have very little (justifiable) use in politics. This is where I disagree with Habermas. Let me explain our difference in position by reference to his argument in *Strukturwandel*.

In that work Habermas explores the historical and normative evolution on the public sphere since the Enlightenment. He proposes to develop a critique of the public sphere, on the one hand, and weigh up its potential as a model for modern democracy, on the other. He traces the transformation of the feudal public sphere into the modern bourgeois public sphere in terms of a change in power relations between the monarch and his subjects as well as remarkable changes in early capitalist economy. Along this transformation, the society/public sphere was gradually separated from the ruler/state and the intimate sphere of family. This separation fostered new conflicts of interest between the bourgeoisie and the state which were subsequently debated in the newly institutionalized, freely working public sphere. This was the important historical

³³ Habermas (op.cit., 427) also makes the following interesting remark in “Further Reflections”: “I must confess, however, that only after reading Mikhail Bakhtin’s great book *Rabelais and His World* have my eyes become really opened to the inner dynamics of a plebeian culture. This culture of the common people apparently was by no means only a backdrop, that is, a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counterproject to the hierarchical world of domination, with its official celebrations and everyday disciplines. Only a stereoscopic view of this sort reveals how a mechanism of exclusion that locks out and represses at the same time calls forth countereffects that cannot be neutralized.” Scattered ‘confessions’ such as this suggest the *possibility* of enlarging the realm of communicative action towards more cultural-aesthetic and radical forms of politics. Yet, this is not the path that Habermas himself takes any further. We may wonder how it would affect his theory of the public sphere and communicative action if he did.

moment where public discussion became the cornerstone and medium of debate through the press, political parties, and parliament. (Duvenage 2003, 121)

Moreover, the bourgeois class debated not only matters of the state but matters of art and culture, especially literature, a genre very much on the rise in the 18th century. Here private citizens, having gained free access to a widening realm of cultural products, were able to discuss and interpret aesthetic and philosophical issues independently of earlier authorities. This form of communication then acted as an important model for the rational-critical communication in the political public sphere. This phase, however, lasted only ‘a blissful moment’ (Duvenage op.cit., 15) to be soon undermined by historical and economic developments which triggered the decline of the public sphere from a forum of rational debate to the life of consumption and matters of ‘business.’ The public sphere thus changed to an instrument for the manipulation of public discourse by powerful bureaucratic and economic interests.

As to the role of art and aesthetics in public communication, Habermas’s position is evident from the start. His assumption is that debating art and culture in public had important civilizing, educative, and democratic effects for the ways individuals understood and coordinated their lives in the democratizing bourgeois society. The problem for him then is that, with the advancing of the process of modernization, this project fails and public life becomes dominated by forms of mass culture. In the same process of disintegration art is separated from the realm of public experience into its own professionalized sphere of production and marketing.

Now, this kind of approach to aesthetics is profoundly normative. Art, to Habermas, is noteworthy only to the extent that it promotes and cultivates forms of reasoned public discussion. Art in/as itself is of no communicative use. Paradoxically, its role for Habermas is quite instrumental. This is the understanding of art/communication relationship which he has never surrendered.³⁴ With his linguistic turn and by the time he published his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas’s thinking on aesthetics

³⁴ This motive comes up also in Habermas’s essay on Benjamin (1983, orig. 1973), where he comments on the possibility of un-aural modern (‘reproduced’) art to enhance something like artful public experience, as well as in his early 1980s discussions on postmodernism and aesthetics in *The Philosophical discourse of Modernity* (1987b, orig. 1985; see especially Habermas’s excursion to Schiller’s “Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man”).

had pretty much come to an end. (See the argument in Duvenage *op.cit.*) While Habermas's weary relationship to aesthetic political communication is understandable, given his lifelong struggle against fascism and the Nazi type of aestheticism, from the point of view of this study his theory is, on this account, clearly too weak. I think it important to understand communication and politics as inescapably aesthetic activities (see the argument in chapter five). I suggest we approach 'aesthetic politics' analytically rather than normatively as a struggle between different 'picturings' and 'shapings' (or aesthetic regimes) of the world. Different aesthetic regimes 'partition' (a concept borrowed from Jacques Ranciere and used in chapter five) the world differently, and politics is action which arises to challenge those partitionings and the way they define and structure society. Should we ignore understanding the relationship between politics and aesthetics in this wider sense, we end up in a situation where "about 99 per cent of what actually goes on in the public sphere of modern democracies are irrelevant to the processes of democratic deliberation" (Gripsrud 2008, 203).

The following discussion of the Clothesline Project and its forms of political communication addresses the problems and gaps (but also some of the strengths) related to Habermas's theory. Through examining the Project's public performances, we will begin to take notice of a sort of communication which is not rational in a sense of being linguistically argumentative. But it is 'rational,' if you like, in alternative ways (for example, it will be maintained that also 'bodies can argue') and it can be of great importance for making democracy more open and inclusive. Political actors, we should note, have reasons for communicating in different ways. Moreover, communication patterns are always influenced, if not determined, by surrounding political circumstances and the structure of the public sphere (we will see many examples of this in this study).

2.4. Communication through clotheslines³⁵

Since 1990 thousands of university campuses and other public locations throughout the United States, as well as in a host of other countries, have held public displays of T-shirts covered with artwork and text expressing stories of female survivors of violence. The Clothesline Project was started out by a group of women in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, discovering that while 58 000 American soldiers were killed in the Vietnam War, during the same period more than 50 000 American women lost their lives in acts of domestic violence. The members of the *Women's Agenda* wanted to break the silence which surrounded domestic violence and create a visual memorial (equivalent of the Vietnam War Memorial Wall) to honour the victims and to raise public awareness about domestic and sexual violence. Inspired by the AIDS quilt, activists in Cape Cod came up with the idea of using T-shirts hanging on clotheslines. Carol A. Chichetto, chair of the project's steering committee notes:

“Doing the laundry has always been considered women's work, and in the days of close-knit neighbourhoods, women often exchanged information over backyard fences while hanging their clothes out to dry. -- The concept was simple – let each women tell her own story, in her own unique way, and hang it out for all to see. It was and is a way of airing society's dirty laundry.”³⁶

The Clothesline project began in October 1990 with a few dozens of shirts displayed in Hyannis, Massachusetts. Since then the project has grown into a network of thousands of projects nationwide and internationally and the number of T-shirts has grown into tens of thousands. Projects have reached out to the general public and, especially, to high school and college students. According to Chichetto, the project has had a clear impact on young women and men. Around one third of the local organizers are new activists who have chosen the Clothesline Project as their first step into the political arena.³⁷

³⁵ In this as well in other empirical examples of this study I have used both primary and secondary research material (except in chapter six which is based entirely on primary material from the internet). I have checked, whenever possible, political actors' and movements' own websites (as well as a number of other websites), and googled articles related to the cited performances from newspapers and online-journals. In each example I have also searched for relevant research literature.

³⁶ www.now.org/issues/violence/clothes.html. Accessed December 7, 2005.

³⁷ Cited in “My Sister's Place.” <http://www.mysistersplacedc.org/clothesline.asp>. Accessed December 7, 2005.

The displayed T-shirts are colour coded: white is for individuals who died as a result of violence; yellow is for survivors of domestic violence and other forms of physical assault; red, pink or orange are for survivors of rape or sexual assault. Blue or green are for survivors of incest or childhood sexual abuse; purple or lavender are for individuals attacked due to perceived sexual orientation. Black is for individuals who became disabled as a result of an attack; grey is for survivors of verbal and/or emotional abuse. Finally, brown is for survivors of spiritual abuse. Also the size of the T-shirts signifies. Small/little shirts tell about violence against babies and small children. The graphics on the shirt each 'artist' can design freely. No artistic ability is required and no particular design is recommended. The only rule is that the last names of perpetrators cannot be used. Occasionally, the displays are accompanied by sound effects by a gong, a whistle, and a bell. The gong sounds about every ten seconds to designate that a woman has been battered. The whistle sounds once a minute to indicate that a woman has been raped. The bell tolls four times a day communicating that a woman has been killed by an intimate partner.

Shirts spell out powerful messages, making direct, emotional, and visceral impact on viewers. Some shirts scream messages like "Feel better now, Fucker?", "NO means No you bastard," and "I hate you" (Gregory et al. 2002, 446). Others express more poised stories and comments, like: "He raped me when I was four. He was my daddy and I loved him."³⁸ Their accusations, denunciations, mocking, and reproaches, as well as their expressions of pain and sadness, challenge viewers and make it hard for them to ignore the stories and walk away unaffected.³⁹

Now, what kind of communication does the Clothesline Project portray? As in the case of the bridge performance in Tampere, the Clothesline Project is about the need and desire to communicate a political message 'through other means.' In Tampere the message was directed primarily at the councilmen. In the case of the Clothesline Project the audience is society at large. In both cases we can notice that their communication

³⁸ Comment in a shirt by a survivor (*Canadian Dimension* 1995).

³⁹ Photos of T-shirts at various Clothesline displays can be accessed e.g. at the project's official website: <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/Photos.htm>. Accessed December 15, 2011. When googled, the Clothesline Project receives almost one million hits to web sites informing about the aims of the project and the programs of past and coming displays, both in and outside the US.

does not fit the rational-consensual model discussed above as they ‘apparently’ do not privilege rational speech as a way of communicating politically. This is a characteristic feature of public performances and there are many reasons why this is so. Performances communicate through alternative forms when, for example, the actors do not have the chance, the right or space to participate in public political discussion (like when participation is denied to women due to traditional social norms, or when the system is totalitarian and disavows free political expression and action); or, when the problem is difficult or impossible to articulate in prevailing terms of discourse (sometimes it cannot be articulated at all). This is a typical problem for political discourse which especially feminist theory and the women’s movement have struggled with for a long time, as Fraser and Kulynych above noted. In this type of settings there can be no communication as transfer of messages or as meeting of minds. Instead, when the space and the appropriate ‘language’ of public discourse are lacking, actors may decide to use disruptive performances to get assertively in the way of the normalized routines and terms of discourse so as to bring their concerns visibly ‘in the face’⁴⁰ of existing power and society at large.

Upon reflecting on the Clothesline Project’s way of engaging in political communication we can make three important observations.

a) Public political performances are clearly about ‘visual politics,’ their express purpose is to bring problems onto a public realm in order to be noticed and recognized.⁴¹ This is the way the Clothesline Project attempts to bring the issue of domestic violence against women, which the more traditional public institutions have been reluctant to address, squarely in the public eye (Gregory et al. op.cit., 437). Often the Project’s shirt-displays are placed in locations through which pedestrians must pass. This increases the accessibility of the space and makes it possible to draw into participation people who have never heard of the project before and who might dodge the occasion if warned in

⁴⁰ This phrase (‘in the face’, ‘in your face’) comes up frequently in the study. It denotes bold, forceful way of presenting oneself or one’s political stand in/to the public. This style of communication is very characteristic of political performances; hence the use of ‘in your face!’ in the title to this work.

⁴¹ Similar kind of visual politics, yet in a politically much more intense context, is involved in the case of the Argentine *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* to be discussed in chapter four. See Taylor’s (1977, esp. chapter seven) discussion on the purposes of visualization for political action.

advance of its disrupting content (ibid.). The public location ensures that it is less easy for the passers-by to ignore or refract from the issue.

To T-shirt artists communication through visual means may be easier than verbal communication because it allows the women, or their family or friends, to bring out the pain which may be too difficult and traumatic to express in words. Moreover, to many survivors the process of creating a shirt and placing it next to others in a 'publicizing' act can be a liberating experience. Through their participation they face the possibility of transforming to political actors and thereby bringing about a positive social and political change. According to one survivor statement: "I learned that I can heal myself and join with the innumerable other women, who have been victims, but can now be powerful warriors against pain and violence" (Gregory et al. op.cit., 441). The project gives a voice to those who have been forcibly silenced, potentially empowering them to action (Beasley & Bacchi 2000; cf. Marcus', 1992, argument about rape prevention). (Later on we will see more examples of this.)

Visuality plays an important role for viewer experiences as well. According to one viewer "people can talk and read and hear about these things but to actually *see* something makes it more powerful." Another points out that "it's visual, and that's easier for people to grasp" (Gregory et al. op.cit., 446). Such reflections on the role of visuality for understanding and interpretation are corroborated by research findings in the psychological and sociological studies on non-verbal communication. Burgoon et al. (1996) point out that when interpreting the meanings of social encounters people (adults) rely on the whole 'communicative package,' not only on semantic meanings (in fact, visual cues are used most). Small children, on the other hand, often ignore visual signifiers and depend more on the verbal content of the message.⁴² Be it or not the consequence of the phylogenetic priority of non-verbal communication to other forms, seeing and being seen has clear impact on our interpretation and judgment of things in the world.

⁴² Such findings contrast interestingly with Habermas's theory of moral and cognitive development. His assumption is that communicative competence refers to the *argumentative skills* of mature participants in discourse. In such perspective it may seem odd that 'competent actors' actually register many communicative dimensions at once.

b) The second observation, closely related to the first, is that the Clothesline Project, like other public performances, typically communicates with and through *the body*. Performative communication is characteristically both visual and corporeal. Often the body is the most efficient communicator and marker. In the Clothesline Project's case, however, it is not the concrete bodies that appear in the performance (later we will see other examples where they do), but T-shirts as 'body surrogates.' T-shirts are, after all, intimate clothing worn close to the body. It is immediately clear to viewers that the shirts represent the lived experience of real people. Each shirt testifies to wrenching physical and emotional experience which personalizes the problem. One spectator testifies: "It was so hard to read them, to keep walking and keep reading, because I felt as if these women and children were there speaking to me" (Gregory et al. op.cit., 447). Another viewer remarks: "I think the saddest thing I saw today, the one thing that hit me the hardest, was a T-shirt made by a mother for her child. It was a tiny newborn T-shirt no bigger than the palm of my hand."⁴³

The significance of corporeal visualization of experience in public as communication is that it brings experience closer to other people and helps (or asks, appeals, persuades) them to identify with it. Through giving participants a relatively direct access to experience, the Project is a particularly effective means of building empathy (op.cit., 445). The visualization of painful experiences stirs affections. Moreover, as Gregory et al. point out, one of the most striking characteristics of the Clothesline Project is its direct visceral impact. Viewers experience the shirts primarily on an affective level, initially beyond words. Understanding the overall influence of the project requires taking into account this affective dimension. Messages such as "Feel better now, Fucker?" and "NO means No you bastard" make the survivors' stories physical and emotional as well as cognitive, amplifying and deepening the viewers' experience of the display. This is also demonstrated by their comments, stating things like: "I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach." "It hurt deep inside my chest. It made me want to throw up, made me cry." Through the project, you can "enter into a world and experience it personally. It grabs your gut, gets under your skin, and won't let you go. The pain hooks you." (Op.cit., 444)

⁴³ A passer-by comment in a Clothesline display in Columbus, Ohio.
www.bibri.com/domesticviolenceinfo/clothes.htm. Accessed December 7, 2005.

Affections and passions, whenever related to politics, have been doubted throughout the history of political thought, and the 20th century thought is certainly no exception in this regard. Habermas, for one, has distrusted emotions in political discourse in that their meanings cannot be spelled out clearly through speech. However, what Habermas and many other theorists of deliberative democracy frequently require of participants in a rational discourse is that they consider seriously different arguments and points of views so as to step, for a while, into the shoes of others. Now, this is exactly what the Clothesline Project does. It uses emotional resonance to induce participants to assume the position of others. There may be good reasons to think then, contrary to Habermas, that emotions and affects⁴⁴ are important components of ‘enlarging people’s mentality’ and of alleviating people to open up for other-regarding ways of thinking. This is “a different kind of intelligence about the world” (Thrift 2004, 60; cited in Bosco 2006, 346).

We can therefore argue that performative communication at least potentially integrates reason and emotion in ways that rational, abstracted, and universalised communication cannot (see Goodwin et al 2001; Richards 2004). The Clothesline Project, undoubtedly, makes practical use of such affective dimension of human experience. The T-shirt displays create affective alliances between disparate individuals who share common, if not identical, experiences and sensations (Gregory et al. op.cit., 447).⁴⁵ The often provocative language of the T-shirts appears outrageous, but it is an effective means of communicating the beats and abuses that the survivors have been forced to take. The shirts capture viewers’ attention and compel their engagement with this difficult issue. The problems and issues that performances like the Clothesline Project bring to the public are not always comfortable, nor are the performances’ ways of ‘showing’ them. But then again, it is not their intention to make a comfortable appearance. In his analysis of the modes of citizenship in demonstrations, Chaloupka (1993) notes that

⁴⁴ There is a lively debate going on, especially in the feminist theorizing on the body, on the meaning of ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ (see the review and discussion in Kyrölä 2010, chapter 1.3). My point here is general (as to the emotional/affective dimensions of communication), so I leave the question of the differences between the concepts aside.

⁴⁵ Gregory et al. (op.cit., 448) make the necessary qualification, however, that affective power is limited and can be used for destructive as well as constructive ends. In itself affective power is incapable of producing change. It needs linking with other forms of practical power, critical thought, and effective action. There is nothing about emotion *per se* that guarantees its positive use in politics.

demonstrating protestors typically move in the margins of politics and culture. They do not (necessarily) make and defend validity claims or claim objectivity to their action. Rather, to be able to question and challenge cultural and political self-evidents, protestors work through various kinds of defiant communication.

c) The third observation, again closely related to the other two, is that performances such as the Clothesline Project can be looked at as *aestheticized* communication or, to use Charles Hersch's (1998) terminology, as 'a democratic artwork' (chapter six discusses the concepts of aesthetics and art more fully). Art has the ability to confer meanings that are not accessible through speech and express them in ways that give us more immediate access to ideas and emotions. As Hersch (op.cit., 2) argues, art is more deeply felt and thus more lasting than other forms of communication.

The aesthetic dimension of performative communication can be likened to the avantgardist and postmodern streams of art (see Hutcheon 1990). All of them juxtapose with the existing social order and seek to create, through deconstruction and disruption of the dominant culture, alternative cultural and political ideas (see Lattunen 2003). Similarly, new social movements typically focus on exposing existing cultural codes and moral norms by provocative means (Eyerman 2006). Performers, be they movements, artists, or protestors, avoid invoking such meanings and action repertoires which could be easily assimilated to prevailing ideas and practices, purposely working in the cultural and communicative margins (see e.g. Plant's, 1992, discussion on the Situationist International).

Several social theorists have recently emphasized the aesthetic dimension of politics. For example to Ulrich Beck (1995) creativity and imagination mark important features of political revitalization. The purpose of such political innovation is not to reproduce old animosities and power constellations, but to imagine new sub-political contents, arenas, forms, and coalitions. Kenneth Tucker (2005) highlights the importance of images, fantasy, and social-psychological transgression for understanding today's collective action and public life. Public displays from fashion statements to the dramatic demonstrations of new social movements produce distinctive cultural styles and new forms of participation in a broadly defined politics that is as much about contested images of legitimate self and group presentation as it is about rational debate. Like

worker and populist movements of the past, such expressions offer the possibility of breaking into history with something new and ‘turning the world upside down.’⁴⁶ Benjamin Shepard (2011) emphasizes the element of play in social and political activism. Play serves as an embodiment of an alternative way of being in the world, and a way of creating space and energy, which helps activists stay engaged. Play offers a nonviolent way of engaging and playing with power and maintaining a culture of resistance, all the while aiding in creating and inspiring new communities. The politics of this sort of performative and playful social-political realm is, in its communications, unruly and unpredictable.

We can conclude by noting that the communication of the Clothesline Project or political performances in general, is not about ‘transfer of messages’ or about ‘mind-sharing.’ If anything, performances disrupt dominant cultural and political ideas, norms, and power practices. They aim at breaking everyday routines in order to draw public attention to what those routines entail, their limits and normalities. They try to sketch out and ‘aestheticize’ the boundaries of the shared reality in order to render them publicly perceptible and judgeable. This is how performances invite and sometimes force people to pay attention to new, or old but hitherto unrecognized, social and political problems.

I suggest we approach this kind of publicly displayed bodyness and the related visual and aesthetic communication in something like Heideggerian terms. I would especially like to refer to Heidegger’s concepts of ‘thrownness’ and *Mitteilung*. Heidegger’s understanding of communication, as played out in *Being and Time* (1927), is neither semantic (meanings exchanged) nor pragmatic (actions coordinated) but *world disclosing* (‘otherness opened’). Here, communication refers to people’s actions in a world in which they have been thrown to live together. “We are bound together in existential and lived ways before we even open our mouths to speak” (Peters 2000, 16). This condition entails that life is a continuous process of experiencing the other, the not-me (whose *mind* I cannot share or be able to ‘read’). Subsequently, because we always remain existentially speaking strangers to one another (even to ourselves),

⁴⁶ Cf. Richard Sennett’s (1997) argument which, on the contrary, *laments* the lack of play and presentative art in contemporary public life. Sennett contrasts the present situation with the early European urban culture where men in public were ‘actors with an art.’ (See my discussion on Sennett in chapter six)

communication between us is by nature precarious and exploratory. In order to be able to live together, we have to go by ‘suggesting’ gestures, symbols, and meanings to others, by placing them in-between us, so to speak. They work as the ‘media’ (see the argument in chapter six) or ‘matter’ which combines us (brings us ‘around the same table,’ as Hannah Arendt puts it) and organizes the world for us. However, communication as placing things in-between is an uncertain business. It may not work, in which case there emerge friends and foes. Or it may build on an unjust system of relations between people where some are excluded from the common table, triggering conflicts about who have the right to define the ‘rules of the game’ and name its participants.

In the conditions of thrownness, the world is never ready. It needs to be communicated, and constructed in space-time *in* communicating it, every time anew. Here communication is not an instrument through which disparate subjects exchange messages. Instead it means *Mitteilung*, that is, participation in a common world by way of ‘doing and acting it,’ as we pointed out in chapter one. In this junction, common world and communication *is* the same thing. This is also John Dewey’s and Hannah Arendt’s, and arguably also Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s, understanding of communication to which we shall return in later chapters.

The potential of this conception of communication is that it does not fix assumptions about pure and ‘interference-free’ communication to start with, or set them as normative ideals. Rather, communication as world disclosing starts from the multiplicity of being and accepts that it is situated within an on-going negotiation and struggle over the meanings and terms of life-in-common.

“Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage - whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (2006, 23)⁴⁷

“With our bodies, with what we are, we came to defend the rights of millions, dignity and justice. Even with our lives. In the face of the total control which the owners of money are exercising, we have only our bodies for protesting and rebelling against injustice.”

Don Vitaliano, parish priest from Italy, in the S26 anti-globalization protests in Prague, 2000⁴⁸

3. Bodies on the line

3.1. ‘Now the body is everywhere’⁴⁹

One of the chief claims of this study is that performance as communication relies to a good extent on the communicative capacities of the body. The body signifies things in itself, ‘even before mouths open to speak,’ as we noted earlier. People are aware of this fact at least instinctively. We constantly observe and evaluate the body language of each other, judging whether it is friendly, hostile, condescending, suspicious etc., and interpret the signs carried by the body, clothes, tattoos, accessories, badges, and so on. Body language and signification are crucially important also for political performances, even if it is not customary or ‘proper’ to notice such things in political studies. In public political performance, however, the body simply cannot be disregarded. It literally jumps in your face, like our bodies did in the Tampere performance, or the T-shirt ‘bodies’ do in the Clothesline Project displays. Another interesting example will be discussed later on in this chapter. In political performance, the body is the chief signifier. The purpose of this chapter is to examine and explain why and how this is so.

For a long time the body remained an unimportant black spot in Western thinking (see Grosz 1994, 3). In recent years, however, bodies have returned into cultural focus and

⁴⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Ed. by A. del Caro & R. Pippin. Translation A. del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁴⁸ Cited in Cuevas 2000.

⁴⁹ Rosser 2001.

theoretical reflection with the influence of feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies producing a flourish of academic and cultural interest in the body. Yet, in another sense bodies were never lost in the first place. Namely, at the same time when the Western thinkers busied themselves with the principles of *logos*, bodies kept returning to the political stage in revolutions, collective movements, demonstrations, and various cultural mobilizations. In social science theory the question of the power(s) of the body has been taken into serious consideration only in the last couple of decades. Now (finally, perhaps) we are witnessing the emergence of a variety of perspectives in different fields to the role and significance of the body in society and politics.

Let me start with a brief historical note. The relationship between the mind and the body has always been a central question for Western culture, but it was arguably only within the post-Reformation Enlightenment that that relationship came to be defined dominantly in favour of the mind. The Enlightenment thinking affirmed a division in which the mind was given the primary place and the body dismissed something like an irrefutable obstruction to *res cogitans*. Ann Cahill (2001, 51; cited in Pitts 2003, 26) gives an illustrative description of the importance of this dichotomy to the Enlightenment's promotion of the rational subject:

“Reason promised a host of good that the body could not hope to provide. Bodies lived, grew old, withered; reason worked according to universal laws of logic and produced timeless truths. Bodies distinguished individuals from one another; reason was the common denominator. Bodies were subject to desires, emotions, and drives that were appallingly outside the subject's control; rational thought was a careful, self-conscious process that the subject could undertake in a context of choice and autonomy. ... Insofar as human beings remained susceptible to bodily dynamics, they were still mired in the realm of the animal, the instinctual, the unfree.”

Moreover and more insidiously, the mind/body opposition became to be correlated with a number of other oppositional pairs, reason/passion, outside/inside, depth/surface, reality/appearance, form/matter, which code and define the body in largely nonhistorical, organicist, and inert terms, seeing it as an intrusion on the operation of mind, ‘a brute givenness’ which requires overcoming. (Grosz 1994, 3-4)

There have been nonetheless threads of body theory from, say, Spinoza and Nietzsche to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Erving Goffman, and Michel Foucault, that have deviated

from this powerful theoretical heritage. Spinoza's non-dualistic view of the body as an indivisible 'oneness' and Nietzsche's inversion of the conventional hierarchy between the self and the body, as well as his valuing of the Dionysian element of embodied experience, have been of great influence for the 20th century body theory. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy has sought to re-embody perception and experience, and Goffman's work has, as pointed out in the first chapter, implied a notion of the body as a site for performing a self that has no essential ontology or core. Although Goffman, unfortunately for later body theory, did not develop the radical implications of this view, his notion of the body as a dramaturgical tool suggests both its malleability and its communicative function. (See Pitts op.cit., 28)

Of the 20th century theorists it was Michel Foucault, however, who forged the most important turn in re-conceptualizing the relationship between the rational mind versus the irrational body. Foucault's view of the soul as 'the effect and the instrument of a political anatomy' and as 'the prison of the body' (1977, 30) marked an extraordinary development in the 20th century philosophical and theoretical thinking on the body. Because the aim of this chapter is to look for the kind of ideas and concepts which recognize the theoretical significance of the body and which approach it in terms of power and political action, I regard Foucault's work as an unsurpassed theoretical source. I will therefore start the discussion in the next section by looking into Foucault's basic ideas concerning the role of the body for politics and power.

Foucault is useful especially in the way he pierces into the nature of power micropolitically, localizing it on the level of the concrete body actions and practices. Moreover, Foucault's understanding of power as strategic action is close to the kind of 'logic' of political action which I think underlines performative politics. Yet, I agree with the suspicion voiced by many other critics, in regards to the Foucauldian conception of power and subjectivity, that if modern power works in ways which so deeply infiltrate individuals' bodies and self-conceptions, there may be very little space left for free political agency. I do not mean this as normative critique. Rather, my problem with Foucault is that his conception of power and subjectivity has limited *explanatory* value when analysing political performance. On the basis of Foucault's later work it is possible to argue, though, that he was well aware of this problem and recognized the need to study resistant political action more programmatically. This may

well be the case but, nevertheless, the question that Foucault never addressed properly was the communicative potential of *bodies acting in public*. Thus, even if Foucault came to acknowledge that the control of the modern power over people's minds and bodies is not total, I do not think his conception captures the active political potential of public body communication.

This is why I turn, later on, to a discussion of Hannah Arendt's theory of the public sphere. Arendt is not a usual suspect as a body theorist, but my argument is that her theatrical ideas about politics and the public irresistibly point to the political significance of publicly performing bodies. Arendt both predates and complements Foucault's story of the usurpation of modern society on political subjects and their possibilities for action but, contrary to Foucault, she finds at least momentary spaces and situations where action can change the common world. For a theory of political performances as communication, Arendt's idea of politics as publicly *visible* action is of utmost importance.

In the last part of the chapter I use these theoretical points to illustrate the features of political body communication in relation to the 2000 protests of the White Overalls movement in Prague, the Czech Republic, against the global market liberalization. My analysis pays attention to three aspects of such body communication: its symbolicalness, cheekiness, and riskiness, all of which count for explaining the political power of bodies.

3.2. Disciplined or dissident bodies?

Body as a theme is strongly present in all of Michel Foucault's work. Throughout his career he was interested in how modern discourses of power and knowledge define subjects and produce them as effectively governable (see Foucault 1982). Foucault's claim is that in and after the 'classical age' (from the mid-17th to the late 18th century) the body becomes an object of relentless interest, observation, and control of the new discourses, the ambition of which is to build ever more detailed knowledge of the body's capacities and propensities. On the other hand, Foucault was also fascinated by exceptions to what was considered normal in them, drawing attention to people who

appeared odd, defiant, and ‘abnormal,’ and whom in the perspective of power were in need of special treatment. The thematic between the body and power is addressed especially in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). Let us first take a look at Foucault’s main findings and arguments in this book, keeping in mind that our main task is to learn more about the capacities of the body for political action and communication.⁵⁰

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault examines changes in penal practices especially in the 18th century. He pays attention to how the practices of public torture and executions (*supplice*) gradually receded and were replaced by more lenient methods of punishment like confinement. Yet, according to Foucault, contrary to what one might think, this change was not about the spread of humanistic progressivism and the defense of individual rights. In fact, public power intended to slacken its hold on the body. (Op.cit., 10) Foucault sees this change in the context of more comprehensive social transformations, especially the birth of capitalist industrialism and the rise of bourgeoisie society, and argues that public power was trying to adapt to such changes by converting its controlling practices to fit the new problems (op.cit, 138). This, Foucault thinks, is always the case with power. When society and its circumstances change, power practices follow suit as if in an infinite strategic game.⁵¹ In the case of the 18th century society an increase in the wealth and property of the bourgeoisie class created a need for better security and subsequently for a more meticulous implementation of the law on crimes, especially theft, which had earlier been allowed to escape more easily. (Op.cit., 76) How was this wealth to be protected?

“By a rigorous morality, of course: hence the formidable layer of moralization deposited on the nineteenth-century population. -- It was absolutely necessary to constitute the populace as a moral subject and to break its commerce with criminality, and hence to segregate the delinquents and to show them to be

⁵⁰ Note that while the explicit theme of *Discipline and Punish* is to document changes in the European penal code and practices of punishment, it also discusses and theorizes the nature of modern power and its relationship to body/subjectivity more generally. It is in this more universal capacity that I find the book important and insightful for my own analysis. I should also point out that we will return to Foucault several times in the course of this work. My purpose in this chapter is therefore not to make a general introduction to Foucault’s philosophy and corpus but to concentrate on his ideas regarding the body/power relationship.

⁵¹ Foucault describes many changes and turns in punishing practices and related discourses but this is the general principle. In addition, we should notice that old practices are never entirely replaced by new ones; rather, they penetrate and overlap one another.

dangerous not only for the rich but for the poor as well, vice-ridden instigators of the gravest social perils.” (Foucault op.cit., 41)

The ultimate objective of the new penal practices was to ‘rehabilitate’ and re-educate the delinquents instead of simply punishing them and in the process reproduce them as docile and useful bodies to serve the needs of the new society. This objective required that public power to be able to dig deeper into human psyche which subsequently encouraged the formation of a whole new corpus of medical, psychiatric, etc. techniques and discourses which became entangled with the punishment practice. (Op.cit., 22-23) The task was simply and insidiously to carefully (‘professionally’) examine and disclose the inner ‘truths’ of the criminal mind in order to determine which would be the best way of rehabilitating him.

While the purpose of this new political technology of the body was to make subjects docile and useful, Foucault stresses that its methods were not simply subjugating. He points out differences between them and for example slavery, servitude, and ascetism. The emerging disciplinary methods were not simply physically restrictive but aimed, rather, at creating and maintaining bodies’ active capacities. As he argues, the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and subjected body.

“What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was not only so that they may do what one wished, but so that they may operate as one wished, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.” (Op.cit., 138)

The new political technology of the body worked then on two fronts: on the one hand it aimed at increasing the capacities of the body for action; on the other hand it sought to control the body and prevent it from turning into a dangerous political force. (Later in the book Foucault describes a number of techniques to register individuals’ every move and keep each person concretely in his own controllable place.)

The significance of Foucault’s work is in that through his rich empirical analyses he is able to depict that immediate institutional-normative framework within which bodily

activities are positioned and to which they always relate and respond, either through obedience or resistance. This framework is constituted by normalizing practices which not only, or not predominantly, restrict action but define and produce its conditions of possibility. In so far as the body has any power of its own, to act and to communicate, it has to be understood in terms of a response to each strategic situation.

Interestingly, Foucault's argument is rather in line with what Judith Butler argued later, namely that subjects cannot freely choose whether or not to take part in power relations (Butler 1997). They are constituted, rather, in terms of this relationship in the first place and cannot simply evade it. According to Foucault (op.cit., 30):

“The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.”

The economic, social, political, and cultural socializing mechanisms of society absorb each and every one in its vortex. This is the game all people are forced to play, the terms of which, moreover, they have only limited possibilities to influence.

Foucault has often been criticized for this conception of subjectivity where individuals seem to be irreversibly tied into the fabric of power relations. Critics have pondered whether such conception of the disciplined body and the self leaves any space for meaningful political action. Indeed, whenever Foucault speaks of the subject, he refers principally to the subject as ‘subjected,’ as the product of dominating mechanisms of disciplinary power. As subjected, the individual is either bound to others by dependency or control, or to categories, practices, and possibilities of self-understanding which emerge from medico-scientific discourses associated with the normalizing disciplines (or bound to both at the same time). We can therefore ask, as Laura Doyle does (2001, xi):

“If as bodied social creatures we walk always within the contours of a culture, shaped by its codes and disciplines, how do we realize in the flesh any gesture of resistance? If prohibitions insinuate themselves into our most intimate and palpable forms of being, the sensations of our hands, the sights of our eyes, out of what materials, by what moves might we (do we) generate another social ontology and write an alternative code?”

However, we should remember that Foucault is an extremely multifaceted theorist whose understanding of power and subjectivity cannot be put in any simple terms. He was, after all, always interested in those marginal groups who defy normalities and authorities. Moreover, especially in his later work, Foucault started to address explicitly critiques which questioned his too one-sided view of the make-up of modern subjects (see e.g. Foucault 1980a).⁵² In the end, he emphasized power as a complex phenomenon which should be approached primarily as a strategic struggle between contesting forces and parties.⁵³ Power is a living relationship, a constellation of forces and relationships which is under constant revaluation and change and which in a sense is destined to – ultimately – fail in its attempt to control subjects. For example, when power technologies aimed at producing socially and politically useful bodies, the result was that there emerged responding claims and affirmations by the subjects themselves over their own body. Foucault (1980b, 56) notes:

“Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body. -- But the impression that power weakens and vacillates here is in fact mistaken; power can retreat here, re-organise its forces, invest itself elsewhere... and so the battle continues.”

It is therefore important to understand that in Foucault’s conception the body is no mere inert matter upon which power is exercised and out of which subjects are created. It is a body composed of forces and endowed with capacities, and it is in order to keep these bodily forces in check that the techniques of discipline are deployed in the first place.

⁵² Especially Foucault’s afterword ‘Subject and Power’ to Dreyfus and Rabinow’s reader (1982) can be seen as a description of a rethought research program in which the study of resistance plays more visible role “for a new economy of power relations” (1980a, 210-211).

⁵³ Foucault (1977, 26-27) notes: “[T]he power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions --. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.”

”There is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge” (Foucault 1980c, 138).

Foucault calls this inverse energy “a certain plebeian quality or aspect (*de la plebe*),” which exists in bodies, souls, individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, in diverse forms and energies and irreducibilities. “This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement” (op.cit., 138). Likewise, Elisabeth Grosz (1997, 238) points out that if the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision, and constraint, it is because the body and its energies and capacities exert an unpredictable threat to a regular mode of social organization. As well as being the site of power/knowledge, the body is thus also a site of resistance because it can exert defiance and make counter-strategic reinscriptions. (See also Hebdige’s analysis of the body styles of resistant subcultures, 1979)

Many theorists have recently attempted to grasp that ambiguous and latent no-man’s land within the subjected-yet-active self and apply it to their analyses of contemporary ‘body projects.’ For example Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Elisabeth Grosz, and Victoria Pitts have pointed to the breakdown of the modern control paradigm and the appearance of body modification practices (in diet, sports, cosmetic surgery, bodybuilding, and so forth) which have rendered possible new symbols, meanings, and options for the body. In contrast to pre-modern body modifications, the post-essentialist body styles do not signify social hierarchies as their primary function (if any). Instead, the ‘postmodern body’ can be understood as a personal projection of the self. It has become a space of self-expression, a ‘project’ which “should be worked out and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity” (Shilling 1993, 5; cited in Pitts 2003, 31; Varga 2005).

Judith Butler and Donna Haraway have famously taken up the body as a *space* for struggle around gender and identity. As we saw earlier, Butler sees gender as performed by citational bodily practices. And even if gender performances are often products of

dominant social and political discourses, their inscriptions on the body and the mind are not absolute. There are also available practices such as drag performances, women's bodybuilding, scarring, and tattooing that generate anomalous or deviant bodies. Because they are constituted by and within the practices of embodiment, gender and gendered bodies are, if not easily malleable, nonetheless changeable. This affords some possibility of agency and resistance. Moreover, to the extent that the body is a site of social control and cultural production, anomalous bodies (Haraway's 'cyborgs;' see e.g. Haraway 1991) can be understood as a real challenge to the social order (Patton op.cit., 364; Pitts op.cit., 40).

On the other hand, some critics argue that this kind of postmodern body play(ing)s have their limits. So while body activists themselves claim to be breaking away from suppressive norms and practices of normalcy (see Pitts op.cit.; Kubisz 2003), this freedom can be partly illusory. Pitts claims that when bodies are understood as a social space, anomalous body modifications do not appear as inherently unnatural or pathological but nor do they illustrate that individuals can freely or limitlessly shape their own bodies and identities. "Rather, body projects suggest how individuals and groups negotiate the relationships between identity, culture, and their own bodies" (Pitts op.cit., 35; see also Pitts 2002). The sociality of the body is what positions it beyond essentialism's notion of fixity, but it also provides hierarchies of power and powerful imaginaries of representation that position the body beyond individual control. As postmodern body-subjects, we may engage in a whole range of body projects, but we do not do so 'in conditions of our own choosing' (op.cit., 36). This is also Butler's argument, to which we referred earlier.

I find the recent postmodern theorising on 'flesh work' to an extent promising in illustrating the economy of contemporary subjectivity and highlighting the interplay of social and cultural forces that inscribe on the surface of the body their norms and idea(l)s. Some of this work also registers individual and subcultural resistance to such forces. Yet, it is difficult to make a theoretical leap from these theories to other forms of body politics, like the kind of performative politics I am concerned with. If the body is conceptualized as a site of contestation between different conflicting discourses and if the self is seen as produced in the midst of such contestation, it is very difficult to tell

when and how the body is conditioned and when/how it has the capacity to take action (especially collective action) on its own.

I would like to stress two things. First, while I agree with Foucault that power works through bodies and the subjects' unconscious socialization into norms, I find it very problematic that neither Foucault or the new body theory takes notice of the body as a site and 'media' of *public* action and communication.⁵⁴ Body theories hardly touch on the concept of the public, possibly because it has been so obstinately linked with liberal theory and the kind of public sphere theorizing that especially Habermas and his theoretical disciples represent. Yet, without the notion of the public we cannot really understand why and how dramatic, subversive body politics (political performances as well as subversive body projects) really matter. The point to be noticed is that performative body politics is a form of *collective political action*, even if its forms appear deviant to what we normally understand with these terms. Moreover, this political action is inherently meant to be looked at, to pose a visible challenge to the power of the normalizing gaze of institutions, authorities, and dominant ideologies.⁵⁵

Second, from my point of view Foucault lacks a more comprehensive understanding of the body as a maker and mediator of social and political communication. I think the concepts of performance and performative help in untying the tight bond which Foucault's theory weaves between the body and the modern power practices. My emphasis in this work is in discerning how power relations are made up visibly and why and how they are nevertheless constantly questioned and played with. My approach is not meant to provide a radically different alternative to Foucault, but I hope it provides a more sensitive device to look into the dynamics of power and politics. I also think that with the assistance of these two concepts we can understand better Foucault's own

⁵⁴ Foucault believed that in modern society, communal and public life have given way to privatisation on the one hand and the entrenchment of state apparatuses on the other, which is why they need not be central objects of analysis (see Foucault 1977, 216).

⁵⁵ Foucault never wrote a genealogy of citizenship and resistance. In this sense his research preferences remained clear. On the other hand, in one of his interviews Foucault notes retrospectively that it wasn't possible to take notice of collective struggles before the events of 1968, "that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the concrete nature of power became visible, along with the prospect that these analyses of power would prove fruitful in accounting for all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis." (Foucault 1980a, 116) Foucault's awakening to the question of the meaning of social and political *movements* became too late, however. He never got the opportunity to dwell into the study of power and subjects from that perspective.

resistant political action which became very visible in the 1970s (see Eribon's Foucault biography, 1993). Why would it be necessary – for Foucault or for other public actors – to engage in action which is publicly visible and clearly performative? This is something that Foucault's own theorizing does not really explain.

Here I think Hannah Arendt provides a useful counterpart to Foucault's theory. Arendt may seem, at the outset, an unlikely resource for an embodied account of politics. The sort of even grotesque identity politics identified with the multitude of contemporary subcultures may appear very distant indeed to Arendt's understanding of public action which, even though described in terms of public speech and action that can be seen and heard by all, hardly figures bodies at all. Yet, my argument is that Arendt's theoretical categories lend important insights to understanding the body politics of public performances. In order to do so, we need to subvert Arendt's ideas just a little bit.

3.3. Bodies that appear: Hannah Arendt and public action

What I find particularly interesting and relevant about Arendt is the relation (and tension) between the two basic categories upon which she builds the basis of her political theory: the unpolitical *private* realm of life's 'irresistible' necessities and the political *public* realm which, in so far it exists (which, in Arendt's belief, occurs too rarely in history), is a space of freedom, space where men can come together, make a 'public appearance' (this is important, as we shall see later), speak and act freely, and experience 'public happiness.' In this distinction, the thematic of the body emerges perhaps to a surprisingly important role, yet always as a *negation* of politics and freedom.⁵⁶

The concept of the body works in Arendt's thinking as a key metaphor of things and processes which make men creatures of 'nature' rather than 'actors.' The body is unpolitical in two senses. First, it lives with/in the constraints of the biological life process "which permeates our bodies and keeps them in a constant state of a change

⁵⁶ We will come back to Arendt later in the work. Here, I will only discuss, first, her ideas of the body and its relation to politics and, second, those theoretical elements in her thinking which help transcend the problems related to her argument according to which body 'belongs' properly to the private sphere.

whose movements are automatic, independent of our own activities, and irresistible – i.e., of an overwhelming urgency.” This biological process imposes its inherent necessity upon us, overawing us “with the fateful automatism of sheer happening that underlies all human history” (1990, 59). Second, in its material-physical make-up the body is imitable and univocal, the same as everybody else’s: “[i]n so far as we all need bread, we are indeed all the same, and may as well unite into one body” (op.cit., 94). In her private life, in the realm of the ‘household,’ a person does not yet have a discernible identity.

What this implies for communication is that bodies in themselves are ‘silent,’ they are engaged in a kind of referential communication that need not even be spoken (Arendt 1958, 179). Arendt also claims that, when experiencing pain, the body becomes utterly non-communicable, unable to assume ‘an appearance’ in the world.⁵⁷ (In this point I clearly disagree with Arendt.) Moreover, in Arendt’s view, this communicative sameness is only amplified in the modern society where ‘the social’ element of life develops into conformism which normalizes (here she thinks like Foucault) people and make them ‘behave,’ in result closing space from the possibility of political action and outstanding individual achievement.

“It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.” (Arendt 1958, 40)

Now, while the body represents to Arendt human life in its unfree and unpolitical aspects, the public realm means its opposite, the possibility of leaving behind the dictates of the body and the household, of elevating oneself to an altogether different world. Here acts are free and men can show to others ‘who they really are,’ all different

⁵⁷ Arendt (1958, 50-51) argues: “Indeed, the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences, namely, the experience of great bodily pain, is at the same time the most private and least communicable of all. Not only is it perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance, it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else. Pain, in other words, truly a borderline experience between life as “being among men” (*inter homines esse*) and death, is so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all.”

from one another, in distinction to the sameness of everybody in their private lives (op.cit., 179). Furthermore, contrary to private life which centres on the routine reproduction of the life process, public action is characterized by its capacity to begin something altogether new.⁵⁸ In addition, in terms of their action on the public realm, men are equal. Privately and socially they are not, but upon entering the public space, men act *qua* men, and their action is judged not by any private criteria but only by its ‘greatness.’ Paradoxically for the contemporary understanding, Arendt thought that it is public action which is properly *individualized* activity and which requires from the actor personal courage and heightened capacity for judgment. Private activities, instead, are typically conformist and social. (About the concept of political judgment, see chapter six of this study.)

This distinction, as Arendt’s theory in overall, is based on the ancient Greek’s differentiation between two spheres of life, *oikos* and *polis*. Arendt’s ideal political community likens to the pre-Socratic Athens, the political traditions of which had already matured and begun to fall apart by the time Plato and Aristotle began to develop their political philosophies. This is the tradition which intrigues Arendt because it represents such a rare political experiment in the history of mankind. The Greek polis is her model example of political freedom, the conditions for which she subsequently looks for in the modern world, especially in the context of the French and the American revolutions as well as in the political movements of the 20th century. Like many other scholars on antiquity, she marvels the peculiar conditions of the Greek polis, where (some) men were able to leave behind the despotic life of the *oikos* and ‘rise to the light of the public realm,’ engaging in speech and deeds which made the Greek world virtually immortal. One of the main findings and arguments of Arendt’s studies is that this sort of political freedom is hard to come by and it usually (or perhaps necessarily) lasts only momentarily. For example, in the French Revolution the conditions for political freedom had hardly emerged before melting into the furies of the terror. In the American Revolution, on the other hand, the creation of a free public sphere was a more

⁵⁸ Arendt thinks that men’s propensity for action that starts something new is an innate capability acquired in birth. This point is interesting considering how unpolitical Arendt otherwise finds the body. If we wanted to rethink Arendt’s basic theoretical categories starting from this notion, action-by-birth, we might reach different conclusions about her public/private distinction as well as her three-fold differentiation between types of action. Such reconsideration might also carry important political implications (see Thorgeirsdottir’s, 2010, attempt at making such argument).

or less permanent achievement of the new Constitution, all the while the revolutionary spirit, the public quest and taste for political freedom, began to crumble as soon as American politics started to build on the idea of the pursuit of personal happiness. (See Arendt 1990, chapter two)

Now, if indeed Arendt is so adamant about the meaning of the body as a representation of all that is irresistible, imitable, and unpolitical in life – and as such beyond communication – why be interested in Arendt in the first place? After all, my argument in this study is that bodies matter a great deal for performative politics.⁵⁹ As I have already begun to argue, I think that despite her negative politics of the body, Arendt offers hugely interesting insights for the theory of performative politics. We can refer to several of them: her concept of the public based on the idea of plurality and mutual appearance, which is very important for my theory as well; her understanding of the difference between behavior (and bureaucratic politics) and routine-breaking events, a distinction which comes close to my idea of the performative-performance difference; and her metaphor of politics as a performing art where the meaningfulness of the act lies in the action itself, in distinction to functional, goal directed activities. Let us take a closer look at each.

First of all, Arendt's theory offers a possibility to approach the concept of the public and public action from a wider perspective than she does in her own analyses (for definitions of the public, see Arendt 1958, chapter five). The basic principles of publicness: appearance, visibility, *and* setting aside of private matters and viewpoints, need not be interpreted as exclusively, in terms of the place of the body in the world, as Arendt tends to do.⁶⁰ After all, even in Arendt's own definition, public space can come up wherever and whenever routines are broken and normal life is subjected to surprising turns of events. (1958, 199; 1972, 109, 132-133). We might simplify and

⁵⁹ We should keep in mind here, when talking about Arendt's 'negative' conception of the body, that to Arendt all human activities have their proper place in the hierarchy of 'vita activa.' Political action can only appear on public realm, which, however, is *premised* on the existence of the private realm which is needed to take care of life's necessities. According to Arendt, destroying this distinction practically equals destroying the conditions for political freedom. The body as an instrument of life in the private sphere is therefore of paramount importance because it *constitutes* the possibility of public political action. Yet, this implies at the same time that bodies are unpolitical 'material.'

⁶⁰ Arendt does not really believe in the possibility of wide, inclusive participation in politics, at least not in the modern mass society. In practice, only a part of the population enjoys the necessary resources to engage in public action. There seems to be, then, an element of anachronistic (and gender blind, as feminist critics point out) elitism in Arendt's republicanist thought (see e.g. Benhabib 1992).

reconceptualize Arendt's definition of the public by stating simply that it deals with 'common problems.' Public space and action appears when actors manage to claim and define certain questions as common problems and, through their 'speech and deeds,' generate public discussion on them. As I argue on several occasions in this study, this is what political performances do. They break routines and bring out in the open new or previously marginalized problems.

Moreover, it is not necessary to limit public attention to non-social and non-biological issues. We only need to think, for instance, about how feminist theorists and politicians have successfully politicized women's reproductive rights or the position of women and children in society more generally. It would be odd, indeed, if public speech and action were allowed to excite the country to start a war but not animate improvements in, say, the economic and social situation of poor families.⁶¹ On the whole, Arendt's understanding, according to which politics properly concerns *itself*, that is, the creation of new political units and negotiation of their working principles, looks from current perception peculiar. I find this sort of limitation unfounded (see Benhabib 1992; cf. Honig 1992).

Secondly, the way Arendt sees the public realm, as an open space in which actors appear to another and which is defined by shared *visual* markers, is absolutely vital to my theory. The public realm is occasioned when people come together *in order to appear and be seen*. The simple background conjecture here is that our common reality is, after all, defined and given to us by the appearances we share, which is also to say that power has a spatial and visual dimension (this issue will be discussed more closely in chapter five). Moreover, what appears in the public realm is *plurality*. That is, since on the public plane we all occupy our own individual spaces (my space cannot simultaneously be occupied by your space), we necessarily look at things from different

⁶¹ To Arendt, 'the social question,' i.e. poverty and economic interests, is a problem and hindrance to political action rather than a subject politics should address. This thematic comes up centrally in *On Revolution* where Arendt compares the failures of the French revolution to the successes of the American one and finds as the main cause of the first the considerable role of the poor and their 'violent needs' for the revolutionary spirit. She notes: "Since the revolution had opened the gates of the political realm to the poor, this realm had indeed become 'social'. It was overwhelmed by the cares and worries which actually belonged in the sphere of the household and which, even if they were permitted to enter the public realm, could not be solved by political means, since they were matters of administration, to be put into the hands of experts, rather than issues which could be settled by the twofold process of decision and persuasion." (Arendt 1990, 90-91) She also points out how people "burst upon the political domain. Their need was violent, and, as it were, prepolitical; it seemed that only violence could be strong and swift enough to help them." (Op.cit., 91)

perspectives. The chief ‘reason’ of political action then is how to present and argue for these different perspectives, how they are agonized over in public discussion, and how they are finally settled upon through ‘action in concert.’

It is no coincidence that Arendt often likens politics to theatre. As a space for mutual appearance, the political space is theatrical in a sense that there everyone is actor and spectator at the same time. Moreover, this ‘political theatre’ is a non-hierarchical space where everybody is factually at the same level. We can therefore claim a special ontological status to Arendt’s public realm as a space of ‘tangible freedom,’ one that should be physically separate from work and labour and one bounded or constituted by law (as in the constitution of the USA). Where this space is collapsed or eliminated, as it is under totalitarianism, the boundaries and channels of communication between men are replaced by a “band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions. -- It [totalitarian government] destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.” (Arendt 1951, 465-466) When space between men is gone, there can be no public action either.

However, where I disagree with Arendt, or think that her theory is internally conflicted, is her explicit commitment to speech as the only meaningful political communication.⁶² This emphasis is, certainly, a logical continuation of her distinction between private (nature, biology) and public (the common world), but it is somewhat contradicted by her characterization of the public. In so far as publicness is the space of appearance, we have to accept that what in reality appear in this space are not so much ‘talking heads’ as the material bodies of those present, with their histories, experiences, identities, signs, and markings. These bodies, moreover, move actively in the space, perceiving other bodies and assuming different positions in regards to them. Those public deeds which Arendt so greatly appreciated can very well include *bodily performances* in

⁶² “[W]hatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about. There may be truths beyond speech, and they may be of relevance to man in the singular, that is, to man in so far as he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves” (Arendt 1958, 4).

addition to, in connection with, or sometimes in place of, public speech.⁶³ Once we rise above the inconsistency embedded in linking public visibility with action as speech and see it, instead, in terms of the movement of bodies, we start understanding the meaning of political performances as publicly visible action where bodies play a remarkable communicative role.

Thirdly, and related to the second point, Arendt's understanding of 'an event' is very similar to what I want to say with my performance concept. Remember, first, Arendt's differentiation between three different types of human activity: routine-like labour and behavior in the household; work and fabrication which create and maintain the material basis of our common world (Arendt includes the work of government and bureaucracy in this category); and action, which is a markedly different kind of activity compared to the other two. Action has several peculiar characteristics. It is the only activity which requires the immediate presence of others and goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter (Arendt 1958, 7-8). It is activity through which actors can distinguish themselves from others, and therefore it builds on difference and plurality. Third, action has the rare capacity of starting something new. But because it is 'an end in itself' and has no predetermined ends to pursue, it is always unique, contingent, and unpredictable; it is the unexpected 'happening' of things. According to Arendt (1972, 109; see also 132-133):

"Events, by definition, are occurrences that interrupt routine processes and routine procedures; only in a world in which nothing of importance ever happens could the futurologists' dream come true. Predictions of the future are never anything but projections of present automatic processes and procedures, that is, of occurrences that are likely to come to pass if men do not act and if nothing unexpected happens; every action, for better or worse, and every accident necessarily destroys the whole pattern in whose frame the prediction moves and where it finds its evidence."

Arendt says, moreover, that such action is 'boundless' and can turn out to be dangerous in case it initiates a process the consequences of which get out of control. Now, I see performances pretty much in the same way, as events the outcomes of which are difficult to predict and control. Furthermore, because performances are often hard to

⁶³ Let me repeat: I do not intend to claim that performances are definitionally somehow non-linguistic. I think of performances as unexpected public events where the (political) body plays an important communicative role. This is by no means an anti-linguistic position.

interpret, the authorities (but also the general public) tend to see them as a threat to social order and, therefore, often resort to strong counter measures. This, in turn, may lead to an even more unpredictable process of events. (See Arendt 1958, chapter five)

By way of conclusion to this discussion on the body and the public we may note, first, that the role of the body in Arendt's political thinking is admittedly ambiguous. In her account the body belongs to a realm determined by the imperatives of the life process. The body thus conditioned is 'silent,' it is uncommunicable and as such has no place in public political action. There is, arguably, a ring of factuality in this remark. We know for example from psychological research that bodies communicate needs, social hierarchies, power positions etc. without words. However, I have argued that bodies do not communicate mere biological and social 'constatives' but, as we can see from the many examples of this study, critique, resistance, and new ideas. In fact, body communication can very well fall into the category of action that Arendt so intensively cherished.

On the other hand, we need not accept this threefold distinction between activities at its face value. Arendt's public action is clearly performative in a sense I am suggesting in this study. But it is not clear that the other two activities should then be non-performative. I agree with Bonnie Honig when she suggests that perhaps all activities, labour, work, and action, can be de-essentialized as performative productions and not seen as expression of the authentic essence of a class or gender. These activities could be conceptualized as 'sensibilities,' as socially imposed self-understandings, according to which a person *can*, but *need not*, regard herself as driven by necessities of labour/work, failing to see and understand her potentiality to turn to a public actor. (Honig 1992, 221) This way we would be able to subvert Arendt slightly and not take the body as a single master signifier of irresistibility, imitability, and the closure of action. Hence, it may be the labouring sensibility, understood as a characteristic of labouring as such and not as a characteristic of *any particular* labourer or her nature that should be excluded from political action, not bodies and body related issues as such. This reading also accords with the participant experiences of the Clothesline Project discovering, as we pointed out earlier, that battered women need a call from the 'outside' to be able to start the process of self-transformation and arise from the private position of subjection to a position of a public actor. So, generally speaking, what

repressed people need to transcend in order to become public actors is, in the first place, their violated sensibilities. It is not their body that is the problem.

My contention therefore is that political action is anchored to the common world of bodies, and this world is premised on the existence of a public field of visibility. There is no common world without bodies publicly constituting it. It is the encounters between such ‘arguing bodies,’ not between ‘talking heads,’ that provide means for creating publicity and political action, as we will see in the following discussion. We cannot run away from this basic condition of politics which Arendt anticipated but could not really follow through in her theory.

3.4. ‘Body as a weapon for civil disobedience’

On September 26, 2000, known as the S26 Global Action Day, protestors from around the world met in Prague, the Czech Republic, to demonstrate against the market liberalization policies of the IMF and the World Bank. This was the third in a row of global wide protests that had started in Seattle the year before. Among the mass of protestors in the streets of Prague, one could see a curiously dressed bunch: hundreds of bodies wearing white overalls that were covered with funny-looking protective accessories, foam rubber, helmets, gasmasks, and covers made from garbage cans and car tires.⁶⁴

The protestors organized themselves in three different groups or blocks, the blue, the yellow, and the pink. The bodies dressed in white overalls headed the yellow block on a march towards the Congress Centre where the official IMF and World Bank delegates met. The two other blocs approached the meeting place from other directions. The whites found themselves in a body-to-body situation with the Czech riot police on the bridge *Nusle*, across the Congress Centre. On the one side a line of ‘Robocops,’ armed with tanks, tear gas launchers, shields, and sticks blocked access to the Centre. On the other side, a wall of protestors in white suits tried to push through the police lines and open passage to the Centre. In the middle of the two ‘body armies,’ a nude young man

⁶⁴ Photos and eye witness accounts of the events are available e.g. at: <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/s26/praga/>. Accessed February 1, 2006.

danced around, his body tattooed with denunciations against capitalism and his mouth and ears stuffed with dollar bills. (Cuevas 2000)

Aggravated by the pushing of the protestors, the police responded with water canons, tear gas, and clubbing. Over the day, more than eight hundred protesters, among them non-participant passers-by, were arrested. More than five hundred people, protesters, policemen and others were injured, a few dozen severely. According to activists, despite injuries and damage, the protest was a success since the organizers were forced to close the convention after the second day.⁶⁵

The white dressed demonstrators called themselves *Tute Bianchi*, the White Overalls. This was the first highly noticeable European wide performance of the movement. Their ‘body tactics’ seemed to have come as a surprise to nearly all parties witnessing the demonstrations in Prague, the public, the convention delegates, the media, as well as other protestors. The movement, a diverse mix of different activist groups, had started out in Milan, Italy, in the mid-1990s as a response to the Italian police removing by force squatters from *Centro Sociale Leoncavallo*, the social centre of young people and activist groups occupied since 1975. The body tactics of the movement originated in the comment given by the Mayor of the city after the police operation stating that ‘squatters are nothing but ghosts now.’ This was an irresistible call for re/action and resistance by the squatters. Two days later a few thousand people went to the streets of Milan, dressed in white overalls. “The invisible ghosts had turned themselves to publicly visible bodies.” (Tietäväinen 2003) By dressing in white suits, the social centre activists wanted to make symbolically visible those social groups which they found silenced in the Italian political system: the young, the poor, the unemployed, the irregular workers, the illegal immigrants. (Of the background of the movement, see e.g. Cuevas 2000; see also Vidal 2001)

The White Overalls gained support groups in several countries, including Finland⁶⁶, and their ‘white monkey actions’ took part in several demonstrations against global market

⁶⁵ See the “Statement” after the event by the movement’s representatives in Italy, Finland, Czech Republic, Greece, and Madrid: <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/s26/praga/wopruga.htm>. Accessed February 1, 2006.

⁶⁶ About the White Overalls in Finland, see e.g. www.ech.org/valkohaalarit/suomi/mitka.htm. Accessed February 1, 2006.

liberalization until the Gothenburg and Genoa protests in 2001. Nevertheless, their spectacular performances also generated criticism according to which the White Overalls activists tried to monopolize protest actions, taking away space from other movements and protest groups (see Albertani 2002). In response, the movement decided to drop their white covers, acknowledging that protest actions should be more inclusive in terms of both methods and the range participants.

Let us then consider how we should interpret the body communication of the White Overalls, or, respectively, the body communication of the Clothesline Project or other performances that will follow in later chapters. Why, for instance, giving public speeches around the convention venue did not suffice to present critique and resistance against IMF and the World Bank? What is body communication and body action needed for? In order to probe these questions, let us take a look at the following comment by an Italian White Overalls activist:

“We realized that the communication of events often modifies things more than events themselves. We decided to send strong images and signals that left no doubts as to intentions. So we invented -- systems of protective apparel, like plexiglass shields used tortoise-style, foam rubber ‘armour’, and inner-tube cordons to ward off police batons. All things that were visible and clearly for defensive purposes only. We wanted people to understand on which side lies reason, and who had started the violence. When we decide to disobey the rules imposed by -- neo-liberalism, we do it by putting our bodies on the line, full stop. People can see images on the TV news that can’t be manipulated: a mountain of bodies that advances -- against the violent defenders of an order that produces wars and misery. And the results are visible, people understand this, the journalists can’t invent lies that contradict the images --. But the question goes beyond that purely practical aspect and is symptomatic of what we call ‘bio-politics’, the new form of opposition to power.”⁶⁷

The citation brings forth several points worth noticing about political performances. First, the White Overalls performance was intended as a *way of communicating* a political message (‘we realized that the communication of events often modifies things more than events themselves’). Second, this communication was carried out by turning the message into a powerful *visual* manifestation (‘we decided to send strong images and signals,’ ‘people understand this’). And third, the central means in this visualization was *the body* (‘a mountain of bodies advances’). The aim of the tactics was to engage

⁶⁷ After S26. Ya Basta interview 2000.

the liberalized global order by rendering it visible, which was accomplished by setting up a confrontation between the representatives of ‘the violent defenders of an order’ and the self-defending citizens ‘on which side lies reason.’⁶⁸ This is to say that, by bringing into public space misbehaving bodies, activists wanted to make visible those power structures and norms which usually remain hidden due to their nature as commonly accepted and mostly unconsciously followed normalities. In our discussion on Foucault we pointed out how power works with and through the bodies, either directly through violence or threat of violence or indirectly through internalized social norms, or as self-observation and self-control (or through all those modalities simultaneously). This is why, to activists, resistance too works most effectively through the body.

In public political performances body communication has at least three central aspects or dimensions (perhaps they could also be depicted as performances’ political ‘functions’), all of which are clearly present also in the White Overalls performance. Bodies communicate through being symbolic, disruptive or cheeky, and at risk. Let me discuss each a bit closer.

a) That the movement chose white overalls as their calling card had intended symbolic value. The white color and the uniform overalls were chosen as a suggestive symbol of the condition of invisibility and powerlessness imposed upon people who are forced to live on the margins of society without social security and other social and political guarantees and without political voice. Whiteness also signified that working people today comprise other than traditional factory ‘blue overalls’ workers, such as irregular and illegal workers and workers in untypical jobs. By putting on white overalls, activists wanted to render their invisibility in society noticeable and thereby communicable to the general public.

“The white suits express the fact that the state ignores us. Look, we say, you do not recognise us but here we are. Many of us are immigrants, unemployed, workers in shit jobs, ecologists and people who work with druggies.” (Vidal 2001)

⁶⁸ This kind of action will be called aesthetic politics in chapter five.

The protective covers worn in demonstrations symbolised, moreover, resistance to violent structures of global economic and political power.⁶⁹ Activists questioned the status of citizenship in societies which choose to protect economic and political elites over ordinary people.

“With our bodies, with what we are, we came to defend the rights of millions, dignity and justice. Even with our lives. In the face of the total control of the world which the owners of money are exercising, we have only our bodies for protesting and rebelling against injustice.” (Cuevas 2000)

Also the confrontational ‘live action’ body tactics carried a symbolic message: “We want to show that it is possible to rebel against the order using our bodies as weapons.” (Op.cit.)

Symbols are, in modern understanding, signs through which people communicate meanings that are in some way central to society (see Pekonen 1991, 25). They signify something in the world that transcends its routine life processes. Symbols also link together different levels or aspects of reality, thereby providing persuasive suggestions as to how it should be interpreted and acted on. In short, symbols often crystallize key ideas, beliefs, values, and goals which members of a society share and which express something central about their self-understanding and worldview. Symbols can, however, be polymorphous and inherently obscure, having the ability to resonate simultaneously with different meanings. The field of possible meanings of a symbol is, then, constitutively open. Symbols refer to something that can never be fully achieved and, as such, they have no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ interpretations, no authorized interpreters (see Eco et al. 1984).

Body symbolism carries major rhetorical power, as we can see from the examples of this study. Its power is based, first, on the ambiguity and unpredictability of the body endowed with active capacities, as we noted in the Foucault discussion. Bodies as symbols can be interpreted, like symbols generally, in different ways. To some, body symbolic as ‘live action’ signifies strength and creativeness that energizes participants and mobilizes potential supporters, while to others bodies ‘bursting into public spaces’

⁶⁹ About the symbolic politics of the new social movements, see Melucci 1985.

means transgression to dangerous disorder and violence (this is what Arendt was worried about, and it is what political authorities always fear).

The second and possibly the most significant facet of the body as a symbol is that it has the potential to bond people together as a group, as a society, as an international community, or even as the whole mankind. Here bodies constitute the common ‘flesh’ (to use a term by Maurice Merleau-Ponty), via which people open up to the world. ‘Flesh’ exposes human vulnerability, laying bare the undeniable fact that as human beings we cannot survive alone, that we need others to be able to live a meaningful life, to be recognized, accepted, and cared for:

“We want to build a humanity in which we are all included, where no one dies from hunger, where no one suffers injustices.”

“We made Prague the capital of alternatives to the prevailing model, of the demands for a different future, for a new world.”⁷⁰

Both the Clothesline Project and *Le Tute Bianchi* as political performance relied, to a large extent, on the symbolic power of the body. In the Clothesline Project, it was the T-shirts which symbolised bodies, communicating through their art dramatic images of the experiences of abused women and children. The intensity of these images was further reinforced by the colour codes of the shirts and the auditory stimuli. The power of the symbolic communication via the T-shirts was so strong that it affected the spectators’ bodies and feelings directly, as we can recall from the viewer comments.

b) Secondly, both in the 1990s Italian political context and in the case of the anti-globalization demonstrations a few years later, the White Overalls’ performances included an aspect of playing with power, a certain boldness and cheekiness. That was actually the initial reference of their first appearance in Milan in 1994, when the white-dressed ‘ghosts’ turned up in the streets to ‘haunt’ the mayor of the city. Their cheekiness was further fortified in the Prague demonstration by their funny protective armour with which these Michelin-tyre guys were ready to oppose the ‘Robocops’ in possession of *real* weapons. Their ‘networked semi-autonomous organizing’ demonstrated an immediate contrast to that of the police and its hierarchical command

⁷⁰ Participant comments from Prague (cited in Cuevas 2000).

structure (St John 2008, 179). The confrontation looked ridiculous, as it was meant to look. “The Tute Bianchi pilloried and embarrassed the state through the most absurd means at their disposal” (op.cit., 180). This kind of carnevalist and cheeky action typically plays with social codes and norms of conduct in order to challenge the prevailing order and its ‘power technologies,’ arguing and exposing the power’s *arbitrary* character. (The modern power system is, on final account, a question of negotiation between the authorities and the people. And since it has no natural origin, it can always be questioned. See Hénaff & Strong 2001.) Cheeky bodies utilize jokes, irony, and wit to try and tease out a response from the dominant system which, once appeared, is up for grabs for mischievous citizens.

Political performances present ‘a different version of the public person,’ as William Chaloupka puts it. This kind of public person draws distance to the liberal citizen who acts in legalistic, constitutional settings as a ‘docile’ actor. There, the citizen knows how to frame his demands in terms which the system can handle (Chaloupka 1993, 153-54). But as soon as citizens stray from this carefully circumscribed role, their action is discredited. Yet, this is exactly what cheeky public actors attempt to do, step outside the usual socio-political manners and reappear as shameless actors with the nerve to show (up/something) in the face of power. This is, arguably, the only place and way through which the protestor can address the system truly critically, pose hard questions on it and draw some distance to its ideology and practices. As some of the activists of the pink or carnival block in the Prague demonstrations explain:

“But the tactic of carnival, with its subversive sense of fun and pleasure, offers us a way of liberating ourselves from such internalised oppression (of capitalism). Along with challenging the authority of the policeman on the street, through our playful resistance we can also challenge the policemen in our heads. -- Carnival is a sensory feast, which allows us to the space to give expression to our dreams and desires.”⁷¹

Through her body the protester presents an alternative way to live, in juxtaposition to the usual constitutional, philosophical, and theological schemes which tend to work against ‘life-as-lived.’ Also, in privileging speed and erratic turns in her action, the

⁷¹ Rhythms of resistance, UK. <http://rhythmsofresistance.co.uk/?lid=52>. Accessed September 17, 2004.

demonstrator invites, Chaloupka reminds, charges of impatience, on the inevitably shaky grounds that ‘this impatient beat fits the song best.’ (Op.cit., 147-148)

The cheeky citizen knows where to find the weak point of power and the hegemonic discourses. Peter Sloterdijk (1987) argues that an essential aspect of power is that ‘it only likes to laugh at its own jokes.’ He makes a telling distinction between the rigged ‘cynic’ of the disenchanted rational, modern regime, and the Diogenesian ‘kynic,’ a cheeky citizen of a resistant, subaltern political sphere. Although the kynics’ blatant action can never assume final victory, they know what political success means, that those who rule lose their self-confidence to the ‘fools and the clowns.’ (See op.cit., chapter five)

This type of resistance has long historical roots. The Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) traces the presence of the kynic bodies back to the medieval carnival, or even farther back to Roman Saturnalias. Bakhtin’s historical analysis of the ‘grotesque’ in medieval carnival, an element which is still detectable in modern curses and vulgarities, points to the symbolic disorder made possible through anomalous bodies. In turning upside-down all hierarchies, privileges, and norms, carnivals signified temporary liberation from dominant order. They celebrated change and rebirth and opposed all finalities and closings. (Pitts 2003, 41; see also Chaloupka op.cit.)

The basic principle of the grotesque was ‘carnavalesque laughter,’ to which Bakhtin ascribes great importance. Carnival laughter, with its oaths, profanities and abusive language, was patently vulgar and profoundly ambivalent. Moreover, fundamental to the corporeal, collective nature of carnival laughter was what Bakhtin calls grotesque realism. Grotesque realism used the material body – flesh conceptualized as corpulent excess – to represent cosmic, social, topographical, and linguistic elements of the world. Transcoding and displacing the high/low images of the body with other social domains, grotesque realism took the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant, and incomplete. In the grotesque, impure corporealism was given priority over its upper regions (head, reason, spirit). (Bakhtin op.cit., 295)

While there are no direct parallels in contemporary politics to Bakhtinian ‘grotesque realism,’ public carnivalism, cheekiness, and symbolic transgression have in recent

decades become important and highly visible features of performative politics (see e.g. St John's, 2008, informative discussion on the 'carnivalized' politics of the 2000s alter-globalization movement; see also Shepard 2011). Let me cite a few illustrative examples. To many one of the most memorable images of civic cheekiness of, perhaps, all times is the daring dance of the one Chinese man in front of the tanks in the Tiananmen Square during the 1989 student demonstrations. Another memorable image can be attributed to the Greenpeace activists' dauntless sea fares in their Zodiacs (tiny rubber boats). Less known, but very powerful on the spot, were the ear-splitting auditory performances of the Belgradians' when they banged together kettle lids and other home-made instruments from their windows during the government controlled evening news, at the height of the Serbian political crisis in the mid-1990s (we will come back to these performances in chapter five). It is better known how irritated and frustrated President Nixon was during the long months of protests in front of the White House during the later years of the Vietnam War. We are, moreover, familiar with the various colourful performances of environmental activists such as closing highway construction sites, blocking traffic and starting parties in the streets, disrupting transportation of nuclear waste, invading military bases, picketing and smashing fur stores, campaigning against oil companies, and so forth. It seems that, when we really start thinking about it, examples of cheeky public citizenship abound.

c) The third form of body communication that I would like to elucidate is founded on placing the body in concrete physical risk in order to communicate the seriousness of the performance. Through their protective garb, the White Overalls wanted to show their victimhood, the fact that it is the ordinary citizens who become the target of violent reaction from the part of the authorities when attempting to 'speak the truth to power.' In the activists' view, "[w]e are not armed, we are acting as citizens, putting our persons at risk, in order to demonstrate that the democracy of the IMF and the World Bank is tanks and armed police. -- We want to show that it is possible to rebel against the order using our bodies as weapons."⁷²

Bodies-at-risk communication can be a radical way of resisting order. Actors resorting to such body tactics risk their health and life by placing their bodies literally in the way.

⁷² Luca, the spokesperson for Le Tute Bianchi in Prague during the S26 demonstrations. <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/s26/praga/bianche.htm>. Accessed February 1, 2006.

“We wear the suits and the padding because we have witnessed the extreme brutality that the police and the authorities unleash on dissent, despite non-violence, and the complete disregard for human dignity and suffering.”⁷³ The power of argumentation here lies in the utmost fragility of the human body and life. By making the body publicly liable to injury and repression, actors seek empathy, care, and responsibility-taking from their fellow human beings. The suffering body exerts specifically strong rhetorical potential and can enable deep identification with its cause by an audience that feels empathy for the sufferers’ anguish (Cho 2005, 8). Body as the terminal locus of power also defines the place for the redirection and reversal of power. This is what Foucault, too, well understood. Because the body is endowed with active capacities, it possesses some capability to resist until its death.⁷⁴ According to the White Overalls activists, “[o]ur bodies are our weapons. We will throw them at the State, just as it rains its weaponry at us.” (Vidal 2001) Bodies at risk –argumentation can be of extreme form but, when taken up, is usually regarded as worth the risk by the actors. It can also be regarded as the last available means to communicate political statements. If successful, it can generate wide outrage in the public and lead to a serious public confrontation with the institutional order. One of the most recent examples of such body rhetoric is the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunis in December 2010 which triggered a dramatic wave of uprisings and revolutions in the North-Africa and Middle-East, the social and political consequences of which are still evolving.

The fact that bodies at risk, and sometimes in concrete pain, can ‘argue’ puts into question Arendt’s thesis that the body’s private experiences and sensations are utterly uncommunicable to others and cannot be a part of the common world of speech and action. Even quite intuitively, we can understand the language of pain (or pleasure), of what it feels like to be injured, beaten, tortured (or alternatively loved, touched, cared for). What we can learn from this extreme form of political communication is that even if there are no functional public spaces for expression of political voice and even if there seem to be no outlets for political citizenship, new avenues for communication may be

⁷³ Participant comment about White Overalls action (cited in Vidal 2001).

⁷⁴ The White Overalls participants occasionally referred to Foucault’s concept of biopower as the fitting theoretical explanation for their action. See e.g. White Overalls in Finland, www.ech.org/valkohaalari/suomi/mitka.htm. Accessed February 1, 2006. However, as we have noted above, while Foucault understood resistance as one of the body’s (potential) active capacities, he did not make a theoretical leap from this to explaining body resistance as public collective action.

opened quite unexpectedly by putting bodies at risk in public. What is this if not spontaneous, innovative political action in the Arendtian sense? This form of communication can be seen as rather breath-taking proof the ability of people to create space for critique and acting where none existed before. It shows the determination of people to demonstrate the power of life, in a kind of ‘carnal logic.’ Body-at-risk communication can signify heroic action in the most radical sense, which is a pivotal pointer to Arendt about the always contingent and unpredictable field of public communication and action, where *bodies* can perform as the force that enables action.

To conclude, contrary to the traditional depiction of political communication as linguistic, I have argued that bodies can act as powerful ‘media’ of political argument. Also Kevin DeLuca (1999, 11) argues that especially the new social movements’ political tactics (what he calls image-events), which often centre around the body, “are arguments in their own right.” “These political bodies constitute a nascent body rhetoric that deploys bodies as a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation” (op.cit., 10). Using their bodies to perform arguments, movements and groups practice a mode of argument that is less focused on an abstract, universalized reason and more attuned to lived experiences. (See also Hauser 1999)

In public political performances, then, the tactics of political actors are in good deal dependent on the communicative power of the body. The movement of bodies in and through the performance is a way of visualizing and reflecting on participants’ experiences, emotions, and problems. Body communication literally touches and connects us in a way that plain speech often cannot. As material beings in a material world, we share a ‘common skin.’ (See Parviainen 1995) Although performative actions in themselves seldom lead to immediate success, they can be effective in turning political problems into hot-button political issues on a longer term. Although designed to attract media attention and publicity, performances and ‘image-events’ are more than just a means of getting on television. They are crystallized, argumentative ‘mind bombs’ that open up the existing screens of perception and work to expand “the universe of thinkable thoughts” (DeLuca op.cit., 12). DeLuca reminds, however, that bodies are not rhetorical ‘a priori.’ Rather, they are entangled with an influx of various conflicting discourses that influence what they ‘argue’ and mean in different contexts. DeLuca is contesting, nonetheless, that bodies are in any simple way determined or limited by

verbal frames. To think of bodies as important elements of communication requires imagining forms of argument that go beyond the *modus operandi* of deliberative reasoning.

“[C]rying is the root of human vision. This suggests that compassion, the capacity to feel what others are feeling and take their suffering to heart, is an essential factor in the fulfilment of our vision --. Compassion is our visionary fulfilment because the sociality of feeling-with is always already inscribed into the flesh of our visionary organs.”
D. M. Levin (1988, 252)

“The dictatorship established its authority by making bodies “invisible;” the Madres responded by making their own extremely visible.”
Gilda Rodriquez⁷⁵

4. Public performance as visual politics

4.1. Political meanings of the visual

As explained previously, I approach performances as political events enacted in public spaces, the principal purpose of which is to generate breaks in everyday political routines. Performances produce such breaks in many ways but one of their special characteristics is the attempt to break down the dominant *visual regime of power* by bringing into it diverse disrupting elements, resisting bodies, parodying images, carnivalism and so forth. Political performances in this sense need a public field of visibility, a space where political actors can appear and be on view to one another. In performative politics we are, therefore, necessarily dealing with ‘the politics of the eye.’

In this chapter I look more closely into the political meanings of visibility and visibility by turning into three theoretical sources.⁷⁶ I will take up, first, Foucault’s notions of ‘the

⁷⁵ http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/courses/knowbody/f04/web2/. Accessed July 7, 2006.

⁷⁶ The concept of the visual/visuality today figures strongly in multidisciplinary research on the (post)modern visual culture. The central unifying concept here is *image*, which is used to analyze, especially, various types of materials (‘visuals’) produced and published by the media. In this work I employ visual and visuality in a wider (and more ‘active’) sense as referring to three interrelated phenomena: a) public visualizing and showing of political problems, issues, stands etc. (which can be representative, i.e. image-related, or corporeal, or – most of the time – both at the same time), b) public appearances of political actors (in Arendtian sense) and c) public ‘play of looks’ between political actors, the public, and political authorities. These three phenomena make up what is here called *visual politics*, modes and tactics of political communication in public space designed to ‘make issues visible’ (which, in performative communication, often results in struggle between ‘visibilities and invisibilities’ as we will see later in this chapter).

gaze' and surveillance and their entanglement with modern techniques of power. While in chapter three we discussed Foucault's conception of power in terms of its hold on the body, now we will be in a position to take a note of how the success of that hold is premised on the body's visibility. My argument will be that even if Foucault does a great favor to social and political theory by raising the issue of the complex intertwinings of power and visibility, his analyses tend to overemphasize the objectifying power of the gaze and downplay the possibility that the objects might 'look back' and thereby resist their objectification. This critique continues the prior argument which found Foucault's theoretical bind between subject and power too tight. My position is that the grip of the modern gaze over subjects is not total. There are points and fissures which open possibilities for political action. I think Foucault was aware of such opportunities, but he never addressed them directly, not in the context of his overall philosophical and social-political theory of modern power. Curiously enough, in the end he *did* find some possibilities for resistance but located such potential in a completely different context, as we shall see.

Because I think it crucial for the theory of performative politics to understand visibility and looking in politically meaningful terms, I will turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's and Hannah Arendt's more versatile conceptions of visibility. Both of them see an intersubjective role for visibility in the common world and do not take it as a construction of a unidirectional, objectifying gaze. Merleau-Ponty examines human perception and what he calls the 'reversibility' of sense experience, encountering there a point of divergence, escape, or 'chiasma,' where sensations meet but never merge and reach identity. I find the idea intriguing and, when interpreted properly, conducive for a performative understanding of politics. As to Arendt, we will come back to her idea of the public realm as a space of appearances and use it to translate Merleau-Ponty's sometimes obscure philosophical notions to the language of political theory.

After these theoretical and interpretive considerations I turn to a discussion of the tactics of visual communication of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, a movement of Argentine mothers and grandmothers against the politics of 'disappearance' of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. This example illustrates, along others in this study, the potential power of visual politics, the significance of which only grows in conditions where a

repressive political regime and culture have closed down other spaces and avenues of political communication.

4.2. Suspicious visuality: Foucault and the power of the gaze

It is often argued that Western culture is deeply visual in its constitution and that in this respect it differs clearly from most other cultures, like the more scripturally oriented Arabic culture. The question whether one culture is more visual than another is surely problematic, but it is safe to say that Western thinking and science have been intensively preoccupied by the powers of the eye. Visuality has been central to the way Western thinking has constituted reason (*logos*) as the ‘mind’s eye,’ believed to have the capacity to rise from the abyss of the world inhabited by men to the light of the other, truer world.

On the other hand, it is notable how vision has throughout history been under serious doubt as well, as judged for instance by the Scholastics’ and artists’ fascination since the 16th century for optical illusions, or by the iconoclastic movements that have regularly swept across Europe in a struggle against what was taken as the corruptive influence of images. The iconoclastic conflicts that emerged with the Protestant Reformation were themselves antedated by disputes which denounced and sometimes attacked images for their illusory power and inconsistency with genuine piety. (Shapiro 2003, 3) Moreover, the fictional character of images, considered as only sham simulators of the real truth, frequently induced distrust among the critics of representation. For example St. Paul cautioned against the *speculum obscurum*, the mirror through which people can see only darkly, and Augustine condemned the capacity of vision to encourage *concupiscentia ocularum*, ocular desire, which diverts our minds away from more spiritual concerns. These and alike disbeliefs have at times come to dominate religious movements and dictate long-standing religious taboos. (Jay 1993, 13)

Image has continued to be the object of both obsession and denial in modern times as well. In fact, as Johansson (2007) points out, critique against images has characterized most of the post-structurally oriented philosophy and social theory of the late 20th

century. According to Martin Jay (op.cit., 15), Western thought especially in France has been characterized by a widely spread ‘denigration of vision.’ Jay mentions in this context for example Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Guy Debord, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault, as some of its most prominent representatives. While such a list is certainly arguable, it is nevertheless true that issues related to visibility have continued to magnetize Western imagination, in France and elsewhere, in the most controversial ways.

A more recent line of what may be called the visual-critical discourse starts out from the observation that the Western culture has in the past few decades witnessed a striking wave of mediatization, visualization, and aestheticization. New computer based techniques of picturing, showing, reproducing, and displaying have proliferated and spread everywhere, while traditional literacy based on printed text has had to retreat in the face of the new powerful culture of the screen (see Shapiro 2003, 1-2). According to the most pessimistic critics, this development is leading to the substitution of the true with images and mimicry. In Guy Debord’s terms, contemporary culture has become a spectacle society where relations between people are increasingly mediated by pictures. Jean Baudrillard, in turn, has analysed culture in terms of simulations and simulacra, claiming that modern media have seriously blurred the boundary between reality and image, creating a new kind of reality where simulated representations have substituted the ‘really real’ of life. (Seppä 2007; Seppänen 2002)

However, while a number of critics have accused Western culture for abandoning the realm of the real, others have made the argument that there are no natural or rational ways of seeing in the first place. On the contrary, visual culture and ‘ways of looking’ are always culturally and politically defined (Jay op.cit.; Shapiro op.cit.; Berger 1972; Seppänen 2005). To these post-structurally oriented critics reality is, with or without alluring images, never transparent and easily interpreted. (See the essays in Brennan & Jay 1996)

Much of the 20th century critical thinking on visual themes has focused especially on the experience of being the object of the look. Here it is again difficult to ignore the influence of Michel Foucault. In a sense, Foucault’s whole corpus can be read as an attempt to sketch the historical appearance of the modern gaze with its various and

multiple technologies. One of his chief theoretical insights is that the better the individual's visibility can be guaranteed, the easier it is to control him. The surveillance of individuals is most efficient when people let themselves be subjected to the 'look' of the omnipotent Seer without any external constraints (see Seppänen 2002, 44).

Foucault was intrigued by visual themes not only in terms of how the gaze generates disciplinary power but, more generally, in terms of which visual regimes have dominated each historical period. He analyses such regimes in many of his works, often by tracing changes in the practices of representation in art (I will get back to this point in a while). One such change occurred in the late medieval Europe when 'word was separated from image,' that is, when it ceased to be self-evident what pictures and objects looked at were thought to signify. "Between word and image, between what is depicted by language and what is uttered by plastic form, the unity begins to dissolve; a single and identical meaning is not immediately common to them." (Foucault 1965, 18) The relationship between what was seen and how it was to be understood required new mediation and translation, a task which was to be given, later on, to the emerging knowledge experts like doctors and psychiatrists. This change materialized during the 17th century, Foucault argues, when madness started to be differentiated from the rest of society. While previously madmen and other 'deviants' had been taken as a peculiar, yet commonly accepted element of society as its strange 'truth-tellers,' now they were isolated as their own lot which was no longer understandable to other people and which was gazed at with new wonderment. As Foucault (op.cit., 70) explains, madness turned into a spectacle, it "had become a thing to look at." Later, the examination and interpretation of the marginalized people became systematized when modern sciences and their new professions subsumed them under their specialized discourses. The way these professionals 'looked at' their objects, the mad, the criminals, and the sick, did not, moreover, resemble the earlier Cartesian 'eye of the mind' method. Instead, the modern sciences took the material eye as a source of clarity with the power to inspect and objectify its target, the human body and mind, and manifest it as what it 'truly' was.

Let us now come back to *Discipline and Punish*, where Foucault presents his most well-known analysis of the gaze. We will be especially dealing with the section discussing 'the Panopticon' as the principle and model of the new technology of power. We will first review Foucault's basic argument and then consider some critical notes on it as

well as make some conclusions as to what Foucault's ideas have to offer the theory of performative politics.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, Foucault looks at modern power as a discipline, as a systematized production of knowledge for controlling the modern body and mind. The basic premise of *Discipline and Punish* is that, in order to work effectively, disciplinary power requires unremitting observation and surveillance of its subjects – that is, it needs an apparatus whose techniques make those whom they're targeted at clearly *visible*. Foucault (op.cit., 171) points out:

“Slowly, in the course of the classical age, we see the construction of those ‘observatories’ of human multiplicity for which the history of the sciences has so little good to say. Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam, which were an integral part of the new physics and cosmology, there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure art of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man.”

This kind of ‘observatories’ had, in fact, an already existing model to follow, the military camp. In Foucault's view the camp represented a new diagram of power based on a principle of general visibility of all to all, and its appearance gave impetus to a new problematic: development of a kind of architecture that is no longer built to be simply seen or to observe the external space but to render visible those who are *inside* it. This would be architecture allowing close surveillance of individuals and would thereby help making them more easily known, docile, and in the end, transformable. Such an apparatus was to make it possible for a single gaze to monitor everything and everybody non-stop, “a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned” (op.cit., 173). Foucault mentions a number of architects who planned complexes that would follow this idea, but his main target is the sketch of the Panopticon drawn by Jeremy Bentham, a round construction where, “in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen” (op.cit., 201-202).

The Panopticon was an important innovation, Foucault argues, for it automatized and disindividualized power which no longer had its principle in a person as much as “in a

certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (op.cit., 202). The designed purpose of the Panopticon was to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power (op.cit., 201).

“He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance.” (Op.cit., 202-203)

Moreover, the Panopticon was patterned as a laboratory to carry out experiments (e.g. with medicines or different methods of punishment) and, ultimately, to alter the prisoners’ behaviour. The power of this optical monster upon the inmates was, in the plans and the images of the designers, to be penetrating in a total sense.

The Panopticon should not be understood merely as a dream building, Foucault cautions. Instead, it established a new diagram of power, a new political technology or ‘anatomy,’ which ought to be detached from any specific use (op.cit., 205, 208). The Panoptic arrangement provides the formula for generalization. It programmes, at the level of an elementary and easily transferable mechanism, the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms (op.cit., 209).⁷⁷ And while the kind of hierarchized, continuous surveillance it premised may not have been a great technical innovation, it was soon extended everywhere due to its smart mechanisms. In this more general sense, the Panopticon models organization as a multiple, automatic, and anonymous power. It functions in a network fashion, like a

⁷⁷ Foucault (1977, 217) argues: “Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism.”

piece of machinery, from top to bottom, bottom to top, and laterally. Moreover, even though the organization underlying it is pyramidal and has a 'head,' it is the apparatus as a whole that produces power and distributes individuals. Disciplinary power is also absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere, since it leaves no 'zone of shade' in the gazed space, and since it functions largely in silence.

“Thanks to the techniques of surveillance, the ‘physics’ of power, the hold over the body, operate according to the laws of optics and mechanics, according to a whole play of spaces, lines, screens, beams, degrees and without recourse, in principle at least, to excess, force or violence. It is a power that seems all the less ‘corporal’ in that it is more subtly ‘physical.’” (Op.cit., 177)

Now, in the previous chapter we saw how Foucault's conception of power has often been criticized for not leaving enough space for critique and free agency. Here, there is again something curious in the way Foucault writes about power, now through the framework of the gaze. When discussing the Panopticon, it is as if he would 'subjectify' power (turn it into an agent of its own) as an autonomous and omnipotent Eye, even if such an implication works against his own explicit assumptions about the analytics of power (where Foucault sees power as a relationship, not a resource or characteristic of political actors; see the discussion in *Discipline and Punish*, chapter four). Foucault sees this diagram in operation everywhere in the contemporary society as well, in schools, hospitals, the army, public buildings, etc., almost in a totalitarian way. And if, indeed, it works so efficiently so as to approach totalitarian control, it has a paradoxical result: when it makes everybody everywhere continuously visible, in the name of surveillance and normalization, it simultaneously makes people increasingly unnoticeable. Namely, if in the classical era the power of the look worked through separation, marginalization, and incarceration, now this kind of differentiation is no longer needed. When the gaze reaches everywhere, and when people internalize its expectations of normalcy, their behavior becomes conformist, and there are no more notable differences between people. On the basis of *Discipline and Punish* it is, indeed, difficult to see how the power of modern disciplines could ever be effectively opposed and challenged. Martin Jay (1993, 415-416) concludes that: "For all his profound interest in resistance, Foucault may have too hastily absorbed all power relations into one hegemonic ocular apparatus. He never explored in any depth the role visual experience might play in resisting as well."

Yet this said, we should also note that Foucault's relationship to visuality is much more complicated than usually afforded to him and more complex than he seems to portray in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault was, perhaps surprisingly, always fascinated by art and presented in his writings a number of analyses of paintings by artists like Velazquez, Hals, Holbin, Manet, Magritte, and Warhol. In fact, Foucault admitted that painting is, "one of the rare things on which I write with pleasure and without fighting what it is" (cited in Shapiro 2003, 193). This interest had a particular historical background, however. When Foucault was starting his career in the 1950s, art, especially painting, was widely debated in the French intellectual circles. Foucault was, to start with, explicitly critical of this tendency to try to *speak* about art. He believed that language is not sufficient to describe the seen, nor could the seen and the said be reduced to one another. Yet, Foucault himself could not resist the temptation to speak and write about painting, as we can see from both his major works and other, more scattered writings (see Shapiro op.cit., 196-197).

I would like to stress especially this point: when Foucault writes about paintings, he has a very special interest in them. He is not talking about the personalities of the artists, not their life histories or the possible aspirations of their works. Instead, he 'reads' the works themselves, reflecting in a kind of archeological fashion on their historical origin, looking in them for clues as to what kind of visual regime they portray (that is, he is interested in what the painting reveals about the understanding of man and society in the time of its making). And here, in the middle of the practices of representation within art, Foucault finally finds signs of challenge, resistance, and alternatives to prevailing normalities. This is almost curious considering how Foucault otherwise felt about the possibilities for action of the modern objectified subject. When Foucault looks at works by for instance Manet, Magritte, or Warhal, he sees them rebelling against commonly accepted visual norms (see e.g. Foucault 1998). He points out, to cite one example, how Manet confuses spectators by painting the relations between objects deliberately 'wrong,' from oddly distorted perspectives (at first sight the paintings' portrayals may look normal, it is only when you look at them more closely that these 'oddities' start coming to the fore), so as to challenge the spectators to reflect on their presumptions

about the 'right' kind of visibility and suggest that there might be other, equally legitimate ways of looking at the objects of the world.⁷⁸

What then might Foucault's analyses and interpretations of art have to offer political theory and our theory of performative politics? Foucault himself says very little in this direction. According to Shapiro, he might argue, however, that within the realm of visibility that emerged in the nineteenth-century Europe, there were both regimes of surveillance and forms of resistance. Some of these forms of resistance inhabited the panoptical institutions themselves, such as the individual or collective strategies and tactics by which prisoners sought to escape or hide from the watchful eyes of their jailers. Paradoxically, as the new system of keeping detailed and individualized records of offenders and deviants was created, the same system was exploited by ordinary people to present accusations about their neighbours or relatives (this may be considered as political empowerment of a sort). Shapiro reads this to mean that the exercise of power always involves unintended consequences and invites strategic responses by those who are its objects. Even within the modern world, vision has other modes besides the malevolent gaze, some of which constitute forms of resistance to panopticism.

"So it is not a question of denigrating vision; it is rather a question of being alert to the different visual practices, often quite conflicting, that operate in the same cultural space and sorting out their specific structures and effects. Foucault has no arguments against vision in general. He is an archeologist of the visual who is alert to the differential character of various visual regimes and to the disparate and possibly conflicting visual practices of a single era" (Shapiro op.cit., 9).

Why not take, then, Foucault's readings of art as an analogy for the visual resistance of political performances? If images and paintings have resisting potential, why not political performances which display publicly perplexing images, challenge spectators, and interrupt everyday visual regimes (and the relations of power they subtend)? Performances, too, can be disruptive 'heterotopias,' about which Foucault wrote in the

⁷⁸ Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) and *The Balcony* (1868-69).

1960s, which both disclose the dominant visual regime and simultaneously challenge it.⁷⁹

Yet, Foucault himself did not in any systematic way depict the possibilities of visual resistance. Politically speaking, he believed most of all in individual resistance, as shown for example in the *History of Sexuality* (1990) where he analyses the history of techniques of ‘the care for self’ which have, to an extent, enabled individualised ‘practices of freedom’ and certain room for trying to influence the conduct of other people (here, Foucault is far from being clear though; see Foucault 1994, 19-20). All in all, Foucault did not really seem to believe in the truly *political* nature of looking. There were few opportunities for him to “escape from the current empire of gaze into a more benign heterotopic alternative,” as Jay argues (2003, 416).

In order to get a more nuanced picture of the politics of the eye, I propose we make an excursion to Foucault’s predecessor in *College de France*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and his phenomenology of perception. My purpose is to introduce especially one particular aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s thinking that is significant for my project, namely his idea of perception being ‘reversible’ and ‘chiasmatic,’ which means that when, for example, I look at you and you look back at me, our looks meet but cannot become identical, nor can our minds and understandings ever ‘melt.’ There is an insecure space between our looks so that at some level we will always remain strangers to one another. Then, to interpret this idea in terms of political theory, I discuss it in the context of Hannah Arendt’s conception of the public realm as a common world and as ‘a space of appearances.’

4.3. The politicality of in-between: Merleau-Ponty and Arendt

Both Merleau-Ponty and Arendt were interested in the intersubjective nature of the common world, even if Arendt’s interests were markedly political and Merleau-Ponty’s first and foremost philosophical. About Arendt we may note that, even if she cannot be

⁷⁹ Heterotopias referred to spatial formations which questioned the unity of the dominant visual regimes. Foucault considered, for example, the museum as a form of visual and spatial organization where viewers and objects are in complicated relations with one another, in contrast to other, more unidirectional visual organizations. (See the discussion in Shapiro op.cit.; Ziarek 2007)

taken as a theorist of visibility any more than a theorist of the body, visibility did play an important role in her theory of the public realm. Arendt was, moreover, exceptional among the 20th century thinkers in defending so strongly life and action (John Dewey was another exception). What combines Merleau-Ponty and Arendt is that both think that relations between men cannot be understood in terms of objectifying looks. Merleau-Ponty's idea of the reversibility of perception, and Arendt's conception of the in-between world, are built on understanding the world as commonly made and perceived.

Merleau-Ponty's anti-dualistic philosophy starts with the conviction that we cannot think about consciousness without the body, or about the world without the immanent intertwining of the mind, the body, and the world. The body is the 'vehicle' and the horizon through which I am able to have relation to the world, its objects, and other 'I's' (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 92). I can never withdraw from my body to reflect on the world. Rather, I have access to both only through living my body (the 'habit-body', as Merleau-Ponty sometimes calls it; see *op.cit.*, 95), that is, through moving about actively, sensing and 'palpating' things around me with my eyes and hands (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 131, 133). Perceiving therefore entails that the body is open and active in its relation to the environment, and understanding means – not something consciousness accomplishes in solo – but being able to act in the world. Consciousness is, in the first place, not a matter of 'I think' but 'I can' (*op.cit.*, 159).

That which in Merleau-Ponty's thinking is central for this study is the importance he gives to the visual basis of perception and experience. His works can be taken as continuously developing thinking over the role of vision in the body's experience and its behavior. To be sure, he finds all senses working together in structuring behavior, yet even when he depicts the touch as perception, he discovers it as a form of looking. Furthermore, to Merleau-Ponty visibility and looking are inter-corporeal and intersubjective phenomena, sort of shared, reciprocal gesturing of meanings. The difference is clear compared to Foucault and Sartre, to both of which looking was always linked to power and repression. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy visibility is a general, shared element which determines the nature of being in the world.

Particularly intriguing is Merleau-Ponty's conception of the reciprocity and reversibility of perception. Basically this idea says that, when my hand, my eye, and my voice are touching, seeing, and speaking, they are, at the same time, tangible, visible and audible. Merleau-Ponty often cites the example of touching hands: "When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of 'touching' and being 'touched'" (2005, 106). Reversibility is something that characterizes the relations between the body and its environment in general. Therefore, also looks can be reversed: I am looking at something/somebody but I am also looked at by it/him, and only this way I am able to envision my place in space as well as understand myself as part of the world. Moreover, reversibility operates in a kind of circle. For example, the left hand touches the right hand while the right hand touches an object which touches the left hand. Similarly, I look at somebody who returns my look and makes me conscious of myself, so that I see myself looking when simultaneously being looked at.⁸⁰ All perceptions are intertwined and together they construct what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'flesh' of the world.

Now, the point which Merleau-Ponty makes and which should be of interest to us here is that perceptions do not coincide. They appear together but never converge and reach identity. "My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization" (op.cit., 147). Merleau-Ponty concludes that there remains a point between sensations, a sort of divergence, escape, or 'chiasma,' which initiates self-reflection as well as experience of being's divergence and otherness. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 148; 1945, 107). This divergence is not, however, an ontological void, a non-being (1968, 148) but a necessary condition of consciousness, language, and communication, the roots of which exist in reflection over such divergence(s). In the context of this study, I use the term chiasma to refer to a politically charged 'gap' between looking and being looked at on a public arena. Chiasma denotes that seeing is a reciprocal phenomenon,

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty explains: "There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence; there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible – and the converse; there is finally a propagation of these exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch – and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transitivity from one body to another" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 143).

yet one which is characterized by play and struggle, which makes interaction, interpretation, and co-understanding constitutively uncertain. In a nutshell: chiasmic political field is a space where actors appear and struggle for public visibility and recognition.⁸¹

Merleau-Ponty is, however, missing the concept of the public. His philosophy of perception does not distinguish between public and private action and experiences. Yet, since for this study the concept of the public is elementary, I suggest we return for a moment to Hannah Arendt's theory of the public realm. In many ways Arendt and Merleau-Ponty understand the world, being and communicating it, in comparable ways, yet Arendt uses terms that are more familiar for political analysis. We can take and link them with Merleau-Ponty's to comprise a set of new theoretical tools for analysing political performances' visual communication.

To start with, like Merleau-Ponty, Arendt depicts an 'impersonal' world, which is of common making and as such irreducible to individuals or individual consciousness. The common world is born only where people meet and act together, it is a 'human artefact.'

"To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (Arendt 1958, 52).

Arendt's common world likens to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the world as shared, reversible experience. Experience is always a personal 'matter' based on a 'standpoint' and perspective of each in space and time, yet it would not be possible in the first place without the existence in this same space of other objects and subjects, towards which I orient and without which I would not be able to 'see' myself. It is these other objects and subjects in relation to which I coordinate the movements and actions of my body. Thought this way, communication is an inter-corporeal and intersubjective

⁸¹ In Introduction we discussed, as part of the social-theoretical edifice of performance theory, the concept of liminality. Liminality can be likened to chiasma, but I use them in slightly different sense. Liminality refers to a moment of insecurity in-between performative citations of norms, habits, and practices; it makes it uncertain, 'what is going to happen next,' whether speech or actions will be cited as usual or if there emerges a break between them, which is a moment of potential politicization of a situation. Chiasma is a 'gap-concept' which I apply for the visual-political context, and it has to do with insecure, interpretative 'public looking.'

phenomenon, exchange of bodily and linguistic gestures (which, incidentally, is not the same thing as exchange of ‘messages;’ cf. the argument in chapter two) which subtends and frames our being and action in the world (or, to be more precise, being *is* acting). Experience “is to hold inner communication with the world, the body and other people, to be *with* them instead of being beside them” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 111; italics added).

That aspect which most intrigues Arendt about this common world is its (potential, not always realized) manifestation as a public realm. This realm has two primary characteristics. First, Arendt’s public realm is closely connected to topography and visuality. The public realm is, in the true sense of the term, public via being *the space of appearances*. Thus she says (1958, 50):

”For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life -- lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance.”

Living a private life is, then, like living in the shadows. It is there, but it is insignificant in the larger picture. Only action on the public realm can ‘lighten’ the world with its knowledge and skills.⁸²

Second, the public realm signifies the world itself, “in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it” (op.cit., 52). It is a space which comes into being in and through men’s concerted actions beyond and above the everyday necessities of life. The public realm is, by definition, inter-action and ceases to exist if people do not come together.

Important for the purposes of this study is Arendt’s view of the public realm as relying on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised (this is also Merleau-Ponty’s position).

⁸² Merleau-Ponty, too, writes about the ‘light’ created by the shared, reversible experience, which opens the world ‘as flesh’ and turns it into inter-corporeal togetherness (see Merleau-Ponty 1968, 142).

“For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position” (Arendt op.cit., 57).

The presence of multiple perspectives on the public realm is an expression of human plurality and their individual character and skills, without which political action would not be possible.

This plurality has two aspects, equality and individual distinction, which define what publicness means to Arendt in its deep sense. If men were not equal, says Arendt, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them, nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them (op.cit. 175). And if actors in public had no capacity for individual distinction, for distinguishing themselves from others through speech and deeds, beginning something new would be virtually impossible, and therewith also politics in the genuine sense of the word would vanish. As to Merleau-Ponty, he too finds plurality of perspectives important for the ‘construction’ of the world. Yet his chiasma reveals differences and otherness as a *general* constitutive element of the common world, while Arendt’s public world and its plural appearances are a *special* element, referring to a particular kind of human activity. Both understand however the significance of differences for social and political life.

To sum up, all three, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and Arendt, would agree that looking and being looked at carry significant meaning for being and action. For understanding performative politics, especially the ideas of the intersubjective nature of perception and the public reversibility of looks are important. In this sense, political performances serve a double function: on the one hand they attract, and sometimes force, others’ looks upon their actions (which can be the only way of creating public space for discussing political problems, as we will see in the next section), on the other hand they resist the gaze of power by looking back at it. Politics as a collective endeavor would be virtually unimaginable without such a public field of visibility.

In the next section I take up the performances of the Argentinian *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* against the politics of the military government in Argentina in and after the late 1970s. The Madres exemplify how performances can be used to challenge power structures and their visual regimes (their control of what can and cannot be seen in public) by bringing into the controlled public space disruptive elements. Together with the other examples of this study, the example of the Madres demonstrates that the visual-critical discourse is at least partly mistaken in assuming that the modern society is immobilized by the objectifying gaze of its powerful institutions (or by the self-controlling gaze that individuals wield over themselves). We may also conjecture that arguments about the over-visualization of the Western culture and its transformation into a ‘spectacle society’ are exaggerated. The point to be taken is that we should analyse and understand visual politics more fully than we do today.

4.4. Some gaze back: the visual performances of *Las Madres*

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (from now on ‘the Madres’) is a movement of Argentinian mothers who in 1977 initiated regular public protests against the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983.⁸³ The Madres protested against the regime’s ‘Dirty War,’ a brutal campaign against the society’s ‘subversive elements’ (political activists, or suspected activists, of the Left) which the regime embarked on upon assuming power. During the first years of the dictatorship, thousands of people (estimates vary from 15 000 to 30 000) were abducted, tortured, and murdered. The bodies of the dead were made to ‘disappear.’ These disappearances, which were carried out in silence (in terms of lack of public attention to them) and which the dictatorship never publicly admitted committing, took place across class and age lines, but most of the kidnapped were young blue-collar workers, students, and members of the

⁸³ There are two distinct groups of Madres with their separate organizations, *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora* and *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (there is, moreover, the separate organization of the *Abuelas*, the grandmothers). The split was made in 1986 due to internal disputes as to the future goals of the movement. For the purposes of my visual analysis, I leave the question of the two organizations aside and talk about the Madres in general. (Cf. Bosco 2006, 352) The emphasis will be in the early phases of the Madres’ political activism (about their political action at later stages, especially in the 2001 economic and political crisis, see Borland 2006).

intelligentsia, teachers, doctors, researchers, psychologists etc.⁸⁴ Defying the decree which ruled that political associations and public meetings were prohibited, a group of mothers started to gather every week in the historic centre of the Buenos Aires, the *Plaza de Mayo*, to pressure the regime for information about what had happened to their children. The protests on the Plaza have continued ever since.⁸⁵

Initially, the Madres voiced their protest in terms of their right to truth, backed by a discourse claiming their universal right to mourn the dead. In the absence of the bodies of their dead children, they were absurdly forced to mourn in emptiness, ‘without object’ (Bevernage & Aerts 2009, 396). However, after the regime began its policy of systematic denial of the existence of the ‘desaparecidos’ and claimed that these were only ‘normally dead,’ or political radicals fled abroad, or young women turned to prostitutes in other countries, the Madres realized that they had to change their political strategy to be able to make a political impact. They then made a turn in their political discourse and started demanding the re/appearance, ‘aparación con vida,’ of the disappeared, instead of simply finding out the truth about their fate. (Op.cit., 397) Subsequently, the Madres refused to accept that their children were dead or mourn them openly, as was culturally expected from them. By ‘pretending’ that the disappeared were alive and insisting that the government ‘bring them back,’ they resisted all policy attempts to leave the question of the disappeared in history and all calls by later civilian governments to ‘move on’ with their personal and collective life (see Bouvard 1994, 82). “We want to know what happened to our children and grandchildren and who did it to them. We want the criminals to have to admit to their crimes and stand trial. We will continue to struggle until that happens.”⁸⁶ The Madres refuse to forget, and therefore they keep on protesting.

⁸⁴ Argentina is not the only country where people were made to disappear. Especially in the 1970s, alike ‘counter-terrorist’ action was forged in Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, partly in cooperation by their regimes. It was a typical feature of this tactic to get rid of the bodies of the abducted and the tortured.

⁸⁵ Photos of the Madres’ protest actions are available e.g. at <http://opticalrealities.org/PlazadeMayo.html> (photos by Linda Panetta, accessed December 15, 2011) and in Bouvard 1994. On the history and politics of the movement, see e.g. Taylor 1997; Bouvard 1994; Borland 2006; Bosco 2006.

⁸⁶ Estela Barnes de Carlotto, founder and longtime president of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (cited in Dinur 2001).

What is particularly interesting about this example for the theory of political performance is its profound entanglement with the politics of visibility. This question in a sense defines the whole movement, its purpose and style of political communication. The politics of the Madres revolves around the impossible but politically astute demand that the disappeared, made invisible by the dictatorship, be 'brought back' and therefore revisualised (Taylor 1997, 140). When the regime replied to the Madres by stating that the 'desaparecidos' were the enemies of the revolution, 'no-bodies' whose faith did not matter, the Madres responded by drawing the body silhouettes of the disappeared, with their names and dates of disappearance, on the walls around the Plaza. The silhouettes brought the disappeared back to 'haunt' the regime and remind that living bodies do not all of a sudden disappear and turn into 'no-bodies.' (See Taylor op.cit., chapter seven)

What the Madres implied with the requirement to bring the disappeared back was not, then, that the bodies of the dead should be exhumed and taken to the Square for all to see (in fact, they are opposed to exhumation and all other similar measures that would mean 'burying the dead' and forgetting about the past; Bevernage & Aerts op.cit., 397) but that the crimes of the 1976-1983 regime, its whole political logic, atrocities, and mistakes, be opened up for public scrutiny and judgment. It is the dark political history of Argentina that they wanted to bring into light.⁸⁷

To fight this cause, the Madres applied in the course of years a multitude of visual-political tactics. For instance, the fact they decided to perform their grievance in the most visible space of the country, its historic and administrative centre, is in itself a telling example of their impudent 'eye politics.' These women had the guts to show up right in the face of power, quite literally, with the presidential palace 'Casa Rosada' and other administrative buildings located around the Plaza. (See Taylor 1997, 194) The immediate pitch of such action was that it succeeded in making the regime look ridiculous for not being able to stop a bunch of elderly women from occupying regularly the central public space of the city. However, occupying the Plaza was a risky activity

⁸⁷ The project and visual politics of the Madres' reminds that of the White Overalls, who wanted to make visible the invisibles of Europe, the young, the poor, the unemployed etc. In both cases we can see the same elements: communication through bodies, use of visual symbolic, cheekiness of action, putting oneself at risk. Later, in relation to their participation in the early 2000s protests against neoliberalism, the Madres made a similar linkage between the unemployed, *desocupados*, with the *desaparecidos*. The unemployed were the 'new disappeared' victims of the Argentinian economic crisis (see Borland 2006).

for the Madres, as it required incessant and dangerous ‘cat-and-mouse’ playing with the police and the administration (see Bouvard op.cit.). For instance, when the Madres went to their weekly marches, they were regularly harassed and assaulted by the police, grabbed, beaten, water cannoned, tear gassed, arrested, jailed, and driven away from the Plaza. The Madres and their supporters were constantly under surveillance, and some members of the group were also abducted and disappeared. (See Clemens 1998) In response, the Madres took up this game (which speaks directly to the Foucauldian understanding of power as a strategic relationship, on the one hand, and to the notion of the insecure, chiasmatic public field of visibility, on the other) and started, for example, appearing in the Plaza at varying times of the protest day to divert the police. They would also switch from one side of the Plaza to the other, and then back, to escape the police who kept pursuing them. Moreover, the Madres assumed the habit of marching around the Plaza in pairs to avoid charges of illegal public gathering. The marching itself is one aspect of the visual tactic. It was adopted early on when the police urged the Madres to stop lingering in the Plaza and ‘move on.’ They did as told, but instead of moving out of the Plaza, they started marching around it, non-stop.

This visual-political struggle between the Madres and the regime developed to be as carnal as to approach a state of war (clandestine from the regime’s side and non-violent ‘warfare’ from the Madres’ side). Abductions were carried out both in and out of daylight, in quasi-public manner, and frequently they had eye-witnesses who, however, were expected not to ‘see’ what was happening. Everyday life in society went on as if nothing strange was taking place, and the administration of President Videla pretended that there were no disappearances. The political reality was absurd to the Madres who went looking, in vain, for their children in hospitals, police stations, and government Agencies. They then developed the counter strategy of trying to make visible, in various imaginative ways, what the regime wanted to hide. This struggle was dangerous and put the Madres’ bodies in perpetual risk.

There were many other visual markers and tactics which the Madres adopted in their struggle to win public attention to their cause. They started to wear a white headscarf, embroidered with the name of the disappeared, when protesting in public. The scarf is a universally recognizable sign of womanhood and motherhood, thus the Madres adopted it as the primary symbol of their togetherness and political resistance. The white scarf

signified not only protestors' maternal identity and their lost children (visually the scarf can also be associated with baby diaper) but the opposition of the 'innocent people' to the 'dirty' war and the country's 'dark' political past (this symbolic resembles closely that of the White Overalls). (Downing 2001, 110)

The Madres also turned their bodies into walking billboards, hanging pictures of the disappeared from their necks or taping them to their clothes. According to one mother: "The dictatorship established its authority by making bodies "invisible"; the Madres responded by making their own extremely visible."⁸⁸ The weekly performances on the Plaza also included marching in a circle, another visually signifying element of the protests. The Madres explain: "How else should the Mothers march than round – like their bellies and the world through which their protest echoes" (cited in Ortiz 1995). In effect, the Madres managed to turn their own bodies into instruments of visualization (in chapter five this kind of politics will be conceptualized as aesthetic political communication). As Diana Taylor (op.cit., 198) points out:

"Ironically, the women made invisible by patriarchy and disappeared into the home became the spokespeople for the disappeared. -- Through their bodies, they wanted to show the absence/presence of all those who had disappeared without a trace, without leaving a body."⁸⁹

Taylor has interpreted the politics of performance of the Madres from the perspective of gender identity and nationalism. In her *Disappearing Acts, Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'* (op.cit.) Taylor explores how public 'spectacles'⁹⁰ like the *coup d'état* and the Madres' protests have constructed and deconstructed a sense of community and nationality. As she argues, public spectacles are a locus and mechanism of communal identity. They are collective imaginings which constitute the nation as an 'imagined community.' Terms like spectacle, drama, and myth are therefore not antithetical to historical and material reality, but, rather, fundamental building blocks of political life. Moreover, mythical representations are not innocent, transparent, or true. They do not reflect reality but create it. Each society is a

⁸⁸ Gilda Rodríguez: *Mothers Go Political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*.

http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/courses/knownbody/f04/web2/. Accessed July 7, 2006.

⁸⁹ For a detailed discussion on the body politics of the Madres, see Sutton 2007.

⁹⁰ Political spectacle and political performance denote, in my usage, different performative phenomena. Their visual-aesthetic constitution is different, as we will point out in the next chapter.

complex system of representations, a constitutive part of which are stories about its origin, challenges, and destiny. The stories resonate with the public because they have been internalized and normalized over the generations. (Op.cit., 29-30)

In Taylor's reading, the military regime's politics represented historical continuum.⁹¹ For instance, the concrete visual implementation of the *coup d'état*, the 'helicopter performance' (where the standing president Isabel Peron was abducted from the presidential palace to the helicopter and flown away without any visible resistance) was not a unique event in Argentina's political history.⁹² The presentation of the coup was, in fact, citational, modeling on previous coups that were themselves indebted to earlier displays of heroic military prowess (so perceived in the mythical narratives).

"The showing of the instruments, the total occupation of public space, and the mechanical display of rigid, controlled male bodies against which the leader(s) stood tall, illustrate both the mimetic quality of totalitarian performance and the prohibitions built into it: the population was forbidden from mimicking or parodying its gestures" (op.cit., 61).

The public in turn immediately recognized the coup as a part of the nation's historical narrative and reacted accordingly by vacating public spaces. The Argentinians went home and left the public field to be seized and occupied by the new rulers. The purpose of the coup was not merely to seize power, Taylor argues, which the junta would have accomplished without problem any way, but to control the spaces for public spectacles (ibid.).

The communicative strategies of the Madres' protests must be interpreted in this historical context. That mythical and political field which the mothers broke into was organized and maintained around a highly coercive definition of the feminine and motherhood which excluded women from public political spaces and agency constitutively. Mothers had traditionally been idealized as caretakers whose space of appearance and work was located in the private sphere, in distance from the political arena. 'Public women' had been considered prostitutes or madwomen, by definition

⁹¹ On the post-Peronist 'praetorinization' of the Argentinian politics in the decades preceding the 1976-1983 dictatorship, see Peruzzotti 2004.

⁹² This point can be taken quite literally. A similar kind of performance occurred during the 2001 economic crisis and political turmoil when the violent mass protests led to the quick resignation of President De La Rúa and his escaping from the presidential palace in a helicopter.

non-mothers, while ‘good mothers’ remained invisible. The traditional gender expectations promoted, moreover, maternal embodiment and required women to display a heterosexual ‘feminine’ appearance and conduct. The Madres both exploited and tried to subvert this prevailing conception of the feminine and motherhood. By politicizing motherhood they resisted the history of mothers as non-political figures in a patriarchal society. Thus their performance as mother activists challenged traditional maternal roles and called attention to the fact that motherhood was a social and political, not just a biological construct. (Taylor op.cit., 184-185; Sutton 2007, 135)

However, when the Madres emerged in their highly visible role in the struggle against the military dictatorship, they also stirred great controversy, not only among the regime, but in the Argentinian society more generally. Many of the remaining members of their families, as well as friends and relatives, in the beginning were strongly opposed to their action. For years the Madres’ public appearances remained a highly volatile issue, and their political action had to take place in an atmosphere of constant fear (Bouvard op.cit.).⁹³ As to their challenge towards the military regime, the visible public performances of the Madres posed a tricky problem. The leaders were able to adjudicate as subversive enemies of the state those women who were *non-mothers*. But the problem was how to cope with the public challenge of unarmed mothers who seemed to pose no serious threat to society. Here the regime got caught in a patriarchal discourse and its tradition of honoring motherhood – a discourse upon which the regime’s own rhetoric of national unity was largely built. The Madres skillfully exploited this discourse to turn the quest for their children into a space of political involvement. The regime tried to sidestep the problem by claiming that the women had renounced their right to motherhood by being ‘bad mothers’ and ‘emotional terrorists,’ but, in the end, they the lost this discursive battle and the Madres arose to a highly visible political role in the Argentinian society for decades to come (see Borland 2007; Peruzzotti 2002; cf. Taylor’s discussion, op.cit., 200-207)

⁹³ The movement received early on only scarce attention in the Argentinian media which either ignored or scorned their protests. The Madres won more attention from human rights movements and media abroad than at home. Towards the end of the 1970s the mood in the country began to change and the Madres’ protests gained increasing visibility and support. Gradually the protests spread across the country. The junta finally fell in 1983 in the aftermath of serious economic crisis and the Falklands war which Argentina lost to Great Britain.

Through their open political activity, the Madres carved for themselves a third position beside the ‘good mothers versus public women’ dichotomy. By making their personal anguish into a public performance they were able to turn their motherhood and bodies into political tools (see Sutton op.cit; Downing 2001). While their identity was based on their motherhood, it could no longer be restricted to the private realm, since now mothers were *lacking children* for whom to stay home. Paradoxically, the disappearance of their children had made it possible for mothers themselves to be ‘reborn’ as political actors (ingeniously subverting Arendt’s assumptions about the bodies’ public incommunicability). As Hebe Bonafini, the president of the Asociación puts it: “Our children now live within us. It is they who have brought us into the world; they have become our fathers and mothers.” (Cited in Ortiz 1995) Taylor (op.cit., 194) reads the Madres’ performances as literally ‘acting out’ the difference between motherhood as an individual identity of ‘madres,’ and motherhood as a political collective of ‘The Madres.’ The personal and the political became connected and inseparable for the Madres when their children were abducted (Rodriquez op.cit.).

4.5. The visual-critical discourse revisited

The 20th century critical discourse on visual themes has provided some justified criticism of the development of the postmodern visual culture and its tendencies, yet it is also to an extent problematic tradition which has not always had productive effects for improving our understanding of visual themes. My main counter criticism has been that when this discourse has focused on arguing against the objectifying gaze and its problems, it has come to ignore vision’s complexities. We have seen how the ‘politics of the eye’ involve a great variety of visual practices and strategies which can only partly be thematized through the framework of the objectifying look. If Foucault defined power as a strategic relation, rather than as someone ‘having’ power, the same can be said about the politics of the look. It is a reciprocal relation and it is never guaranteed that the ‘object’ does as the look(er) tells. It is especially noteworthy how critics have managed to miss the existence and meaning of those alternative visual presentations on different cultural arenas and on the political public sphere which have sprung up to challenge the existing system and its visual-political norms, declaring to it: ‘in your face, deal with us and our challenge to you!’ I have found that such

presentations have taken place everywhere, on all continents and in different political contexts, during the 20th century.

What I have tried to bring forth in this chapter is the aspect of politicality that relates to the mutuality of vision and the ways in which political performances play with eye politics. As noted, Foucault described how the modern gaze has attempted to produce and control subjects-as-objects. My reading of political performances, on the other hand, has highlighted that ‘objects’ may also try to resist this control by getting assertively in the way, by looking back at power, as it were (see Hooks 1992, for a similar insight). What performances and their visual communication teaches us is that the power of the gaze is by far complete. It can always be disrupted, questioned, and ridiculed.

The use of power and the keeping of order come with an urge to control that chiasmatic, contingent moment. As noted, seeing is necessarily insecure activity, and we can never be entirely sure what it is that looks try to communicate, whether we read the looks correctly (as intended) and whether others read our looks as we intend them. Political authorities try to manage this foundational undecidability through, for example, professing social conventions, habits, and rituals, which try to pre-render our intentions and actions ‘normal’ and predictable. Yet, because looks are reversible and can be turned over, political authorities must face the possibility that they are being made visible in ways that are not always to their advantage. It is therefore problematic for authorities that they can never be sure in what light subjects are going to show them, whether authorities are taken seriously, laughed at, or attempted to be overturned by ‘cross looks.’ From this perspective it is understandable why seeing and being seen are so central to political order (see the interesting historical argument in Hénaff & Strong, 2001, stretching back to the ‘Machiavellian moment’). One way of reacting to the problem of chiasma is to try to hide from the potential cross looks by, for instance, not showing up in public space, especially when there are protests in the streets (it is different before the elections which is when politicians are forced to expose themselves to public looks and judgment), or by attempting to direct public attention away from the government to other issues. Another way is to try to ‘shut down’ chiasma and make looking back impossible. But here power can never succeed once and for all.

The example of the Madres shows, as do other examples in this study, that a characteristic feature of the contexts surrounding performances is that there is a felt lack of public space for political expression and, therefore, for public visibility. For example the Madres battled quite literally to gain entrance to the public space in order to make visible the military regime's acclaimed 'acts of disappearance.' Visual performance can, therefore, be a vital means of challenging the existing contours of the public sphere and the political imagery upon which it is constituted. Critical actors like the Madres, seeking retribution to serious social and political problems, are not willing accept the existing world of appearances. They yield to a different strategy to embark upon the politics of the gaze. Instead of giving up to the demands of the gaze, they deliberately place themselves in its way. They assert their own being and presence by rendering it obstinately visible where it is not supposed to be.

To conclude the chapter, let us draw a few conclusions about the role and meaning of visibility for performative politics.

a) We can assert first that visual issues are important to deal with already because our language and interpretation of the world are so intimately linked with them. It plays an irrefutable part in a process through which we not only encounter and experience the world but give meaning to it. Languages are filled with metaphoric references to visual experience, which is in itself evidence of that we seem to have an immanent need to *see* things in order to make sense of the world (e.g. Merleau-Ponty claimed that speaking is corporeal activity which is closely related to visual perception; see Merleau-Ponty 1992, chapter 6). 'Oh, I see!' here means 'Yes, I understand!'

b) The visual-critical discourse has argued that ocularcentrism is an implicit unthought undercurrent in the Western tradition and that critical philosophy should contribute to exposing its pitfalls and insidious hegemony. Yet, this view has also been opposed. Some critics have been weary about the aspiration of this discourse to seek access to some 'premordial' experience to replace the ocularcentric way of being. This aspiration may be judged erroneous if we accept the counter-argument that being-in-the-world is unavoidably contextual and historical. Perhaps there are no avenues for *more authentic* experience over and beyond this framed being. Critical feminists, for one, have conspicuously refuted the possibility of original experience (as designation of

‘womanhood’) and stressed the existence of different experiences. I agree with Shapiro’s critique when he states that the biggest problem of ‘anti-visualism’ is that it does not distinguish between different modalities and conceptions of vision or between different visual practices and visual regimes.

”In a time that takes the thought of difference so seriously, there is an anomaly in thinking of vision as always the same, always identical, and so opposing it to other forms of perception and sensibility, which, it is claimed, offer more finely nuanced, more engaged, more historically sensitive ways of engaging with things” (Shapiro 2003, 6).

c) However, the critique that I find most valuable in this context deals with the nonpolitical nature of the visual-critical discourse. Its critics have concentrated too far on the problematic of being the object of the look. In consequence, they have failed to take notice of those bodily, cheeky, and risky public (re)presentations and displays which have, spontaneously or deliberately, opposed prevailing visual regimes and the relations of power they produce and portray or produce. The central finding and idea of this study is that at least occasionally visual performances are an important means of bringing up and thematizing social and political problems in the public (even Habermas can agree on this). Even though it should be clear that not all visual performances can be regarded as success stories judged by the criteria of democracy and morality, this does not justify the claim that all visual performances are politically suspect. Visuality is a site of cultural-political struggle with no clear winners and losers. Here many of the critics of visual political representation are clearly wrong.

d) My conclusion finally is that vision and other senses need not be considered exclusionary. It is unnecessary to bracket sight and seek knowledge with other senses, since human experience and communication play with all of them. Visual and bodily experience are closely related, as we saw in the case of the Clothesline Project and the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, not only in a sense that the body experiences objectification as marks of power on its ‘skin,’ but also in a sense that visual communication can awaken the spectators’ physical, aesthetic, moral, and political perception, and thereby challenge and change public imageries as well as the existing boundaries of the public sphere. It can ‘enlarge our mentality,’ as Arendt would say (see the argument in the next

chapter) and educate us to being better citizens who are capable of sharing an interest in *le regard* in its other sense as ‘caring for.’

So far we have addressed the question of visibility and visual experience as such, without paying attention to its particular dimensions. It is time to note that public displays and representations do not as such disclose (or produce) meanings and truths. It is the significations related to showing and seeing that matter. Consider, for instance, D.M. Levin’s argument: “[C]rying is the root of human vision. This suggests that compassion, the capacity to feel what others are feeling and take their suffering to heart, is an essential factor in the fulfilment of our vision --. Compassion is our visionary fulfilment because the sociality of feeling-with is always already inscribed into the flesh of our visionary organs” (1988, 252). But how does this effect, compassion through eyesight, come about? And how does the quest for understanding and sympathy, embedded in much of visual communication, relate to public performances? To ponder these questions we must move to the realm of aesthetic and ethical judgment.

“Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”

Jacques Ranciere (2006, 13)

5. Public performance as aesthetic communication

5.1. Performance as aesthetic communication: starters

In the previous chapter we located the communicative power of public political performance in the chiasmatic, insecure moment between crossing looks and noted that it is in the interest of political rulers to try to control that contingent moment (that is, to control visibilities and invisibilities). We also pointed out that this visual field, which is so important for social and political order, can be challenged by bringing disrupting elements into it. From this starting point we can begin to understand the very practical importance of what performances actually do and *show* in the public, what kind of experiences, critique, and alternatives they make visible in the public arena.

In this chapter I will continue the discussion by arguing that political performance is not simply visual but, more deeply, aesthetic communication. My basic contention is that performances are aesthetic communication because they *give visible shape* to performers' experiences and ideas and because they bring these expressions into the open to be publicly scrutinized and judged. Moreover, performances are *aesthetically intensive* communication (cf. Lappalainen 2002, 159-175) when and because they are played out in the sensitive chiasmatic realm, in which it is constantly under negotiation who gets to appear and act in public, which ideas can be publicly presented, and which practices become dominant and get to control the public field of visibility.

But before we can delve deeper into political performance as aesthetic communication, we have first to clear out space in political theory for such an argument. That is, we need to deal with the typically negative associations that accompany the notion of

‘aestheticized politics’ and revive the theoretical potential of the concept of aesthetics beyond such suspicions.

We can start by noting that the expression aestheticized politics is in many ways confusing. This is mainly because of the particular way the two concepts, aesthetics and politics, have been linked in intellectual history. The expression is misleading, first, because it seems to suggest that we can distinguish between aestheticized and non-aestheticized politics, that the aesthetic is something which can be deliberately used to decorate politics. Coupled with the mainstream interpretation of the 20th century political history, this conception implies that aestheticized politics is shallow at best and dangerous meddling with fascist aspirations at worst (i.e., aesthetics as manipulation of the masses). Also Habermas’s long-lasting distrust of aestheticized politics and communication is related to this historical trajectory. Lipscomb (2002, 136) notes that Habermas is suspicious of those thinkers he sees as having abandoned rationality in favor of aesthetics that lacks the self-critical mechanisms of intersubjective rationality. Habermas fears that such subjectivism fosters totalizing tendencies and is vulnerable to the mystifying appeals of demagogic politics, commodification, and moral relativism (see Habermas’s essays on these themes in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 1987b; cf. Duvenage 2003).

I think this argument leads to a misconception. Namely, all politics is aesthetic in that its representations, verbal as well as visual and symbolic, play with notions of good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. Aesthetic and ethical judgments are always implied in social and political action. It is not a question of comparing aestheticized to non-aestheticized politics, then, but of examining *how* each representation – ideology, political program, speech, discourse, visual performance etc. – sketches out reality and how it is judged.

Let me point out one example. When we think for example about the ‘spectacular’ political aesthetic of the 1930s fascism, especially in the Nazi-Germany, and compare it to the aesthetic of political performances, we can detect manifest differences between them. Perhaps the biggest difference concerns the fascist emphasis on systematic, geometrical forms along which it ‘fashioned’ its political activities. Hitler personally was very interested in architecture in which he favored grandiose and open designs.

These were often meant as arenas for mass gatherings, which in turn had to do with the fascist ideology stressing the greatness and methodical unity of the German Volk. The geometrical forms of Nazi mass spectacles expressed strict order and discipline which allowed no disruption and spontaneity. The aesthetic of political performances, on the other hand, works typically in the opposite way, bringing onto public spaces unruly action and disturbing visual images which are designed to annoy the prevailing order and its controlling visual imageries. The important point here is that we should not conflate aesthetic politics with, say, fascist ideology and spectacularism, but pay attention to differences between various political-aesthetic expressions.

Another problematic way to approach aesthetics and politics emerges from the long tradition where aesthetics has been understood, first, as the domination of the image over the word and, second, as a process of modern commodification which eventually invades all corners of life and begins to determine social relations as well. The latter critique has strong roots in Marxism, but in the 20th century it was especially the first generation of critical theorists who made it famous with their analyses of the modern mass society and culture industries (see e.g. Horkheimer & Adorno 2002). More lately this view of ‘surface aestheticization,’ as Wolfgang Iser (1997) calls it, has begun to relax. Interest has been paid for example to the role of creativity and emotionality in politics, which are now regarded as essential aspects of all political representation and experience. Frank Ankersmit (2002) argues that political representation is not so much about personal interests as about creation of political worlds through imagination and stylistic presentation (see also Ankersmit 1996). In this view, politics can be understood as a creative process in which society is constantly made and remade through cultural production. Likewise, Peters (1993, 566) finds contemporary media a necessary means for imagining community. (See discussion in chapter two for more views on this subject.) This is not to say that aesthetic politics should not be addressed critically. Rather, what I am arguing is that it is not the concept of aesthetics *per se* that should be blamed. Potential remedy to, say, the ‘entertainmentization’ of politics (Karvonen 2008) is then not in trying to envision non-aesthetic forms of action but in sketching and discussing alternative kinds of aesthetic imagery.

In this chapter I approach aesthetics and politics as closely related activities. From the perspective of the theory of communication developed in this work, aesthetics refers to

the material and sensible make-up of the common world. Aesthetic politics is activity through which that world is given form to. Moreover, aesthetics is related to political and ethical judgment, people constantly (re)produce different kinds of ‘forms’ in order to sustain a common world *and* judge them by using valuating categories such as beautiful-ugly, safe-dangerous, good-bad, friend-foe, and their varying degrees.

One more preliminary note is in place about how to define the relationship between art and aesthetics. Aesthetics has for long been understood as a theory of the beauty value of art and its reception as experience (although this was not exactly what Baumgarten meant by the concept more than two hundred years ago; see Welsch 1997). The two concepts are often conflated in discussion and theory, as when one talks about Adorno’s aesthetics and what is meant is his theory of autonomous art, or when under discussion is Habermas’s aesthetics and reference is made to the role of ‘discussing art critically’ in his theory of communicative action. Similarly, aestheticized politics is often understood as the deliberative use of art for political purposes. In such views aesthetics is connected with art and the two are separated from other spheres of human activities like politics and economy.

I think it important not to conflate aesthetics with the concept of art. Art, or what we commonly refer to as art in its modern sense, is an institutional practice defined by special conceptions about how it should be technically done and publicly portrayed and commonly understood to be distinct from everyday life (see Dickie 1984). Art has a lot to do with aesthetics, experience, and judgment, but aesthetic experience is not limited to the field of art. While in modern society art is institutionalized and recognizable, even in its very varying incarnations, as its own sphere of activity, aesthetic experience cannot be separated from our experiential relationship with the world (this is John Dewey’s point, as we shall see shortly; see Dewey 1934, 46-47). Aesthetics is therefore a broader and a more abstract concept than art, referring generally to the triad perception, experience, and judgment, which define our ‘being in the world.’

Both concepts, art and aesthetics, can be used to characterize performances. We can say that public performances are art to the extent that they are defined by their public, exposing character. More particularly, performances are art/istic if and when they create a relationship between the artist (i.e., the performers) and the viewers or participants, a

relationship in which both parties understand that the act is meant to be judged publicly. (We should note, however, that not all performances work as art. They can be thematized alternatively as, for example, social events, entertainment or, more negatively, as collective violence.) Conversely, political performances are aesthetic communication to the extent that they produce sense experiences about things in the world which invite public reflection and ethical-political judgment.

In this chapter I am going to look at performances as aesthetic communication from three perspectives. I will first turn to John Dewey to insights about how aesthetics relates to experience. I will then engage in a more detailed theory of aesthetics as ‘form giving’ by reference to the work of Jacques Ranciere, especially his notion of politics as aesthetic ‘partitioning of the sensible.’ Thirdly, I will look into Hannah Arendt’s conception of aesthetic judgment which helps us to close the argument and see what is, or can be, valuable about the kind of aesthetic communication political performances typically engage with. The important notion to be discussed in this context is Arendt’s idea, via Kant, of ‘enlarged mentality’ which bears important implications for democratic politics (this last point will be addressed more closely in the concluding chapter).

After these theoretical discussions, which should open before us interesting avenues for understanding the meaning of aesthetic politics, I will engage in discussion of the 1990s political protests in Serbia against the government of Slobodan Milošević. We will pay special attention to the theatricality of the protests. Theatre, in the Serbian context, worked both metaphorically and concretely as a marker of how the political reality was experienced and acted on by people. It provided protestors with ‘the aesthetic language’ through which to approach, explain, judge, and resist what was going on in the country.

5.2. Dewey on aesthetic experience

In the view of the argument of this study it is interesting that, contrary to most other political theorists of the 20th century, John Dewey did not reduce communication (merely) to speech. To Dewey the origin of communication lies in human beings’ active relationship with the world which involves *taking part* in it in various ways. Thought

this way, language use, aesthetic activities, and political action are all forms of participating in communication-as-living-together. Moreover, Dewey believed that art is the most effective kind of communication, “communication in its pure and undefiled form” (1934, 244).

Dewey wrote on aesthetics and art fragmentarily from 1880s onwards, but his *opus magnum* in aesthetic theorizing is nevertheless *Art as Experience*, where he stresses the intertwining of art and everyday life and criticizes the alienation of art from experience and the assumption that experience-related work of art is somehow less valuable than the more abstractly tuned ‘fine arts’ (op.cit., 3). He believes that everyday experience can be/become aesthetic when it is consciously led to organic ends. When this happens, there is a “conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversions, into movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close” (op.cit., 56; see Mullis 2006). Dewey’s aesthetic theory is complicated in its details; therefore I confine myself to making only three points which relate directly to our discussion in this chapter.

Dewey defines the nature of *an* experience quite explicitly. An experience is the bringing to a conclusion of an event or interaction between man and his environment, as when a problem is solved or a game is played to its finish. This can be contrasted with an unformed experience in which we are distracted and cannot complete our course of action. An experience is aesthetic when it involves intentional and innovative connecting of parts together, that is, when it gives birth to something new which creates a feeling of satisfaction, harmony, and unity. (Dewey op.cit., chapter three) Or, as Van Meter (1953, 149) sums it up:

“For Dewey the transition from ordinary to aesthetic experience comes without transcendence, simply when the distinction between means and ends disappears: when what is done and what it is for coalesce; when we at once strive and arrive. Withdrawal from reality is not necessary; only appreciation of it; when there is fusion of the instrumental and the consummatory.”

Dewey also conceptualizes aesthetics in terms of ‘true art,’ which he sees stemming from human strive for experiencing beauty. This aspiration is a universal human condition which excludes the use of lower senses like touch and smell. True art is

something which cannot be bought or owned or surrounded with selfish interests. It communicates between separate people and experiences and seeks harmony between them. In this sense art is social, not individual activity. The root of Dewey's argument is that when art is closely tied to people's everyday lives, it is a form of communication through which people learn about each other's similarities and differences, break through barriers to understanding and awareness, and develop modes of communality (op.cit., 244, 270-271): "[W]orks of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience" (op.cit., 105). The communicative potential of art is based on the artists' character and history of experiences of living in a particular culture and in a particular community. The expressions of art, even if they are produced by individual artists, have, sort of innately, public and communal character. And it is this common quality of art that provides its communicative capacity (see Mattern 1999, 57).

Moreover, unlike language, which 'translates' the qualities of experience into practically manageable "orders, ranks, and classes," art to Dewey is a form of immediate experience. Art can create and express meanings that are not accessible through language. While scientific and intellectual language merely describes qualities and values, art (such as music and poetry) can directly create and re-create that quality in sense experience. "The unique quality of a quality is found in experience itself; it is there and sufficiently there not to need reduplication in language. The latter serves its scientific or its intellectual purpose as it gives directions as to how to come upon these qualities in experience." (Dewey op.cit., 215) Supposing that the artist has taken elements from collective experience and reconfigured them in his art, when experiencing such art, viewers are, at least potentially, challenged to view their lives in a new light. This may buttress a reconsideration of traditionally sanctioned beliefs and practices. In *The Public and its Problems* (1927, 183-184) Dewey argues that: "The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness. -- Artists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation." Moreover, Dewey believed in art possessing a moral function "to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing,

tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive” (Dewey 1980, 325).⁹⁴

How is this useful for the theory of public political performance? My first point is general and relates to the nature of social theorizing in the twentieth century. I find it problematic that, along the modern rationalization process, science, politics, economy, and art have disintegrated into their own spheres of action (here I concur with Habermas’s analysis). This, I think, has led to the impoverishment of the theory of action (which Habermas describes systematically but keeps missing some important points). The difficulty is in that the modern ‘spheres thinking’ does not pay enough attention to how various activities intertwine, overlap, and define one another. In result, important elements get swept away from social and political theory. In my view, aesthetic qualities, which have been throughout the last century consistently linked with fashions, emotions, and other ‘non-rational’ qualities, are among such elements. It is not surprising then that political performances’ way of communicating aesthetically may seem like a far cry from a ‘normal’ political process. Dewey’s attempt to understand and approach communication more widely, embracing also its aesthetic nature and connection with human experience, is in this sense important theoretical advance which the study of political performances can make use of. Public performances too possess a strong experiential element, both for the performers and the public. As we have already noticed, the logic of performances is that they try to appeal to the bodies of other people to find common ground, a sounding board of a sort, across which to communicate their critique and visions.

Secondly, in Dewey’s theory art, aesthetics, and other human activities are closely linked. Art in its different manifestations denotes human need to reflect on and work with experience, which is why Dewey prefers to talk about ‘*works of art*’. This is a fruitful way to approach also political performances which characteristically surface from people’s need to portray their personal experiences (of wrong-doings) and visions (of a better society) in public. Performances piece together different aspects of reality, critiquing existing practices and creating new imageries as to how things might be different, which is exactly what Dewey requires from art. And just as Dewey thinks art

⁹⁴ Notice Dewey’s prolific use of visual metaphors (cf. my argument in chapter four).

should be publicly accessible, performances carry out their aesthetic interventions in public. Moreover, performances as art have the ability to communicate things which linguistic communication may miss.

There are, however, several problems in Dewey's account.⁹⁵ First of all, to Dewey aesthetic experience denotes a harmonious and gratified ('consummated') end-state of man's perceptual encounter with his environment. Dewey is not saying that this harmony equals beauty (he did not find the concept of beauty analytical enough to study experience; see Dewey op.cit., 129-130), but I think it is still too restrictive an approach to understand what aesthetic experience is about. While it is, for sure, a common conception within aesthetic theory that aesthetic experience is about men's taste for enjoyable things and relations, there is theoretically speaking something illogical to its core. Namely, it seems build on the assumption that it is possible to judge only *ex post facto* whether an experience was aesthetic or not (and take it as aesthetic only if it ended up with pleasurable feelings). But it shouldn't be correct to conjecture in advance what the result of the judgment is going to be. Sometimes it may generate sentiments of sublime gratification, but at other times it may produce more conflicting sentiments, like when one sees human suffering and reacts with repulsion and/or grief. In order for aesthetic judgment to be analytically meaningful, it must operate with a wider register of valuations with various points of referents to understand how experience is felt and rated. Aesthetic experience cannot be restricted to one end of the scale, then. Rather, it moves along the scale, judging different perceptions and experiences differently, prompting varying reactions to them (on a similar argument, see Jay's, 2003, discussion on the aesthetic value of the transgressive 'non-consummatory' body art; cf. Mullis 2006). Dewey's view of aesthetic experience is in this sense regrettably restricted. As Gotshalk (1964: 132) points out:

"The broken and fragmentary, objects and experiences without organic unity or a discernible pervading quality, the distorted and ugly, and things generally that do not lead necessarily to an agreeable or consummatory or mystical response, are thereby excluded from aesthetic experience, as if one should not be permitted to taste these as well as the beauties."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ A good overall critique of Dewey's *Art as Experience* can be found in Ames 1953.

⁹⁶ Gotshalk (ibid.) continues to make a valid point: we recognize that ordinary moral experience is the experience of *good as well as evil*, yet we tend to define moral experience only in terms of the ideal, the fulfilment of a law, or a concept of the good. "The experience of evil is thereby excluded by

Second, while Dewey basically refers by art to everyday activities, his examples and discussions in *Art as Experience* point more or less exclusively to modern ‘fine arts’ such as poetry and painting which most people are not customarily related to. He has very little to say, for example, about the more popular arts and their meaning for politics and democracy. Therefore, “[a]t a stroke he disposes of the considerable tradition that hedges the aesthetic from the actual and the vital, from what men are really doing and thinking” (Van Meter 1953, 146). It is as if Dewey ended up bringing back in through the back door the same subject-object dualism which he professed to throw out of the front door. This kind of thinking does not necessarily augment the values of participation and action which, in principle, were very important to Dewey. (See Boas 1953, 178; Mattern 1999, 58)

Third, I agree with Mark Mattern (op.cit., 59) that Dewey tends to overstate the clarity and certainty of art as communication and assume that a work of art communicates the creator’s experiences naturally and universally. This assumption is clearly too simplistic. Art communicates obscurely and ambiguously. It means different things to different individuals, groups, and cultures and infrequently prompts conflicting responses. Works of art do not always exercise such community building power as Dewey envisioned. When Dewey talks about art as communication and communality, he seems to be implying an overtly optimistic vision of democracy, thinking that society is a union of people in which communication can break down the barriers and fix the alienation of individuals. But as Boas (op.cit., 180) pointed out in his 1950s critique of Dewey: “There is also an art of concealment, an art which society necessitates quite as much as it does that of communication”. Art historians are well aware that art has never been an institution free from power. On the contrary, throughout history it has been intimately linked with the reproduction of political power and construction of political ideologies.

Related to the third point, we can make one further critical observation. Even if Dewey does not discuss the issue directly, it seems that his theory of art implies the possibility

definition from moral experience, whereas in actual conduct it is probably more included than the experience of good or of the ideal.” Gotshalk concludes, as I do here, that we need a wider concept of the aesthetic experience than Dewey has to offer.

of combining the interests of art and politics, at least in the sense that as art combines people through creating common experiences it can act as a means of conflict resolution. Moreover, when art gives occasion to individual and communal reflection, to some kind of public deliberation, it involves an element of democratic participation and discussion. But what Dewey consistently overlooks here is the other side of the issue, the conflictual aspect of men living together, and how art sometimes participates in producing social-political divisions in society instead of bridging them; his one-sided interest is on how art can restore unity among differences.

We should also note that works of art depend for their influence on their public visibility, which is more attainable given economic and political power. For example transnational corporations can flood public spaces with visual messages in their own interest, while less powerful and affluent actors can only seek access to the public through disruptive means. This kind of political-aesthetic struggle on the world's visibilities and invisibilities remained outside Dewey's theoretical perception. He wanted to develop a universal aesthetic theory which would be based on the 'rhythmic' relationship of man to his environment, that is, to the general conditions of life. "Art is thus prefigured in the very processes of living" (Dewey op.cit., 24). What is missing here is understanding of the historically changing visual-aesthetic regimes, of different paradigmatic 'ways of looking,' and how they are related to norms and practices of power. (See Mattern op.cit.)

Bearing in mind Dewey's suggestion that aesthetics is linked with active engagement with the world, and disagreeing with him that aesthetic experience revolves around harmony and gratification, we can move on to examine how the aesthetic figures (in) the world *intertwined with politics and power*.

5.3. Politics as struggle between visibility and invisibility⁹⁷

The French philosopher Jacques Ranciere has a curiously original way of approaching politics and aesthetics and how they determine one another.⁹⁸ When analysing politics

⁹⁷ I would like to thank Tuija Lattunen for drawing my attention to Jack Ranciere's work on politics and aesthetics.

and democracy, Ranciere pays attention to the visible configuration of the various parts and parties of society, to those ‘partitionings’ which organize its activities and occupations and which condition people’s possibilities for action within it. (See e.g. Ranciere 1999 and 2006)

To Ranciere, politics is first and foremost an aesthetic question because it draws the boundaries of visibilities and invisibilities and therefore determines what can be experienced, thought, and done in society. In his understanding, the influence of politics is based more than anything on this aesthetic power. There is an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics, Ranciere argues, “that has nothing to do with Benjamin’s discussion of the ‘aestheticization of politics’ specific to the ‘age of masses’. -- Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.” (Ranciere 2006, 13) To be more precise, Ranciere’s theory includes two ways of approaching the politics/aesthetics relationship. The ‘aesthetics of politics’ is a more wide-ranging way of sketching political realities, while the ‘politics of aesthetics’ refers more narrowly to art as an historically developed institution. Both perspectives are relevant for theory of performative politics.

Let us first turn to Ranciere’s conception of the aesthetics of politics. In Ranciere’s view, politics is not about use of power in terms of resources and capabilities but about the visual-material construction of the political reality and about the struggle over who has the right to take part in this construction. Ranciere uses the phrase ‘partitioning of the sensible’ (*le partage du sensible*) to describe this basic precept of politics. Politics in a sense of what he calls the ‘police order’ (in distinction to politics as oppositional action) creates and sustains an implicit order, a system of ‘self-evident facts’ of sense perception. At the same time it conceals other possible ‘partitionings’ of the world (2006, 12).

“Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization

⁹⁸ Ranciere’s work extends to various disciplines and areas of interest, including history, philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, art, film, and fiction. My focus is confined, however, solely to his concepts concerning the aesthetic/political relationship.

another name. I propose to call it *the police*.” (Ranciere 1999, 28; italics in orig.)

As an example of how this partitioning of the sensible works and conditions the world, Ranciere refers to Plato’s ideal State where every person has a predescribed place and role. If you were, for example, an artisan, you would not have the time to participate in a responsible activity like running a state.

“They cannot be *somewhere else* because *work will not wait*. The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc.” (Ranciere 2006, 12; italics in orig.)

Therefore, in Plato’s State, only a few people are actually able to participate in politics. It is this kind of visibly embodied predefined locations and roles of people that make up the police order.

Ranciere’s ‘politics’ (*la politique*), on the other hand, takes place when there is a confrontation with the existing police order and its control over the sensible, disrupting its ‘naturalization’ and revealing temporarily to the public the shape of its power. Politics and political are relational phenomena, founded on the intervention of politics in the police order rather than on the establishment of a particular governmental regime. When politics rushes in (which does not happen that often, Ranciere thinks), it denotes a reconfiguration of the visible partitioning of society’s spaces and activities, as well as a struggle over the right to get involved and use voice in defining what the boundaries of the real should be. Aesthetic politics is aimed at ‘setting up scenes of dissensus.’

Moreover, politics in a strict sense does not presuppose a predefined group of individuals as the agent, like the poor or the proletariat. On the contrary, the only possible subject of politics is the people, the ‘demos,’ the ‘supplementary part’ of any population at any time. Gabriel Rockhill notes:

“Those who have no name, who remain invisible and inaudible, can only penetrate the police order via a mode of *subjectivization* that transforms the

aesthetic coordinates of the community by implementing the universal presupposition of politics: we are all equal. *Democracy* itself is defined by these intermittent acts of political subjectivization that reconfigure the communal distribution of the sensible. However, just as *equality* is not a goal to be attained but a presupposition in need of constant verification, democracy is neither a form of government nor a style of social life. Democratic *emancipation* is a random process that redistributes the system of sensible coordinates without being able to guarantee the absolute elimination of the social inequalities inherent in the police order.” (Rockhill 2006, 3, italics in orig.; see also Ranciere 2006, 19)

Ranciere also approaches aesthetics in a more narrow sense. Here he is dealing with a more familiar subject, aesthetics as historically evolved practices of doing and understanding art. Ranciere divides the historical development of art in different phases. There is, first of all, ‘ethical regime of images,’ characteristic of Platonism, which is primarily concerned with the origin and telos of imagery in relationship to the ethos of the community. It establishes a distribution of images which distinguishes strictly between artistic simulacra (imitating simple appearances) and the ‘true arts’ (forms of knowledge) used to educate the citizenry about their proper roles and modes of action in the communal body. (Ranciere 2006, 21) The ‘poetic’ or ‘representative’ regime (the ‘fine arts’) is an Aristotelian system that liberates imitation from the constraints of ethical utility and separates art as an autonomous domain with its own specified rules for fabrication and criteria of evaluation. This regime gives primacy to action, that is, to the art of speaking over ‘characters’ and to narration over description (of pure ‘resemblance’). (Op.cit., 22)

The ‘aesthetic regime,’ formulated at the turn of the 19th century, stands in clear contrast with the representative regime. It relies on two premises. It means, first of all, the collapse of the system of prior constraints and hierarchies which used to separate objects worthy (high arts) or unworthy (low arts) of entering the realm of art. Ultimately, the aesthetic regime erases the frontier between art and non-art, artistic creation and anonymous life. Second, it means that the works of art are grasped in a specific sphere of experience where they were free from ‘sensory connection’ to objects of knowledge or to objects of desire. They are ‘free-appearance,’ in a non-hierarchical relation between the intellectual and the sensory faculties. For example Schiller articulated this principle in his ‘aesthetic state’ where the supremacy of active understanding over passive sensibility did not any longer work out. The power of the

high classes was supposed to be the power of activity over passivity, of understanding over sensation, and this power Schiller wanted to deny.⁹⁹

In the aesthetic regime (which also defines, to Ranciere, the nature of modernity) two kinds of ‘politics of art’ can be distinguished. There is, first, ‘life as art’ politics where (in the extreme case) the political state represents the highest form of aesthetics. Here politics emphasizes social commonality through common aesthetic experience, the model for which is the close connection between art and society in the Greek polis. The second type of ‘politics of art’ stresses the autonomy of art from society and politics. Only because of this separation, Ranciere thinks, can art be/come truly political, that is, resistant and oppositional, ”art doing politics on the condition of doing no politics at all” (op.cit., 5).

Both types of politics of aesthetics come with a paradox, however. In the case of ‘life as art’ there is critical potential in a sense that the breakdown of high culture and class elitism offers opportunities to emphasize the ordinary and the popular and to refresh community life through common aesthetic experience. For example German idealism held in high esteem *das Volk*, seeing the state (the institutional and cultural embodiment of the people) as a spiritual work of art. The paradox here lies in that such ‘domesticated’ art may end up losing the character of art as something out-of-the-ordinary with an ability to both fascinate and outrage people. When art becomes everyday culture and common social activity, it also becomes normalized and gradually ‘invisible.’ Moreover, in (over)stressing the value and unity of a *Volk* (which in the nationalistic ideology is usually constructed as a ‘chosen nation’ whose faith is different from other nations) and in sublimizing the State, art-as-life thinking involves potentially dangerous moments. The history of the 20th century bears out this concern in a sweeping way.

⁹⁹ We could also make the point that classical representational art was intimately connected to the power structure of society, often simply because the painters and the musicians were employed by the rulers and assisted in ‘performing’ their power status to the other classes. The aesthetic regime, which began to replace the classical one from the 18th century onwards, broke the relationship with political power and art, designating a new kind of artistic autonomy and collapsing the former division between high and low art. Art’s earlier function was weakened in status, and forth came other possible relations between it and the world.

In the second case art is detached from immediate political purposes and left to work on its own conditions. This kind of politics involves the possibility of doing things differently, of bringing up marginalized perspectives and generating new ones. Oppositional art, like stand-up comic, Brecht's and Beckett's plays, Magritte's art, public political performances etc. force people to take notice of and respond to critical questions about society and its way of life. However, here critical potential may remain marginal because as a separate sphere of action art is 'only art' and can be ignored as such, as a bundle of curiosities that need not be taken seriously. In the juxtaposition of these two forms of art politics, political-critical art functions somewhere between them. It needs to remain close enough to everyday life and use familiar surfaces through which it can touch people. At the same time critical art should keep up its distinctiveness and the ability to show new things and ask new questions. This means that critical art is dealing with a delicate balance between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Art is most effective when it cannot be designated as 'mere art' and when it manages to forge connections between its surprise element and the common life world. (Ranciere 2006) We can then say that also the efficacy of political performances grows, the more they succeed in operating on the slippery slope between art and collective action and represent collective aspirations that have resonance among the general public.

Ranciere's conception of art as politics clearly has use value in the analysis of contemporary cultural-political phenomena. Think, for instance, about the aesthetics of today's communication media, especially TV, and its highly commercialized imageries which in a very straightforward manner materialize (and sell) the art-as-life -approach. In these conditions art becomes a constitutive part of the lifeworld where people increasingly identify with public figures and imageries that *this* form of 'aestheticized politics' produces. Judging this development and the art/life mix is by no means easy though. Popular imageries do, after all, offer common points of reference and identification which brings an element of collectivity and communality to an otherwise highly fragmented postmodern society (these are the truly 'imagined communities'; see the argument in Corner & Pels 2003 and Peters 2000). In this kind of society, art has limited possibilities for effective critique. It has become too ordinary.

Yet, this is not the whole picture of art's critical possibilities. There are also a variety of alternative media and art from, say, Adbusters¹⁰⁰ to Act Up¹⁰¹, The Yes Men¹⁰², alternative theatre, and local action groups, which act on the permeable zone between art and life, mixing artful performances with political stand-taking. They refuse integration with popular culture, but use it, and they are not 'mere art' but take actively part in political debates and movements. Their significance lies mostly in that they produce surprise works and performances in public spaces that come in our way and force us to take notice. Yet, as stressed previously, this is always insecure kind of action in that the public and the political authorities may not be able to tell whether the act is 'only a joke' and can be more or less ignored, whether it is interesting to notice but still 'only art,' or whether it is something they should be really concerned with. People may receive and interpret the act in a way which does not spawn the sort of interaction between different parties that would grow into a generally significant moment of collective action. This is why also the consequences of critical art are, each time, unpredictable.

To summarize: through Dewey we were able to get away from the simplistic assumptions of 'surface aesthetics' so popular today. We saw aesthetics as related closely to the experiential character of life. With Ranciere we stepped into aesthetic politics as a struggle over the distribution of spaces and activities and over the right to participate in defining the common. We need one more thing to close the argument. In the next section we will see how Arendt defines and uses aesthetic judgment as part of her public sphere theory.

5.4. Aesthetic/public: Arendt

Arendt has often been read as a theorist of dialogical and collaborative politics. The emphasis in this reading is in the consensual dimension of politics, which her works (partly) lend evidence to. Yet, Arendt can also be read differently and see a more radical or 'Nietzschean' side to her which is highly critical of the rationalized form of

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.adbusters.org/>. Accessed December 10, 2011.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.actupny.org/>. Accessed December 10, 2011.

¹⁰² <http://theyesmen.org/>. Accessed December 10, 2011.

consensus politics (see the argument in Villa 1992b). Like Nietzsche, Arendt critiques the instrumentalization of action and the general degradation of the ‘world of appearances’ which accompanied it. She finds epistemological as well as political relief in approaching politics in terms of a ‘great performance’ rather than in terms of means and ends typical for the 20th century political discourse. The performance model enables her to critique the action-undermining character of the distinction between the actor and the act, or the agent and the effect, and conceive action more aesthetically in its own terms and as a value in itself. To Arendt, there is no reality behind appearances, no subject beyond action and performance, and no actor separable from his deeds. Instead, men show who they are in their action. Any theory of politics that really wants to find remedy to the Platonic resentment of plurality and refurbish a sense of the intrinsic value of political action, must in Arendt’s thinking be able to go beyond the means-ends thinking and focus, instead, on theorizing the performance of action itself (Villa op.cit., 278).

Likewise, Arendt approaches freedom in terms of Machiavellian virtuosity and suggests that the public realm be seen as a kind of theater. She notes:

“Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli’s concept of *virtù*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*. Its meaning is best rendered by “virtuosity,” that is, an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making), *where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself* and not in the end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it. The virtuoso-ship of Machiavelli’s *virtù* somehow reminds us, although Machiavelli hardly knew it, that the Greeks always used such metaphors of flute-playing, dancing, healing and seafaring to distinguish political from other activities, that is, that they drew their analogies from those arts in which virtuosity of performance is decisive.” (Arendt 1993, 153; partly my italics)

The reason why Arendt finds the performing arts to have such a strong affinity with politics is that neither is instrumental in character. Contra Plato, the freedom and meaning of action are radically separate from the achievement (or nonachievement) of any end beyond the performance. Arendt puts the same thought in a slightly different way when she claims that, “men *are* free – as distinguished from possessing the gift of freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after: for to *be* free and to act are the same” (ibid.). Moreover, this kind of aesthetic interpretation of action means that the

only suitable criterion for judging action is its greatness, not for example morality. Moral terms provide necessary standards of judgment for determining appropriate conduct but they cannot do justice to the performance of action in the public realm. Arendt argues (1958, 205):

“Unlike human behavior – which the Greeks, like all civilized people, judged according to moral standards – action can be judged only by the criteria of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.”

Yet, Arendt is also aware of the dangers of agonistic political action. If too diverse and oppositional, it can be a threat to the public spirit. But if this is so, how can we preserve the possibility for virtuosity and genuine action and at the same time maintain the intersubjective character of public action? The key is to remember that, “[t]ruly political activities -- acting and speaking, cannot be performed at all without the presence of others, without the public, without the space constituted by the many” (Arendt 1993, 217). In order to prove that ‘agonistic’ politics can be combined with concerted action, Arendt turned to Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment. The central concern here is not, however, with reason and dialogue, but with matters of *taste*.

Kant’s theory of knowledge makes a clear distinction between cognitive, aesthetic, and practical faculties. The cognitive faculty is concerned with understanding the laws of nature, the aesthetic faculty with feelings of pleasure and pain (i.e., with the beautiful and the sublime), and the practical faculty with reason and morality. (Kant 1951, 33-34) Of all the faculties, only the aesthetic judgment is unforced and free. It is interested in objects for their own sake, in representations *as* representations, not representative of something else.

“The satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called “interest.” -- Now when the question is if a thing is beautiful, we do not want to know whether anything depends or can depend on the existence of the thing, either for myself or for anyone else, but how we judge it by mere observation (intuition or reflection).” (Op.cit., 38)

“Everyone must admit that a judgment about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgment of taste. We must not be in

the least prejudiced in favor of the existence of the things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in things of taste.” (Op.cit., 39)

Kant’s aesthetic approach, even if formalistic, opens up a realm of experience and communication removed from the pressing interests of life. It is on this root that Arendt builds her argument on aesthetic judgment as a model for political judgment. She fears that without the ability to form disinterested opinions on political issues, political action loses its creative potential and ties too closely with material, moral and ideological interests. To be able to appreciate the play of politics people, when acting together and appreciating the plurality of the world, must reach beyond the necessities and petty interests of the everyday life. “For judgments of taste, the world is the primary thing, not men, neither man’s life nor his self” (Arendt 1993, 222).

Moreover, Kant’s philosophy of taste in *The Critique of Judgment* pays attention to the necessarily common character of taste. Taste has no objective ground (Kant op.cit., 125-127). Instead, it is a kind of collective sense, a ‘*sensus communis*.’¹⁰³ Villa (1992b) points out that lacking an objective principle, taste judgments are necessarily difficult, and where their validity is questioned, it can be redeemed only by persuasive means. In her essay ‘The Crisis of Culture’ Arendt (1993, 222) argues that taste judgments share with political opinions that they are persuasive. The judging person can only ‘woo the consent of everyone else’ in the hope of coming to an agreement with him. This is one of the contentions which Arendt and Habermas share. It is also the idea which the deliberative democrats have been intrigued by in their communicative modeling of democracy.

In political judgment, too, there is a need for distance between the object and the one judging it. In politics the question is not, however, as much about ‘disinterestedness’ as about practical capability and willingness to surpass one’s narrow interests and put

¹⁰³ “But under the *sensus communis* we must include the idea of a sense *common to all*, i.e. of a faculty of judgment which, in its reflection, takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought, in order, as it were, to compare its judgment with the collective reason of humanity, and thus to escape the illusion arising from the private conditions that could be so easily taken for objective, which would injuriously affect the judgment. This is done by comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man, by abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment.” (Kant 1951, 136; italics in orig.)

oneself in the position of others. This kind of other-regarding, enlarged mentality is an important feature of genuine politics.¹⁰⁴ Thought this way, Arendt approaches again the deliberative theory in a sense that aesthetic and political judgment requires continuous process of communication and deliberation that goes on 'without final criteria.' Judgment does not necessitate any transcendental basis for appearances nor universally valid criteria of rationality. "Practical questions emphatically *do not* admit of truth" (Villa 1992b, 298). Yet, political-aesthetic judgment helps tame the *agon* by creating connections between plurality and deliberation (the idea is that differences need not be exceeded and eradicated), "by showing how the activity of judgment can, potentially, reveal to an audience what they have in common in the process of articulating their differences" (ibid.), and what they have in common is the world. The acting and judging self here is of a decentered kind. When judging, man discloses himself to the public, revealing what kind of a person he is, and this disclosure gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncracies (Arendt 1993, 227).

We should understand, of course, the wider political and historical context of Arendt's theory. It was intended as a critique of modern alienation and the rise of the mass society and its 'laboring mentality' (see the argument in Arendt 1958, chapter three). Arendt did understand it impossible to sustain stable boundaries between different spheres of action, but she was adamant in wanting to keep alive the memory of another kind of (political) world. In Arendt's conception, true politics is an unfortunately rare occasion. But what I have found important in Arendt's theory for the present discussion is her understanding of action as aesthetic performance which does not rely on ready-made structures and processes but is more contextual, creative and enabling, and therefore conducive to aesthetic-political judgment. However, I'm not with Arendt (nor with Ranciere) in assuming that true politics is a rare moment. Rather, my approach to politics is much more mundane. I see everyday political activities and struggles as 'genuine politics,' even when they are not so intensified. Political performances represent, as I have argued throughout this study, exception and disruption in political routines, but they, too, are frequent political events, not rare historical moments.

¹⁰⁴ The idea of enlarged thought is Kant's. He notes: "However small may be the area or the degree to which a man's natural gifts reach, yet it indicates a man of *enlarged thought* if he disregards the subjective private conditions of his own judgment, by which so many others are confined, and reflects upon it from a *universal standpoint* (which he can only determine by placing himself at the standpoint of others)." (Op.cit., 137; italics in orig.)

Moreover, I do not accept that political judgment should follow the lead of Kantian aesthetics and be linked with ‘disinterestedness in objects.’ Disinterestedness can hardly be regarded the only key to understanding otherness and enlarging mentality. It does not, for example, account for the fact that we often identify with the experience of ‘the other,’ whether joyful or painful, only after sharing it and taking it to our heart. This kind of personal ‘taking to heart’ of other people’s experiences and viewpoints would seem to denote a good extent of ‘interestedness,’ not its lack. (This is what, for instance, the Clothesline Project’s public displays have often accomplished.)

Theodor Adorno makes the same point in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1984). He takes up and criticizes Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment for trying to locate aesthetic quality in art’s impact on the spectator (this is the rationalist tradition). He thinks the doctrine of disinterested satisfaction as impoverished in view of the richness of aesthetic phenomena. It reduces them either to the formally beautiful or, in the case of natural objects, to the sublime. (Op.cit., 14)

“His [Kant’s] aesthetics presents the paradox of a castrated hedonism, of a theory of pleasure without pleasure. This position fails to do justice either to artistic experience wherein satisfaction is a subordinate moment in a larger whole, or to the material-corporeal interest, i.e. repressed and unsatisfied needs that resonate in their aesthetic negations – the works of art – turning them into something more than empty patterns.” (Op.cit., 16)

Adorno’s evaluation of Kant’s aesthetic theory is rather harsh, but I think it hits the point rather well.

We will next take a look at the political events in Serbia in the 1990s for an illustration of the artistic and aesthetic qualities of political performances. The case is especially stirring because the political actors themselves explicitly recognized in the events and actions aesthetic qualities, especially theatrical ones, and also exploited them purposefully in order to influence political developments. Through this example we will be able to see in concrete way what aesthetic politics in Ranciere’s sense, as struggle over the boundaries of the visible reality, can be like.

5.5. Politics as 'theatre of the absurd'

During the 1990s, the streets of the major Serbian cities staged frequent public protests against the regime of President Slobodan Milošević.¹⁰⁵ Protests became daily in November 1996 when the centrist democratic coalition *Zajedno* ('Together') won the local elections, the results of which the electoral commission refused to sanction. Subsequent to months of mass demonstrations, the electoral victory of *Zajedno* was officially acknowledged in February 1997. Protests did not stop here but continued with varying vigour around Serbia for several years, demanding (unsuccessfully) Milošević's resignation. Only after the student-led *Otpor* ('Resistance') movement managed to mobilize disparate opposition groups into a joint mass movement in the fall of 2000, following Milošević's refusal to acknowledge the opposition's victory in the presidential elections, the regime reached its final crisis and crumbled in October 2000.¹⁰⁶

According to protestors, politics in Serbia in the 1990s became 'theatre of the absurd' (Jestrovic 2000). Theatrical metaphors were frequently employed by the protestors and proved an important symbolic resource for the movement. They were used to denote both the 'theatrical politics' of Milošević's government as well as the activities of the opposition who used theatrical protest events to gain public visibility and unite people politically. Theatre became the central means of doing politics, even quite literally, when the theatre houses opened their doors to the opposition's meetings and when actors and theatre directors joined, and on many occasions led, the street protests. (Op.cit.)

The recurring protests of the winter 1996-1997 offer one example of this theatre-like action. Every evening during the state-controlled TV news, thousands of people in Belgrad joined noisy actions against the government. People clung pots and pans from their windows, honked their car horns, and blew whistles and other instruments,

¹⁰⁵ Protests related to a critique, especially by students, young professionals, and part of the intelligentsia, against Milošević's nationalist policies, lack of democratic rights, and Serbia's deteriorating economy. About the political background of Serbia in the 1990s, see Pappas 2005.

¹⁰⁶ In 2001 Milošević was arrested and taken to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague to be tried for crimes against humanity in Kosovo and Croatia and for genocide and other crimes in Bosnia. He died in 2006 while jailed.

symbolically displacing the ‘voice’ of the government and replacing it with the voice of the people. People also joined silent public walks around the city, particularly around the parliament house, to symbolize their reclaiming of public space and civil freedoms. Protestors lit the streets with candles and fireworks so as to ‘break through the darkness’ to which the country had been thrown. (Keane 1998, 1-2)

Many of the protest performances involved disfiguring images of Milošević. For example, in 1996 one group took to the busy business streets of Belgrad a performance which they named ‘Faluserbia.’ The group pushed around a wheelbarrow carrying a red painted piece of ‘sculpture,’ an enormous erect penis with a photograph of Milošević attached to it. A member of the group spoke to a megaphone inviting people to join the pageant: “Citizens, this is the unique opportunity to feel, touch and kiss the symbol of creative power of Serbia!” A woman with bare breasts, with her head covered by a hood, danced around the statue, stroking and kissing it. After a while, the performance transformed into a procession when a number of by-passers joined it, walking behind the wheel-barrow and mimicking the gestures of the performers. The performance ended when the police arrived on the scene and arrested the performers.¹⁰⁷

Like in other examples of this study, the body and visibility figured strongly in the Serbian performances. This is not surprising given that the opposition politics had no other means to present its resistance (the media were under the control of Milošević’s government). To get noticed and to get their critical message ‘out there,’ protestors had to take their resistance to the streets. What is special about this case is that the protestors themselves very perceptively and knowingly read the on-going political events in aesthetic terms. They frequently used the metaphor of the theater when referring to their actions and protests. This attests to their use of what was titled above as art-like performance. Performances are art, we pointed out, when they are placed in public space in order to be seen and judged by the public. In the Serbian context, the street dwellers had no problem in recognizing that the disruptive performances, with their sometimes rather imaginative make-up, were meant as public critique, where such critique was not supposed to be. We already noted this connection between protest

¹⁰⁷ Photos of this performance can be accessed e.g. at: <http://www.021.rs/Vodic/Muzeji-i-izlozbe/FOTO-Uskoro-izlozba-Nuneta-Popovica.html>. Accessed December 15, 2011. For more examples of the myriad protests and public performances in the 1990s Serbia, see Jestrovic 2000; Sorensen 2008; Steinberg 2004.

politics and carnivalistic theatricality when we discussed the White Overalls' performance in Prague. Scholars in Performance and New Social Movements studies have paid attention to how direct political action in the streets increasingly makes use of carnivalesque elements to create ambiguous and unruly sociality among people to interrupt the norms of the official political culture (for an excellent exposition and discussion of such 'protestival' action, especially in the context of Global Days of Action events, see St John 2008).

In the Serbian political conditions, the metaphor of the theatre became important in two ways. First, it helped disclose to the public the 'made' character of the political reality, visualizing and making accessible the idea that 'politics is only theatre,' a performance or performativity that can be evaluated critically, which made it possible to judge the actions of the regime as 'made' re/presentations. This perspective helped to challenge the normality and legitimacy of the regime. Second, the opposition presented and understood its own resistance in theatrical terms as well, posing for a moment the everyday life as 'acted;' this enabled experimentation with new political ideas and types of 'imagined community.' In other words, when people conceptualized their own life as a theatrical play, they could write alternative plots and turns of events to it. This is why theatre has often been seen such a fitting environment and means for social-political critique and innovation (this is very markedly so e.g. in the theatrical work of Augusto Boal; see e.g. Boal 1998 and 2000). Theatre utilizes material directly from ordinary life and works it into something new, with which the spectators and participants can identify with, at least experimentally during the performance.

How did the Serbian protests communicate in aesthetic terms? How did they envision alternative politics and seek to redefine the 'partitioning of the sensible world'? Think, for instance, about the daily kettle banging from the windows during the evening news, or the silent marches around the parliament building (the latter were, we might note, an illustrative example of the way protestors tried to 'look back' at power where and when they were not supposed to). We can distinguish between two forms of aestheticized politics here: Milošević's aestheticized vision of Serbian history and Serbian culture (Erjavec & Volčič 2009, 128), and the disruptive, outspokenly anti-Milošević performances of the opposition. Milošević's (in fact, rare) speeches and spectacular public appearances aimed at restoring and exploiting the former ethnic conflicts of the

Balkan area. He used rhetorics and visualization to portray other nationalities as enemies against which the Serbs, subject to many historical injustices in the past centuries (as well as in the Tito era), had all the right to campaign (about Milošević's charismatic leadership and Serbian nationalism, see e.g. Pappas 2005; Bieber 2002).

The aesthetic politics of the opposition, in turn, voiced open criticism and ridicule towards Milošević's nationalistic project. In the Faluserbia performance the rise of the Serbian nationalist politics was identified with an erect fallos desired and adored by women. The performance was, to be sure, totally improper and ridiculous (as intended) but it did manage to draw people's attention to its critique towards the government all the while stimulating also irritated responses from the public. This action once again placed itself 'in your face,' disclosing in the process the police order of the society, which showed up literally when the police arrived to arrest the performers.

To the audience the performance was challenging in its offensiveness. 'As only art' it could almost be ignored (in a sense of showing bad taste), but not *quite*.¹⁰⁸ The performance had an unmistakable political undertone that managed to provoke at least some reactions in the audience. Some spectators joined the procession, participating in the open mockery of the government, while others rejected it. Performances like this 'demonstrate'¹⁰⁹ that there is an implicit (or sometimes frighteningly explicit) order in society which determines what is accepted as normal and what is not.

We should yet again keep in mind that the outcomes and effects of political performances are precarious. It cannot be known in advance how they will be received and what direction the political development will take later on. In Serbia it took for almost ten years before the opposition managed to mobilize enough support for the movement and turn it into a convincing political force which eventually brought down

¹⁰⁸ Sorensen (2008) makes the same point in her analysis of the use of humor in the 1990s protests in Serbia, especially in the Otpor movement.

¹⁰⁹ See Chaloupka's (1993) interesting discussion on the two understandings of demonstration. On the one hand, to demonstrate means to 'point out, make known, describe, explain.' In this sense demonstrating protesters want to make known their points and interests which already exist and motivate their action. On the other hand, to demonstrate can also refer, as derived from the French *demontrer* and *montrer*, to the demonstration as a 'show.' Demonstration in this sense is not a description or an explanation but more like a defiant exposure: "[T]he protestor's usage moves toward the contingent realm of strategies and emotions. Here demonstration does not establish objectivity and logic, so much as it shows up the objective order, assertively getting in the way." (Op.cit., 147)

the regime. For several years the opposition remained weakly organized and without widespread public support. It did not have enough 'cultural leverage' to challenge the police order despite frequent spurs of cultural activism (open political opposition was regularly suppressed). It took until the turn of the 2000 for the Otpor to succeed in mobilizing large scale popular support for its anti-government campaign.¹¹⁰ One of the factors that helped the movement in this task was the effective use of visual significations in their communication, especially the raised black fist that became the movement's identifying marker and symbol.¹¹¹ It required yet another set of developments, the war in Kosovo and Milošević's refusal to accept the results of the 2000 presidential elections, before the regime reached its final crisis and broke down.

We can now rehearse several basic points about the aesthetic features of political performances.

a) The aestheticity of performances is based on trying to expose the existing political reality (the police order) and to configure for the public 'eye' an alternative political reality. Analysis must then pay attention to what kind of 'figures' (or in Ranciere's language, partitionings) performances present and how they attempt to get visibly in the way of the regime in power. Often it is only through the public exposure of disruptive performances that it becomes apparent which figures in society are taken as naturalized and acceptable. Only when they have been disclosed to the public can they be thematized, judged, and reconfigured.

¹¹⁰ On the demographic and ideological background of the supporters of Zajedno and Otpor, see Steinberg (2004, 12-13). It should be noted here that the anti-Milošević sentiments were not at all unanimously shared in Serbia. He had supporters especially in rural population, blue collar workers and managers. The opposition was characteristically of urban origin, consisting mainly of the youth, the students and the centre-liberal groups. Moreover, Milošević's charismatic leadership as the 'savior' of the Serbian nation still continues to appeal to large a large part of the Serbian society (see e.g. Erjavec and Volčič, 2009, for a discussion on the coverage of Milošević's life, regime, and death in the Serbian media).

¹¹¹ Visual markers such as the fist were not the only means of making the movement publicly noticeable and of attracting public support. Sorensen (2008) has analyzed the use of humor in the actions of the Otpor, both inside the movement as well as in its relations to the general public. Steinberg (2004) has examined the role of rock music in the 1996-1997 and 2000 protest actions of the students. He notes: "In their collective action repertoire rock music became an aesthetic technology for constructing collective identity, providing mattering maps, and accentuated the framing of oppositional politics. In effect, rock was a soundtrack for the story that students told of their collective resistance." (Op.cit., 19)

Many researchers have recently paid attention to how a bulk of current political struggles are fought chiefly on aesthetic grounds. Performances can be likened to cultural activism which aims at change by affecting the partitioning of the sensible and people's awareness of it. Cultural activism understands the dynamics of social change differently than traditionally. Its basic precept is that when you want to change politics, you first need to change the culture which defines the outlines of what can be seen, thought, and done (Lattunen 2007, 294; see also Gripsrud 2008).

b) We ought to bear in mind that aesthetics and ethics are closely related spheres of experience and judgment. Encounters with the environment demand our reactions, judgments, and actions. Therefore we continuously judge our experiences as to whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, just or unjust, and so on. The various 'figures' – material objects, symbols, ideas, common imageries – between us (as in Arendt's common in-between world) are aesthetic and ethical simultaneously, through them we communicate and negotiate what is generally acceptable. Welsch's (1997) conception of the aes/thetics refers exactly to this dual-faced character of aesthetic judgment, and this was also Arendt's idea, presented in different terms, when linking aesthetic and political judgment.

Accordingly, I do not accept that aesthetic politics or the communication of performances is *equivalent* (or reducible) to the use of emotional influence in marketing political ideas. Instead, I have attempted to show what kind of significance performances can have as stimulators of political imagination. The aesthetic expression of performances acts as a means of moral judgment because imagination, our ability to set ourselves in the position of another, is the key to morality, and art in turn is a key to imagination (Lattunen op.cit., 285-288). This way aestheticity approaches its etymological meaning which refers to perception and understanding. In Greek, *aisthanomai* means perceiving through bodily senses as well as mental perception and understanding.

c) This conception of aesthetic politics is very different from Habermas's view which understands by communication first and foremost speech aimed at making, examining, and redeeming validity claims. Habermas distinguishes aesthetic-expressive validity claims as their own genre and believes that reaching agreement on them in discourse is

difficult because they refer to subjective feelings and experiences. From my point of view such a distinction does not really make sense because speech (or presentation and evaluation of facts and norms) cannot be separated from perception, and perception is unavoidably aesthetic activity. Objective validity claims, too, concern the world in-between us. By making validity claims about the objective world, people typically seek in their communication to visualize that world in order to make their point ‘come across’ (across the common space). But even without apparent visualizations, all communication from production of sounds to the use of symbols denotes in-between aesthetic action which we cannot but keep re/producing and judging from one moment to the next. Should we stop doing that, there would be no society, no common world.

Like cultural activism, political performances operate with imagination both to revive moral considerations (deliberation) and to expand the limits of what can be thought. Performances act on the sphere of assumptions, creatively (re)working with the central symbols and practices of society, attempting to present them in a new light (see Reinsborough 2003). “The final goal of cultural activism is building completely novel eyeglasses through which the reality is shown ever more sharply” (Lattunen op.cit., 297).¹¹² This goal is likely to be never reached as such, but pursuing it is the inevitable sphere of aesthetic political struggle.

Let me conclude by this summarizing note. In this chapter I have argued that political performance can be approached as aesthetic communication. My basic point has been that all political expression is aesthetic, but in the case of performances their aestheticity is underlined because they typically present disruptive and sensually intensive material. The aestheticity of political performances is noticeable because it comes ‘in our face,’ insisting that we notice and react to it.

¹¹² ”Kulttuurisen aktivismin lopullisena päämääränä ovat kokonaan uudet silmälasit, joiden läpi todellisuus näyttäytyy entistä terävämpänä.” (Translation TR)

“[I]n today’s culture, police and politicians can’t hide their actions as easily as before. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, or so it’s said. Today’s sun is the light of a camcorder or video phone. The people have the power. Use it.”

”Truth to power,” blogs.ink19.com
(Accessed November 17, 2006)

6. Performance in/for the media?

6.1. Suspicious mediatization

So far I have studied political performance from three perspectives: as corporeal, visual, and aesthetic communication. Our observation has been that especially in conditions where people feel that other spaces of communication are marginal or non-existent, political performance can offer an alternative channel for public communication and action. Yet, as we have noted on several occasions, the reception and consequences of such communication are always insecure.

Until now the work has progressed under the implicit assumption that political performance represents direct, non-mediated communication. Now it is time to tackle with this assumption. Namely, it is quite plausible to argue that approaching political performances as non-mediated communication is unrealistic or even misleading under the current conditions of globalized institutionalized media. In practice, most political performances gain public attention not in direct contact with people in the streets but through the media. This prompts the critical question how this relationship affects performative communication; that is, how far is it conditioned by the fact that it is so closely related to the media? There is, after all, strong research evidence pointing out that political actors have keen media interests and often carefully planned media strategies. Think for example about an organization like Greenpeace which routinely exercises performative communication to attract widest possible media attention. But it is not only activist organizations like Greenpeace that are oriented to media publicity. Many of the most notable social and political movements of the 20th century from the early century’s suffragette movement (Green 1997) to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Rhodes 2001) and the environmental movements of the last couple of

decades (Juppi 2004) have put out their actions in full knowledge of that ‘the whole world is watching’ (Gitlin 1980). With this background in mind, should we not approach and understand public political performances realistically as publicity seeking action with possibly manipulative political intentions?

Suspensions and questions of this sort can be linked to the discussions that have been waged for many years around the mediatization of politics and the politicization of media and, related to these, around the ‘entertainmentization’ of both politics and media (Karvonen 2008). Studies have paid attention to the growing power of the media to set agendas. In these conditions, political actors seeking publicity must be able to present themselves and their agendas so visibly and impressively that they get noticed by the media. From the democratic point of view, one of the tricky consequences has been that political actors too have had to adjust to such ‘media logic’ (see e.g. Meyer 2002). According to critics, this has increased the individualizing and entertainmentizing tendencies of politics, even its depolitization. For example Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 6) suggests that: “These mechanisms work in concert to produce a general effect of depoliticization or, more precisely, disenchantment with politics. -- [W]hen politics raises an important but unmistakably boring question, the search for entertainment focuses attention on a spectacle (or a scandal) every time.”

Such developments have made the friends of democracy weary. Their worry is that when people prefer being entertained instead of getting informed, there are no audiences left for serious political issues. Moreover, since entertainment is often closely linked with economic interests, the danger is that its increase leads to the impoverishment of perspectives from which political issues are treated in public. Instead of giving space for a plurality of voices, the media may want to prioritize contents which attract high ratings. Such arguments are nothing new, to be sure. The 20th century thinking has hosted many other similar critiques against the modern mass culture. For example, the critical analyses of the modern mass culture by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Antonio Gramsci carried the assumption that the Western culture is getting ever more standardized and entertainmentized, which in effect turns potentially active people into passive consumers (see the discussion in Anttila et al. 2008). Later for example Neil Postman (1987) argued that television has brought forth a new way of defining reality and truth which has displaced the old epistemology based on the printed word.

Television speaks with the ‘voice of entertainment’ which spreads everywhere in society, bringing all other modes of knowing under the logic of entertainment industry.

Nevertheless, even if this line of discussion is important for social science, I am not following suit in this study. As a matter of fact, my starting point is quite the opposite. I want to question the (basically moralistic) assumption that politicians and other public figures should avoid using entertaining qualities like theatricality in their presentations and instead strive towards personal ‘authenticity’ when appearing before the public. This presumption of authentic self-presentation affects, and this is one of my central contentions, the norms of public communication so that presentations which follow other criteria, like political performances usually do, easily appear suspect.

The argument of this chapter proceeds in three steps. First, instead of assuming that public presentation should be personal and authentic instead of actorly, my question is: why should this be so? Why should public political presentation be tied to *these* norms of presentation and communication? I will try to show, by reference to the work of Richard Sennett and Michel Foucault, their historicity. Like Sennett (or Arendt) I understand political performances as specifically *public* expressions not intended to replicate the norms of communication of the private life, even if distinguishing between public and private is, by no means, a simple matter, as we have seen throughout this study.¹¹³ They are, rather, reminiscent of the kind of communication that was born along modern urbanization where the new city dwellers developed certain performative codes of conduct (commonly shared visual and verbal markings) in order to get along in an environment that was crowded with people unknown to one another. What was, and is, at stake was ‘figuring out’ (again, quite concretely) the common political world with its shape, norms, and agencies.

Secondly, I will briefly dwell into the concept of the media. I want to critique the dominant definition of the media in terms of mass media and try to open it up as a complex mix of ‘in-between communication.’ My understanding is that any communication-carrying technology from speech to images, dress, body language, and

¹¹³ Moreover, if we accept the argument referred to in chapter one, we cannot take the ‘personas’ of the private life as authentic presentations either (as we noted there, etymologically the person refers to a mask). Then we must also accept that a certain degree of performativity/performance characterizes all human action.

performances, which communicate and negotiate meanings, can be understood as media. Moreover, in modern circumstances we have to take note of the fact that different media continuously overlap and attach to one another which makes their reception and interpretation an extremely complicated process. This leads to two things: first, no media (e.g. TV) can entirely co-opt another media (e.g. performances), which entails that different media have at least some degree of autonomy. And secondly, media do not have self-evident and unidirectional effects. When, for example, the news media report on a particular public performance, their coverage cannot fully subsume it under the media's own frames and terms. At least some of its bodily, visual, and aesthetic elements 'come through' the coverage. Political performance, in turn, can incorporate elements from other media (pictures, images, text, video footage etc.) with their special characteristics. Different media interact, overlap, and influence one another in a way where one media is not able to totalize another's meanings. This is good to remember when we talk about mediatization and presume that it conforms to a single logic which defines all communication. I do not think this is true even in conditions where the mass media have become ever more globalized and commercialized.

The third central point of this chapter relates to the second. Critical media research has argued for decades that commercialized media structures are unconducive to political participation and collective action (see e.g. Habermas's classic position in *Strukturwandel*, 1989). Even though this view has lately been questioned by other researchers pointing out that popular culture and entertainment can also generate political communities and empower political involvement instead of making people automatically passive (see Anttila et al. 2008; Richards 2004¹¹⁴), there is an overall agreement that citizens and non-institutionalized political actors have an uneasy access to the mainstream media. From this perspective, the development of the new electronic

¹¹⁴ Barry Richards notes that politics is nowadays increasingly interwoven with popular culture and argues that political communications (by professionals, especially politicians, towards the public) have failed to meet the emotional needs of the culturally disintegrating audiences. "The unpopularity of politics can be attributed in part to the failure of political actors -- and of the professional communicators they work with, to respond and adapt sufficiently to the ways in which popular culture has now transformed society. -- In particular, there is an emotional deficit in contemporary political communications, a lack of crafted, sustained attention to the emotional needs of the audience." (Richards 2004, 342) In fact, Richards is here promoting the kind of intimizing of politics which Sennett and Foucault criticize. While my argument in this study has been that political theory lacks understanding of the bodily-emotional dimensions of political action, which are crucial for comprehending performative communication, I do not find Richards' professionally attuned emotional politics a very convincing alternative.

media, especially the recently popularized social technologies of the internet, appear particularly interesting. In the last section of this chapter I will discuss one example of how performative communication figures on these new virtual communicative arenas (not entirely unproblematically, as we will see).

6.2. Public life and the tyranny of intimacy: Sennett and Foucault

While the basic intention of this work has not been to present a historical argument about the development of performative communication and politics, here I want to engage in a brief backward looking excursion in order to back up my argument that the present norms governing public presentation have a history and that there is, subsequently, nothing natural and inevitable about them (see Alexander & Mast 2006, 6-7). Through such an undertaking we will be able to put different paradigms of public presentation in perspective and take a critical view at them. In the following discussion I will refer to two well-known discussions on the subject by Richard Sennett and Michel Foucault. While their starting points and knowledge interests differ from one another, both ends up making a rather analogous analysis of how the norms of public presentation in the modern society have developed into what they are today.¹¹⁵

Let us begin with Sennett's analysis. In his well-known *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), Richard Sennett examines changes in European public life and public expression from the mid 18th century to the late 19th century. Sennett's central claim is that the modern society has become so privatized that intimacy virtually tyrannicizes public life (op.cit., 5). In order to understand the roots of this state of affairs, he engages in a historical reconstruction of the development of the modes of public life in Europe. Sennett's interest is especially in the relationship between public space and social conduct. He looks into questions like how architecture has determined the uses of public space and how theatre as a space and mode of presentation has intertwined with public life on the streets and cafes. Like Foucault, Sennett's focus is in living practices and 'behavior', and he counts himself in the 'performance school' within sociology (Sennett 2008).

¹¹⁵ In the end of the 1970s, Sennett's and Foucault's research interests also converged, in relation to the interest of both in the role of sexuality in the construction of modern subjectivity (see the Sennett/Foucault exchange 1982).

Sennett pays attention to the emerging common forms and codes of public conduct and argues that they became necessary when large numbers of people moved to cities. City dwellers needed visible signs through which to present themselves, their social status and intentions, to people unknown to them. Speech and gestures were to be ‘read’ in ways that linked them to a common code and distanced them from the *person* making them. Sennett (op.cit., 49) points out:

“[S]trangers in a more amorphous milieu have a more complex problem, one of arousing belief by how they behave in a situation where no one is really sure what appropriate standards of behavior for a given sort of person are: in this -- case, one solution is for people to create, borrow, or imitate behavior which all agree to treat arbitrarily as “proper” and “believable” in their encounters. The behavior is at a distance from everyone’s personal circumstances, and so does not force people to attempt to define to each other who they are.”

This can also be judged as the precondition of modern politics *per se*, since in large cities political action could no longer be based on personal relationships alone (Szerszynski 2003). City people behaved like actors in a play, as it were.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in the early days of modern publicity, it was public life which was considered to constitute the sphere of freedom. In public ‘man’ could express himself more freely and creatively than in the ‘natural sphere’ which was to take care of the everyday necessities of life (op.cit., 23).¹¹⁷

Sennett then outlines the contours of a change in public presentation which occurred during the 19th century and which gradually turned around the norms and practices of public life. Impersonal presentation of oneself (which made a distinction between man’s private and public roles) gave way to *representation of personality*, which stressed man’s public expression of himself and his ‘true feelings.’ “What was perceived when people watched someone behave in public was his intentions, his character, so that the truth of what he said appeared to depend on what kind of person he was.” (Op.cit., 25) This was no simple requirement for people’s conduct in public, and the result was that public life withered when men started to avoid making ‘distinctive appearances;’ it was

¹¹⁶ Living up to such an ‘actorly’ mode of public presentation was no coincidence. Theatre had, in fact, a considerable role in defining the nature of the early urban life and providing the model for organizing its social relations and ways of communication.

¹¹⁷ Arendt had made this distinction before Sennett, but he does not refer to Arendt here.

way easier for crowds of people to try and look alike. “Silence in public became the only way one could experience public life, especially street life, without feeling overwhelmed” (op.cit., 27). Public expression became the prerogative of professional artists and politicians, while people at large became ‘silent spectators’ of politics, which was a notable cultural change compared to the much more participatory public expression of the previous century. Hence, “in modern society, people have become actors without an art. Society and social relations may continue to be abstractly imagined in dramatic terms, but men have ceased themselves to perform.” (Op.cit., 313, 314)

During this period the general conception of self and identity began to change. An idea gained popularity that there is an authentic core to every person which can be revealed to others. With this belief there emerged the distinction that has had such a peculiar role in modern culture: a difference between ‘genuine’ representation of personality versus the ‘fake’ and actorly way of presentation. According to Sennett, this conception eventually led to the tyranny of intimacy, the belief that social distance between people should be transcended so that frankness and intimacy of human relationships could flourish (cf. our discussion on the meanings of communication in chapter two). Sennett (op.cit., 5) argues that there is a confusion between public and intimate life. People are working out in terms of personal feelings public matters which properly can only be dealt with through impersonal codes. To Sennett, the problem with this kind of personalized publicity is that when social values are centered on the ideal of personal warmth, greater social and political ends are lost; “we have come to care about institutions and events only when we can discern personalities at work in them or embodying them” (op.cit., 338). Political interaction is replaced by mediated, especially televisual, forms of communication which constitute people as onlookers to public life instead of participants.

Let me then turn for a moment to Foucault, and especially to his argument in *The History of Sexuality* (1990). Foucault’s focus on the powerful ‘sexualisation’ of the modern subject differs notably from Sennett’s research interests, yet his conclusion about the role of intimacy in modern life is very similar to Sennett’s. Foucault, too, brings up the growing importance of the *self* for the modern society. That society is curiously fascinated by the constitution of the self and seeks, through the multitude of

medical, therapeutic, and religious discourses circling around him, to discover the ‘truth’ – believed to be based on a person’s hidden sexuality – underlying its visible surface. In order to reveal this sexual undercurrent, the society has developed a host of confessional practices which the subjects are expected to follow in order to count as credible and acknowledgeable social actors. This confessional intimacy, as we might call it, is an important principle of the late 20th century media publicity. While Foucault never specifically analysed the genealogy of the modern media, we can assume that media publicity has had an integral part in the evolution of the modern power (and, more specifically, in the evolution of the technologies of ‘governmentality’ and ‘biopower’).

Foucault’s thesis is that sexuality was invented as an instrument in the service of biopower (related to the need to control populations). Rather than seeing the last centuries as a history of growing repression of sexuality, he suggests that there was a dramatic, unprecedented rise in discussing, writing and thinking about sex in the 19th century. This discourse posed sex as a drive so powerful and irrational that dramatic forms of individual self-examination and collective control were imperative in order to keep those forces leashed. “Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytic discourses. In the eighteenth century, sex became a police matter.” (Foucault 1990, 24) Sexuality became an individual matter, the very essence of an individual human being. The idea emerged that it is possible to know the secrets of the body and the mind through the mediation of doctors, psychiatrists, and other specialists, to whom people should reveal their most private thoughts and practices (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982, 171).

Through the deployment of sexuality, biopower invaded both the body and the psyche of modern subjects. This was accomplished through a specific technology, confession of the individual subject, both in personal self-reflection and in public speech. This profound interest in confessional practices did not concern only sexuality and its politicization. The modern conception of the self with the practices that normalize it, of which confession is one the most important, has penetrated everywhere in society and its spheres of activities. As Foucault (op.cit., 59) notes:

“The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships and love relationships, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles... Western man has become a confessing animal.”

Even though Foucault does not identify it here separately, the demand for personal confession has strongly characterized the media practices as well. This has directly influenced (or so I argue) the way in which political performance as public communication has been received and interpreted – with difficulty, as we have pointed out on several occasions. Namely, performative communication conflicts markedly with the ways of public presentation which focus on the individual and his/her (hidden) potentialities. This is noticed also by Bronislaw Szerszynski (2003), who utilizes Sennett’s distinction between presentation (showing, acting) and representation (re-acting, making visible what is not present) in interpreting the use of political signs of modern environmental protest movements. According to Szerszynski, protest movements use conspicuous visual marking in the construction of their identity in order to distinguish themselves from other political actors and to communicate effectively to the wider society. As Szerszynski sees it, environmental protest movements present themselves much like the actors of the early urban Europe did, utilizing a rich amount of visual semiotics in their communication. (On the other hand, their public action is politically motivated and in that sense differs from the ‘social acting’ of the 18th century.) This pretty much equals how I approach and interpret public political performances and their style of public communication.

I suggest that we can talk about (at least) two different styles or paradigms of public presentation between which we can detect a tension: a) actorly presentation of self and politics, and b) personalised (re)presentation of the authentic self. The current social and media norms have naturalized especially the latter, for reasons that have to do with, if we accept Foucault’s analysis, the practices and objectives of modern power. The style of actorly presentation is, in contrast, a much more challenging mode of communication (in ways and for reasons that have been explicated in the previous chapters). Yet, I would like to maintain that actorly presentation is important in that it engenders space for public citizenship, the core idea of which is to cross over the personal level and

make it possible for people to gather together in some *public quality*. This, we can argue, is a *sine qua non* condition of modern democratic citizenship.

In light of the discussion above we can now reconsider the performance/media relationship. If the generally accepted norm is that public presentation should be based on the disclosure of authentic personality, then performative political communication with its theatrical and conspicuously aesthetic forms of presentation, which often seek to dissolve personality features rather than highlight them, must seem odd. For political authorities and the media, the problem with public political performances is that they seem to try to hide the ‘who’ behind them, along with this who’s ‘real interests.’ Within the current norms of publicity, it is indeed difficult to conceive and accept that the central issue with political performances (at least from the point of view of the performers) is what they are trying to *show* about the limits of political reality, not the persons and personalities ‘behind’ the acts (St John, 2008, addresses this point succinctly).

To come back to the argument presented in the beginning: I do not automatically regard performances’ ‘inauthenticity’ as a problem. Rather, what we need to understand is that there are always some operative norms in society which define what kind of public expression is acceptable and what is not. The question is not about ‘sham’ performances but about what kind of conceptions and norms govern public presentation. We should know these conceptions better in order to be able to receive and judge the various paradigms of public presentation.

6.3. Public action in/for the media

If in the previous section we concentrated on outlining what the media today require from public presentation, in this section we move on to reconsider the concept of the media itself. My expectation is that through such reconsideration we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between communication and media. It is generally accepted, and we can start from this idea, that in the modern media structures the social and political actors’ access to publicity has been limited. After all, the media both chooses, frames, and interprets the elements of the reality they report on. The

public in turn interpret further this already interpreted and framed media material. It should be clear that these mediating mechanisms complicate also the possibilities of political performances to communicate. Since access (in the pressure of the journalistic news criteria) to public agenda has been limited, political actors and events have had to employ spectacular means in order to attract media attention. We can therefore wonder if performances are destined to scandalize audiences without any possibility to control the communicative process? (E.g. Cho, 2005, makes a note on this when she discusses the possibility of ‘body communication.’) Are they, by the same token, forced into a problematic relationship with the public because they so rarely get to ‘speak’ to people directly?

We can respond to these worries in several ways. First, we should acknowledge from the outset that performances are not meant to ‘shock’ people due to adoption to the media logic (or at least this is, by far, the only way to understand public performances). We should rather approach their communication in the opposite way and see that the very purpose of performances is to break routines and turn people’s attention to something extraordinary. This is the case be there journalists on the spot to report their actions or not. Second, we can refer to the observation made by the more recent media research, according to which the way media messages are received is an extremely complicated give-and-take social and political process, not something the media can control without problems. Third, we need to take a closer look at the concept of the media itself and notice that it is not a single construction, not even in its guise as modern media industry.

Ridell et al. (2006) remind usefully of the etymological versatility of the concept media. First, media is the plural form of the Latin *medium*, which has many meanings. Most commonly it refers to something existing in the middle (in terms of distance, time interval, and physical or metaphysical intermediate substance). Already in antiquity, media was used in maxims to refer to something publicly on view, like *in medio esse*, to be in the middle and therefore accessible to all. For quite a while, however, media has been used to signify the modern mass media, and the plural form is used even when reference is being made to only one (type of) media like television or a newspaper. The concept has therefore established its reference to a particular structure of modern

communication which has narrowed down possibilities to conceptualize media in more general terms through its nature as an in-between phenomenon.¹¹⁸

Moreover, in philosophical terms we can think about medium/media as something producing and structuring being in the world, a phenomenon mediating between the subject and the object, spirit and matter, me and others. Here medium is conceptualized as a conditioning structure where language, signs, and technical systems appear as *a priori* conditions of the world.

”This way our relationship to ourselves and to others would be organized entirely within the conditions of different media systems. -- Experience, communication and understanding on the whole do not exist but through some kind of medium. The world is given to us as a world only when it is ‘in-between’” (Ridell et al., op.cit., 19).¹¹⁹

Approached this way, media can be seen as creating and simultaneously constraining ways of perceiving and conceiving the world including images, words, sounds, and their constellations. ”The constellations of images, words and sounds work as technically, semiotically, aesthetically or politically charged mediations or ‘in-between media,’ which open up, reveal something, and at the same time leave something out” (op.cit., 20).¹²⁰ Facial expressions, gestures, and spoken language can each be thought of as communicating media.

I suggest we open up and approach media in the aforementioned terms, conceiving the different communication ‘technologies’ as media which at the same time structure and mediate the common world to us. We can take political performance as one type of media which produces and carries communication (cf. Downing 2001 and 2003).

¹¹⁸ Medium and media can be given two further dimensions of meaning, both of which articulate their ‘in-between’ character. Media has often been conceptualized as a means of transmission of messages (as ‘mediation’). In the previous centuries this transmission was understood principally as a mental thing but in the course of the 20th century it began to be seen more in technical terms. The third dimension relates media to something existing in the middle of opposite parties and getting involved in their relationship. Here media implies acting as a ‘mediator’ or arbitrator. All three dimensions implicate the existence of space, making it possible for something to occur between two or more actors or parties.

¹¹⁹ ”Näin meidän suhteemme itseemme ja muihin jäsentyisivät yksinomaan erilaisten mediajärjestelmien luomissa mahdollisuusehdoissa. -- Kokemusta, viestintää ja käsittämistä ei ylimalkaan liene muuten kuin jonkinlaisessa mediumissa. Maailma tulee annetuksi maailmana vasta ‘välissä’.” (Translation TR)

¹²⁰ ”Kuvien, sanojen ja äänien konstellatiot toimivat teknisesti, semioottisesti, esteettisesti tai poliittisesti latautuneina välityksinä tai ‘välittiminä’, jotka avaavat, paljastavat jotakin ja samalla sulkevat jotakin pois.” (Translation TR)

Subsequently, when performances are reported in the mass media, they effectually work as a media inside another media, both of which bring between us different aspects of reality. Or, to be more accurate, the media, from within which performances communicate, constitute a complex mix of interlinking media which do not construct and represent only one reality or one interest or have only one kind of effect. One media cannot fully deconstruct or empty the meanings carried by another. In a sense, then, all media (news, commercials, movies, internet communities) possess some extent of autonomy. Performances, too, can communicate through a mixture of visual-aesthetic elements even when they have to do so from within other media.

By now I have done two things in this chapter. One, I have turned around the requirement that public expressions must be authentic through being personal and intimate. This is a requirement related to the current public culture, the politics of which we can view critically. Through Sennett, I argued that political performances can be understood as a continuation (even if in different terms) of a long tradition of public presentation where public expressions have their own character and logic. The basic insight here is that encounters between strangers in the public space necessitates using signs and ‘masks,’ because there communication cannot be based on individual exchange. In this sense, public expressions like performances are ‘showed and acted.’ Two, I have opened up the conceptual dimensions of the media and reconstructed it as an in-between communicative phenomenon. When we adopt this perspective, we need not restrict our understanding of the media to the prevailing conception of it as mass mediated technologies and practices.

6.4. Virtual performance?¹²¹

Above I have maintained that performances, like other ‘alternative’ media, can communicate from with/in other media. However, this communication from-within certainly has its limitations, as pointed out above. Access to the mainstream media is not easy and the media’s framing practices as well as the audiences’ different ways of

¹²¹ This section utilizes my previously published article, “Here’s your fucking use of power!” In T. Häyhtiö & J. Rinne (2008, eds) *NetWorking/Networking: Citizen Initiated Internet Politics*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 355-381.

receiving media content make performative communication always an insecure matter. This makes the possibilities of the new media, especially of the internet, so intriguing. The internet has brought along the ability for virtually anyone to communicate directly with large groups of people. The crucial difference compared to the earlier media technologies is that in the new media the traditional control relations do not figure as strongly as before (the gatekeepers' role has, to an extent, collapsed). So, what kind of media is the internet, and what are its implications for political communication?

Let me first point out that my purpose is not to discuss the politics of the internet in general. My main concern is, once again, with interpreting and theorizing performative political communication. From this perspective, one of the most interesting features of the internet is that it provides basically indefinite prospects to do online politics, as well as to report and discuss off-line political events (see e.g. Sassi 2000). We can argue, moreover, that the internet features a number of specific characteristics which invite users to communicate performatively. The internet is a vast space filled with contents that compete for readers' and viewers' attention. In order to create interesting profiles of themselves and to express their identities and goals in recognizable ways, net activists are required to put up distinctive visual and graphic, but often also argumentative, 'shows' that can be likened to 'live' political performance (cf. Lappalainen 2005, especially chapter three).

The difference between online and off-line performance is, however, that in the latter the actors bring their showcase into an open space where they can be seen and heard by all. They are by definition *public* performances. The nature of publicness is different on the net where it changes to a kind of quasi-publicity where actors can perform anonymously and hide their 'real bodies' and identities from the public view.¹²² (I will come back to this point later.) Outrageously, perhaps, this feature has provided rich opportunities and incentives for imaginative net communication. On the internet, one has to put all the more effort into the communicative performance to make it effective. In this perspective, performative communication on the internet need not surprise anyone; it can rather be expected and looked for.

¹²² For a qualification to this argument, see the discussion in the end of this chapter.

One of the most interesting features of communication on the internet concerns the various social media technologies such as YouTube, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, which are sometimes called the Web2.0 technologies. They are only one, yet a significant part of the multifarious interaction possibilities offered by the internet. Mark Poster (1995) has fittingly called the development of the new digital media ‘the second media age.’ While the first was structurally centered, featuring broadcast systems of one-to-many communication with politicians and journalists acting as the gatekeepers of information and public opinion, the second media age is characterized by decentralization, many-to-many communication, individualization of media consumption, interactive technologies and, arguably, more democratic opinion formation. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the new digital media has been the massive breakthrough of peer-to-peer production of web content. Today the internet makes it possible for anybody with access to the net to become content producers and publishers.

Especially blog technologies have been central to the development that has brought easy and almost free web publishing into the hands of the end-users previously placed at the receiving end of the communicative hierarchy.¹²³ Blogs have provided a much welcomed counter-weight to the power of commercial interests and financial capital on the internet which in the positive appraisals has been seen to revolutionize the nature of communication in the contemporary world. While the bulk of blogs are maintained as personal reflection boards, many focus on politics as well. Postings on political blogs often concern the critique and refutation of the ‘official’ media content produced by journalists, politicians and other powerful public figures, and they frequently link to other blogs as well as to diverse other sources available throughout the internet (articles, speeches, video footage, academic studies etc.). The style of commentary in the blogs varies from short notes urging the readers to ‘go and check it out,’ to debates with the readership and to lengthy political essays. Some bloggers are motivated to highlight

¹²³ Weblogs date back to the early 1990s, but the first public blog service was introduced by *Blogger* in 1999. With Blogger and other service providers like WordPress and LiveJournal, the software quickly developed its signature outlook of webpages with frequent entries in reverse chronological order, blogrolls (links to ‘friend blogs’), archives, comment sections, ‘permalinks’ (individual URL-addresses), ‘tags’ (words used to describe content) and RSS-feeds (via which blogs can be subscribed to). After 9/11, and later after the US attack in Iraq, the number of blogs quickly multiplied as individuals “rushed to describe their personal experiences and find an outlet for their heightened political awareness” (McKenna 2004, 3).

issues that have received little attention in the mainstream media because of bias or neglect (McKenna 2004, 5).

Micheletti (2006) suggests that blogging is a sign of the times, proving that we need to take information-seeking, -providing, -retrieving and -interpreting seriously. Growing distrust in government, politicians, political parties and the mass media make information-seeking and political understanding “more than just political foreplay for real political participation (like voting).” Blogs enable a form of communicative participation increasingly important in times when citizens question the prefabricated information packages provided by experts, parties and organizations. Blogging also illustrates how political communication and political understanding have entered the DIY (do-it-yourself) world where the media, advocacy groups, corporations and even established organizations invite ordinary people to involve themselves directly in communicative actions. “Political communication is, therefore, no longer just a way of getting across messages. It is action in itself that mobilizes and structures political thought and engagement” (Micheletti op.cit.).

A remarkable example of such DIY tactics is the growing use by ‘citizen journalists’ of cell phones and videocams to record off-line incidents involving politically sensitive material in order to expose it to the public via the internet (for a closer review of such uses, see Häyhtiö & Rinne 2008). Related to this development, Drezner & Farrell (2004) note that bloggers have first-mover advantage in formulating public opinion. The comparative advantage of blogs in political discourse is their low cost of rapid real-time publication. Immediately following an event of political consequence – a presidential debate, a terrorist attack etc. – bloggers are able to post their reactions on the internet already before the official media have had the chance to notice that something important has occurred. Mickey Kaus (2003) explains: “[T]he virtue of speed isn’t simply, or even primarily, that you can scoop the competition. It’s that you can post something and provoke a quick response and counter-response, as well as research by readers. The collective brain works faster, firing with more synapses”.

Let us next take a look at what this kind of blogo-politics in practice can look like and what sort of performative features we can detect in its style of communication.

6.5. "Here's your Patriot Act, here's your fucking abuse of power..."

To study the assumption that blogs foster performative communication, I briefly hooked up with the blogosphere in relation to an incident which occurred in the University of California library (at Bruin, LA) on November 14, 2006. I will first offer a brief account of what happened, pieced together from postings in various blog posts and then move to discuss the case.¹²⁴

On the night of November 14, Mostafa Tabatabaiejad, an Iranian-American student at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles), is asked by UCLA Community Service Officers to show his university ID during a random check in the Powell library after 11.30 pm. Tabatabaiejad declines or for other reasons fails to produce his ID (it is not known why), after which he is told to leave the premises immediately. He does not comply with the request. There is controversy in blog comments as to whether Mostafa Tabatabaiejad refused deliberately or whether he was simply so engrossed in the work that he failed to react to the request immediately. The officers leave, returning a few minutes later with two University of California Police Department officers to escort the student out. By this time Mostafa Tabatabaiejad has started to walk toward the door with his backpack. One of the officers approaches him and grabs his arm. Tabatabaiejad responds by trying to free his arm, yelling "don't touch me" several times.

At this point Mostafa Tabatabaiejad is stunned with a Taser (a gun which releases electric shocks), as a result of which he drops to the floor, screaming in pain. While he is still down and crying, the police keep ordering Tabatabaiejad to stand up and stop resisting. He is also told that if he fails to do so, he will be tasered again. Again there is controversy over whether Mostafa Tabatabaiejad resisted deliberately or whether he was really not able to stand up. Tabatabaiejad does not stand up and gets tasered again. He screams and the officers keep telling him to stand up. Tabatabaiejad does not follow the order and shouts "Here's your Patriot Act, here's your fucking abuse of power..." He is tasered at least twice more, also after being already handcuffed. As

¹²⁴ The whole story is available e.g. in Daily Bruin, www.dailybruin.com. Accessed November 17, 2006.

Tabatabainejad is dragged through the room by two officers, he shouts, 'I'm not fighting you, I said I would leave.' In the end, the officers manage to drag Tabatabainejad out of the building and he is booked overnight to be released next morning.

Significantly for the later events, a fellow student present in the library at the time of the incident decided to record it with his/her camera phone. The six-minute video footage, later circulated widely on the internet, played a crucial role in the ensuing reaction of the blogosphere to the incident.¹²⁵ Arguably, had the reporting on the episode been based on eye-witness accounts only, the reaction would not have been the same. Once on the net, the video triggered a quick and extensive response among bloggers, most of who were shocked by the extensive use of force by the police. Questions, critique, comments, and demands for re/action flooded the blogosphere. Was the incident related to the US anti-terrorist home security policy? Did racial profiling play a role? Can citizens ever feel safe in the hands of authorities? What does the incident tell of current American political realities? The incident was also tackled normatively: in what kind of circumstances is extensive use of force against citizens legitimate? Did Mostafa Tabatabainejad 'have it coming' because he resisted the police (if, indeed, he did)? Are citizens allowed to argue with authorities and defy them verbally without getting beaten up?

What, then, does this test case demonstrate about the patterns of communication on the blogosphere? We can make several observations. The first is that the UCLA incident represents a typical political event which today finds its way quickly onto the internet and begins circulating and resonating there freely. As people now carry their mobile communication devices everywhere, it is more than likely that interesting and exceptional events are quickly forwarded to the net, increasingly by everyday 'citizen reporters.' As one blogger points out: "[I]n today's culture, police and politicians can't hide their actions as easily as before. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, or so it's said. Today's sun is the light of a camcorder or video phone. The people have the power. Use it."¹²⁶ The new blogging technology has significantly empowered formerly passive

¹²⁵ The video is available at numerous sites, e.g. at <http://technorati.com/pop/>. Accessed November 17, 2006.

¹²⁶ "Truth to power," blogs.ink19.com. Accessed November 17, 2006.

observers of public events and processes, turning them into active public actors. Citizens equipped with digital cameras, videophones, laptops, and Wlan-connections are tantamount to a 24-hour 'citizen watch guard,' many times with surprisingly effective results. As one commentator put it, "I'm guessing -- that the police involved in this are going to have a rough few weeks. Cameras in the hands of citizens may end up being a far, far more effective counter to police abuses than guns in the hands of citizens ever were."¹²⁷ On the other hand, this kind of 'Little brother' surveillance which is nowadays present everywhere also carries its downside. In addition to politically sensitive footage, the cameras record all kinds of materials which, once published and shared over the net, violate privacy rights and can lead to serious consequences. (On the conception of the 'Little brother surveillance,' see Häyhtiö & Rinne 2009; cf. Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish*, 1977)

Another and related observation is the wide scope and practical influence of blogospheric communication. The blogosphere is a vast and complex but at the same time effective communication network capable of disseminating information quickly around the world. Authorities and elites are forced to take into account bloggers' actions and opinions already due to the sheer magnitude of the 'World Wide Blogosphere' and the publicity it is able to generate on debated events and issues. In the test case, Technocrati found 638 results for search words "UCLA taser" on November 17, and 2 084 results four days later. On November 25, nielsenhayden.com reported that the video had been accessed by one million viewers. Several official organizations were then forced to respond to the events, including the university administration and the police, the established media, human rights organizations, and the Council of American-Iranian Relations (CAIR).¹²⁸

The third point relates to the structure of communication within the blogosphere. Compared to many other technologies, due to easy linking functions blogging and other new social media are highly interactive. On the other hand, 'conversation' in blogs is somewhat curious. It can be directly dialogical as in "Here's your Patriot Act," nielsenhayden.com or, in the majority of blogs, only indirectly so when bloggers prefer

¹²⁷ "Here's your Patriot Act," nielsenhayden.com. Accessed November 17, 2006.

¹²⁸ CAIR is an organisation defending the interests of Islamic people and groups in the US (www.cair.com).

commenting on issues on their own blogs instead of writing to the comment zones of other blogs. This peculiar conversational practice draws attention to the bloggers' own virtual profiles and visibility, providing accentuated evidence of what Michele Micheletti (2003) has termed 'individualizing of collective action.' The blogosphere is a collective phenomenon, yet not a 'mass' where each part would be similar to other parts as when sharing the same ideology, identity, or political objectives. The power of the blogosphere relies, rather, on randomly shared common orientations, that is on individual bloggers' actions occasionally coalescing into common objectives and campaigns, which then quickly dissolve when the project is completed. As a collective political phenomenon, the blogosphere undoubtedly challenges traditional political authorities and elites, who now have to learn to address and appeal to a very miscellaneous assemblage of individual voters and actors.

The fourth observation pertains to blogs' communicative styles. Bloggers like, whenever possible, to use tangible material to back up their comments and assessments such as photos, videos, podcasts, official documents, pictures, symbols etc. In the UCLA case, many bloggers attempted to reconstruct the events by gathering information from a variety of sources in order to construct a fuller account and interpretation of the episode and its significance. It is interesting to note that, in so doing, bloggers exploited both careful argumentation as well as various visual, rhetorical, and symbolic means of communication.

Blogs per se, as visual and rhetorical representations, are quite rich in communicative elements. Think e.g. of the names of blogs such as 'Horsesass.org,' 'Truth to power,' 'AlienTed' or 'Nihilix.' The names in themselves are interesting rhetorical and symbolic performances, and it is interesting that so many bloggers would seem to be so concerned with 'revealing the truth.' Bloggers also use visual symbols as a way of creating, expressing, and playing with their identity. This is one way of 'putting up a show' for those visitors or 'friends' who may be looking. One further point is that even though bloggers often trifle with the visual and verbal projections of their identities, this does not seem (contra Habermas's beliefs) in any way to prevent them from engaging in 'serious' talk and political commentary.

The fifth point concerns the effects of the net for 'real' life. The earlier critical appraisals of cyberlife worried about the potentially over-individualizing and under-politicizing effects of net communication. Their point was that the individualization of people who spend a lot of time on the net, with the (presumed) accompanying virtual transcending of bodies and social differences, does not really do much to eradicate social differences in the 'real-life' political structures and practices. Therefore the insistence of many feminist difference advocates that in order to be effective, resistance to existing hegemonies must be visibly present in the offline physical publics.

Boler (2007) argues, however, that the role of bodies as major social signifiers remains more or less intact in digital communication. As an example of this, bloggers' personal profiles often include basic information about their age, sex, location, 'ideological' standing and fields of interest. Furthermore, only half of bloggers use pseudonyms, according to the Pew survey (Lenhart & Fox 2006). Why so? It seems that the credibility of bloggers as public figures with a virtual 'face' requires putting in such information, and this is the information most visitors seek any way to be able to relate to the blogger. Ironically, Boler notes, even in digital communication the body functions as a necessary arbiter of meaning and signifier of what is accepted as real and true (op.cit.).

We should note though that net activists do frequently hide their identities so as to 'mask' them.¹²⁹ It has been pointed out already that this is one of the defining features of political performances in general. Masking serves several functions for performative politics depending on the context. Through masking, performers may want to focus public attention on the action itself (the 'substance') instead of the persons behind it; they may want to 'aestheticize' (in a sense explained in chapter five) the issue in question in order to emphasize and highlight particular features related to it, so that it becomes easily noticeable; or they may seek to hide their identities in fear that their safety might be compromised, and so forth. All these functions figure in virtual performances too. (Judged in the light of the dominant norms of publicity discussed

¹²⁹ Whether it is their 'real' identity that they are hiding behind their profile, is an open question. Remember the note made in chapter 1 (footnote 15), whereby we referred to R.E. Park's classic observation: "In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be."

earlier in this chapter, it is easy to see how and why such communication should appear suspect to non-activist publics and political authorities.)

As to the last point: with the coming of the social media technologies such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter, the structure of communication on the internet has changed dramatically from the earlier text-based modes. It is these social software features of the net which really seem to be thriving the current development of the internet. This is not to say that social media, with or without video footage and other visual ‘embodiments,’ in themselves were able to correct real life power differences. Yet, they increase markedly the net’s communicative potential and as such merit much closer attention from political studies than hitherto.

Finally, we can also turn a more critical eye and ear on what is taking place on the internet’s performative communication. We have already pointed to the fact that the internet offers virtually limitless opportunities for disruptive performative action, and they are also unabashedly exploited. Disruption is carried out for example through denial of service attacks, website hacking (e.g. to extract information or to show ‘that I/we can’), taking over and reconfiguring sites, putting up sites which evaluate and provide counter-information on powerful corporations and political authorities, creating ‘look-alike’ sites with faked information on the target, and interrupting net conversations. Net disruption is typically meant as ‘cheeky’ and parodic, but sometimes it can also be intentionally harmful (in a sense of ‘symbolic violence;’ about the concept, see Rhodes 2001). Now, there is an element in the politics of virtual disruption which is a bit uneasy. Namely, virtual publics are, in a sense, in a constant state of war, struggling unrelentingly for public space, attention, and recognition. (Note, however, that while there is practically infinite *space* on the internet, we can call it public only to the extent that it is a space or site where a group or crowd of ‘netizens’ actually meet and act together.) Offline publics struggle for visibility and recognition too, but battling on the net is particularly intense in that there it goes on ceaselessly, with the effect that actors can never claim the virtual space they have ‘occupied’ in the same way as actors and activists in the physical world can (think e.g. about public squares which can be ‘occupied’ for long periods of time by the government or by the opposition activists). On the net, publics can emerge and wither almost in an instant. In such circumstances, ‘militant performativity’ is a more or less inevitable feature of communication.

It is even possible to argue that the principle of performativity on the net has become so overbearing that it is virtually getting out of hand. If we go on assuming that political communities always need, in order to persevere, collective markers and representations which combine people and bring them ‘around the same table,’ the virtual world as it currently exists, as an increasingly fragmentary universe, *may* pose a radical threat to the existing communities (see Hénaff & Strong 2001, 26-27). So far, historically speaking, public political performances have represented ‘politics of the exception,’ with their communicative power being built chiefly on their surprise element. Now, we may speculate whether on the net this exceptionality is becoming a rule, making performativity to lose its prior communicative power and in effect leaving us with spaces, modes, and processes of communication which are ever more dispersed, disarticulate, and meaningless. Perhaps the term communication itself is turning obsolete. I have argued in this work that communication entails ‘placing things and signs’ between us as the shared stuff or ‘media’ which create the world for us as a perceptible, sensible, and meaningful phenomenon. To the extent that ‘things and signs’ no longer find their place between us, that they are scattered around the (virtual) universe with loose or no connections, ‘communication’ becomes an inadequate concept. If this is the case, we will need new terms to describe how the world works socially and politically.

*For once I felt like a true citizen being concerned with a
public issue and having the guts to show it in the 'face of
power.'*
TR

7. Conclusion

7.1. Back to the beginning

The purpose of this final chapter is to recapitulate the main points of the study and discuss briefly the democratic potential as well as the limits of public political performance as political communication. To start with, let us go back to the beginning of the study and recount the personal experience described there, the experience in which this whole study originated. We should now be able to provide several answers to the questions that this experience gave occasion to, bearing in mind our theoretical ruminations and empirical discussions in the previous chapters.

The main story line in the beginning of the chapter went like this: We, a group of residents in the city of Tampere, were seated in the visitors' balcony of the City Hall following a meeting which was to discuss the construction of a new motorway bridge in the historical city centre. We had for several months struggled against the plan, without palpable success. While waiting for the bridge item to come up in the meeting, an unexpected incidence took place. Somebody in the group passed on a note suggesting that we all stand up when the discussion on the bridge started. Subsequently, when the item was called on, we stood up in an act of silent demonstration, watching down attentively on the councilmen as they began discussion. The councilmen quickly noticed our act and many got ostensibly aggravated.

This event stirred my academic curiosity and made me ponder a host of questions. What did the act really mean? Why did it have such a strong effect on both us and the councilmen? What was the significance of our bodies and their visibility to the communicative effect of the act? What was the impact of our 'gaze' down on the councilmen? And, as a post-graduate student on democratic theory, I also wondered whether our act was to be considered democratic or non-democratic.

Hence began this study on *public political performance*, as I decided to conceptualize the phenomenon. I started looking around for other examples of political performances in literature and the media, and found that they were indeed a recurring phenomenon. From there on, I started to think about such public actions in a new way, bracketing what would have been the obvious categories of interpreting them, like demonstration, protest, and civil disobedience. It would have been easy to argue that demonstrations occur simply because people want to protest against injustice, or that they are frequent because public expression of opinion is protected by law which makes demonstrating and civil disobedience a routine feature of democratic politics. However, these familiar frames of interpretation do not say anything about why it should matter that such acts are publicly *visible*, why they are often theatrical, excessive, disruptive, and improper (or seem so). Nor is it clear what place they have, or should have, in democratic theory.

7.2. Why performance?

Throughout this study I have argued for the usefulness of the concepts *performance* and *performative* in the study of political communication and action. It is notable how conspicuously absent these concepts and theorizing around them have been in political studies (gender theory and parts of the New Social Movements literature exempted), which is a marked difference compared to many other disciplines where the concepts have been developed extensively, even to a point where they have begun to lose their theoretical rigor. They do, however, retain fine theoretical rigor for political analysis, and I have suggested we use it.

Let me first rehearse the origins of performance and performative in a few strokes and explain where they become useful for my project. The concept of the performative originated in the language philosophy of the 1950s, moved on to literature in the 1980s, and further to gender studies in the 1990s. During this theoretical journey, performativity as a special category of utterances that ‘do’ rather than merely ‘state’ things (in Austin’s sense) became generalized first to stand for a ‘doing’ aspect of any utterance and later, through Derrida’s notion of the iterability or citationality of speech acts, to explain the effectiveness of all language-use. Derrida’s theoretical move shifted analytical focus from the speaker’s motives and intentions to those background

conventions that guarantee the very possibility of performing speech acts. Later Judith Butler famously utilized Derrida's idea to de-essentialize gender and reconceptualize it as a performative, as a 'done' identity.

The concept of performance developed in an entirely different context, its home being not in the philosophy of language but in performing arts and aesthetics. Here the concept moved from the postwar non-academic art critique to a specialized *art form* that wanted to take distance to traditional (conservative/affirmative) theatre and develop a more unique, experimental, and participatory (avantgardist, postmodern) form of theatrical expression. Since then the concept has been extended in many directions and adopted to analyse all sorts of social-cultural practices.

We located the utility of performance to social theory and this work in the way it highlights the processual and 'live action' character of social practices. While theorizing around performatives has stressed the presence of a citational norm as a kind of historical script to any act, verbal or non-verbal, performance has brought up the possibility of interruption and change in the citational chain which 'does' (and thereby reproduces) the given practice. For political analysis, the focal point of interest is this: what happens when citationality is broken and the practice is cited differently or refused to be cited at all? What kind of political and tactical potential inheres in this liminal moment, as we called it? We experienced such a moment in Tampere when we stood up in the balcony of the City Hall. We broke the norms of appropriate behavior in a situation where it was not clear to us, or to the councilmen, what would result from such an act. The uncertainty we detect here refers to that the implications and consequences of performances are always unpredictable. They may prove productive as well as unproductive (depending, of course, on who is looking at it).

The political value and the theoretical intrigue of public political performance lies in that it makes this liminality built into social and political life perceptible. That is, it discloses the essentially artificial character of culture-as-performatives and the possibility of questioning, deconstructing, and changing it. This feature comes with democratic potential (and only with potential) as we have frequently detested in this study. In some contexts public political performance marks the only available communicative means for bringing up problems and using critical voice in public.

I think of this dialectic between performatives and performance as constitutive of politics. The basic contention here is that politics, like all social action, needs to be performed and done, time and again. Understood this way, political performance is not a postmodern phenomenon. Still, how politics is performed and done is always defined contextually and historically. The political performances of the early 21st century may look very different from those of, say, the Middle Ages.

7.3. Performance as communication

In this study I have approached performance as a specific form of communication and outlined some of its constituent aspects. Let us think again about our performance in the City Hall.

The performance was clearly intended to communicate something. What exactly, remained unclear to us all, but it was *something*. We took stand, concretely, but this did not amount to any single and simple ‘message’ transmittable to the minds of the councilmen. We were not allowed to speak up, and were not bold enough to defy the rule, so we were left with the possibility of stating our presence, showing the councilmen that we were *there* and demanded to be reckoned with. How can we conceptualize communication in this indistinct sense where words are not (necessarily) exchanged and where, instead, it is the bodies and looks that do the ‘talking’?

In chapter two we referred to J. D. Peters’ insightful claim that though humans were dubbed the ‘speaking animal’ by Aristotle, only since the late nineteenth century have we defined ourselves in terms of our ability to communicate with one another. Communication as a term has become ‘a registry of modern longings,’ evoking a utopia where nothing is misunderstood, hearts are open, and expression is uninhibited. Yet, many of the chief dilemmas of the modern age, both public and personal, have turned on communication failing and transforming into forms of deception, manipulation, and strategic action.

We noted how Habermas's early work was conceived in an atmosphere where the promise of modernity had become dubious and the attitude of instrumental action taken control of ever more areas of human life. Yet, Habermas has insisted all along that instrumental rationality does not define the whole idea of modernity and that there is another face to it, the possibility of reaching agreement in a community through critical public discussion, of which the 18th century bourgeois public sphere was an exemplary case. Habermas's famous argument is that even if critical discourse is not always practically feasible, the promise of rationality nevertheless remains embedded in the universal characteristics of language-use and can be resumed at any time, if the will is there, to solve conflicts and redeem consensus. Hence Habermas's continuing emphasis on linguistic communication and the free public sphere as the dual bases of modern democracy.

We discussed the various critiques against the Habermasian model of communication and acknowledged that it has problems with accounting for performative aspects of communication. Interestingly, however, in his later work Habermas has moved towards a fuzzier conceptualization of democratic communication. We pointed out that his restated model (especially in *Between Facts and Norms*) differs from most versions of deliberative democracy and their procedural definition of communication (with significant conditions attached to what kind of procedure it should be). Habermas accepts that from the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must 'amplify' and 'dramatize' social problems so that they are taken up and dealt with by the parliamentary complexes. This view opens up room for considering performances as 'informal deliberation' (we will come back to this point in the final section).

However, Habermas's theory still contains shady corners, especially when it comes to the playful, aesthetic dimensions of communication. Habermas explicitly prizes conversation, reading and plain speech, while always remaining unsympathetic to representation, theatre, the visual, and rhetoric (as to rhetoric, however, his position has relaxed in the past ten years). The problem is that such a normative position leaves us with an impoverished account of the manifold ways in which communication works, and impedes the imagination of alternative forms of communication within modern media structures.

We then moved to devise a somewhat different kind of conception of communication, referring especially to Heidegger. From Heidegger, we adopted the idea that communication relates to our being ‘thrown into the world’ with other people, that we are bound together in existential ways even before ‘we open our mouths to speak.’ And, to add tangible gist to Heidegger’s often inert meditations on ‘Dasein’ and ‘being-in-the-world,’ we outlined a conception, in the spirit of Dewey and Arendt, of communication as active partaking in the common world (the world which we make in and by communication in the first place). Communication as partaking does not entail, however, that we share the same meanings. Our worldly exchanges produce different experiences and contesting interpretations and judgments. Communication therefore cannot ensure stability and consensus. Rather, it constitutes a plural world where some encounters are taken positively and others negatively. Depending on such experiences, actions and meanings can converge as well as cross and collide.

We can also conceptualize communication as markers or signs (these can be physical, visual, and/or symbolic) that we ‘place’ between us. It is through such markers and signs that we interpret, negotiate, and contest over the ‘shape’ of the world, what is real in it, what can be seen and thought and what remains concealed or ignored. Such ‘shape giving’ is an essential function of political communication, which especially postmodernists have stressed. We referred to Kenneth Tucker who, for one, has highlighted the importance of images, fantasy, and transgression for understanding collective action and public life. Tucker claims that contemporary movements, subjects, and communication(s) are as much about playing with new forms of sociability and symbolism as about developing ‘rational programs’ to implement their demands. Like worker and populist movements of the past, they offer the possibility of breaking into history with something new and ‘turning the world upside down.’

7.4. The body

In chapter three we started our undertaking on delineating the specific characteristics of performances by noting the role of the body as the primary marker and carrier of communication. For example our performance in Tampere relied extensively on the communicative potential of bodies. There the mere asserting of our bodily presence had

significant communicative resonance, as we were able to detect from the councilmen's reactions.

We observed that 'the body is back' after remaining for long a conceptual blind spot in Western dualistic thought. We referred to Michel Foucault as one of the most important figures in effecting this turn from mind to body, in the framework of his overall theory of modern power techniques. In Foucault's analytical scheme, body and power are always attached. Foucault does not see power in terms of institutions or concepts but as a material force that *does* and *makes* things with and via the body. Foucault's genealogical studies reveal how within modern culture power inscribes our bodies both violently, keeping the body confined, constrained, supervised, and regimented ('disciplined'), as well as by less obviously aggressive means, through cultural and personal values and internalized precepts of normalities (which Foucault in his later work called 'biopower').

The value of Foucault's work for identifying and critiquing modern power/knowledge regimes is indisputable. However, we agreed with those critics who have pondered whether his conception of the disciplined body leaves any space for free subjectivity. For example Jana Sawicki has noted that whenever Foucault speaks of the subject in *Discipline and Punish* or in *The History of Sexuality*, he refers to the subject as 'subjected,' as the product of dominating mechanisms of disciplinary power. We then suggested that in his later work Foucault did at least partly meet such criticisms. Foucault's body is never simply inert matter upon which power is exercised and out of which subjects are created. It is a body composed of forces and endowed with capacities. Elizabeth Grosz made the same point: if the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organization. As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus also *a site of resistance*.

We next took up some recent theorizing on 'flesh work.' Many theorists have argued that the breakdown of the modern control paradigm has rendered possible new symbols, meanings, and options for the body. The body has become a space for self-expression, a project which should be worked out and accomplished as part of an individual's self-

identity. We noted, however, that it is difficult to make a theoretical leap from such body theorization to other forms of body politics like public political performances. From the point of view of political performances, it is problematic that most of contemporary body theory takes no notice of a perspective which sees the body also as a site and media of *public action and communication*. The concept of the public may be lacking because it has been so notably linked with liberal theory and the Habermasian type of public sphere theorizing, which post-structurally oriented theorists usually disdain.

We argued, however, that without the notion of the public we cannot really understand why dramatic and subversive body politics should really matter. In order to move to this direction we turned to Arendt. This move seemed first unexpected, given the ambiguous role of the body in Arendt's political theory. In her account the body is a 'constative,' which belongs to the realm of biological necessities and which has no place in the world of public action. Nevertheless, we also claimed that Arendt's insistence on the public visibility of acting in the world necessarily anchors public actors in the common world of bodies. At least implicitly, bodies must have communicative power for Arendt as well.

Following this line of thought, we pointed out that, through their entanglement with the body, political performances are connected to the lifeworld and the experiences of the performers. This increases the communicative efficacy of performances, as they make clear to viewers that they re/present the lived experience of real people. This personalizes performance and makes it easier to identify with it. Moreover, bodily movement in the performance is a way of thinking about and visualizing (making 'sensible') questions and problems encountered in the world. Our analysis of body argumentation showed that bodies are able to re/present problems and memories in ways which escape language and, instead, resonate strongly in other body subjects. This was particularly the case with the Clothesline Project. Viewing the T-shirts, the spectators were confronted with the inescapable fact, to which they often responded viscerally, that the shirts expressed the testimonies of actual, lived violence.

On the other hand, we also made the reservation that because bodies are composed of forces and capacities, they can also be perceived as threatening and hostile. Body is an

'undecidability,' as we pointed out in our earlier discussion on the dialectic between performative and performance. Through this insight we can understand why public demonstrations and other collective body acts often produce tensions between performers and those of the authorities. We saw this for example in the case of the *Tute Bianchi's* confrontation with the police in Prague. Since it remains uncertain whether the body agrees to cite performatives 'normally' or decides to defy them, there is always the possibility that public body communication leads to eruption of violence. There was an element in our performance in Tampere as well that hinged on this possibility, even if violence was not intended by either side.

7.5. The visual

While in chapter three we began to see how public visibility is central to the efficacy of body communication, in chapter four we explicitly set out from the premise that in performative politics, we are necessarily dealing with eye politics. Our Tampere performance, for one, was evidently about a visually charged political moment. Our gaze down on the councilmen clearly agonized them, and the situation quickly turned into a struggle of crossing looks in which both parties 'measured up' one another. The moment was short-lived but it had an unmistakable sense of power struggle which was forged through the play of looks.

We started our discussion on visibility by observing how people in the West have always been mesmerized by the powers of the eye as well as baffled by its imperfections. Yet, vision has also been fiercely criticized by those suspicious of its powers. In the 20th century one of the central concerns of critics turned on the experience and stifling effects of being the *object* of the look. It was again Foucault who opened up this problematic in an exemplary way. Foucault had from early on been sensitive to the relations between social and political constraint and the objectifying power of the modern gaze, but it was in *Discipline and Punish* that he first analysed the more subtle mechanisms involved in power-as-gaze. There he notes the decay of the Classical privileging of visual observation in favor of a more complicated but still visually determined power regime in the nineteenth century. Although acknowledging its prototype in the military schools and clinics of the eighteenth century, he thinks of

Jeremy Bentham's model prison, the Panopticon, as the most explicit version of this new ocular technology of power. It was here that the disciplining and normalizing function of the gaze was at its most blatant.

Complementing the role of the gaze in the control and rehabilitation of criminals came the preventing power of surveillance designed to prevent potential transgressions of the law. Here the external look becomes an internalized and self-regulating mechanism that extends to all realms of life. The normalizing effects of the institutions and practices of surveillance were successful enough to dispense with the more heavy-handed displays of sovereign power needed earlier to render the population docile. Thus, reminiscent of Guy Debord, Foucault concluded that our society is one of surveillance: "We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine."

Again we were able to see that while Foucault's sharp-eyed theoretization captured pointedly the characteristic nature of modern power, he left something out of the picture. When constantly shadow-boxing with the modern power technologies, he failed to take notice of the vision's *intersubjective* character and its communicative potential. He never explored in any depth the role that the mutual play of looks might play in resisting power.

In order to get a grasp of this dialectical potential of the eye politics we turned to Merleau-Ponty's idea of the reversibility of perception and Arendt's visual determination of the public world. Merleau-Ponty's conception of perception involves the idea that it is always reversible, that the touched can turn to the one who touches and the seen to the spectator (I have called this the 'play of looks'). This reversibility is an elementary feature of all perception, yet Merleau-Ponty assumes that there always remains an unbridgeable gap or 'chiasma' between the experience of touching and being touched, seeing and being seen. Chiasma entails otherness: our bodies can touch, our eyes can meet, yet there is the inexplicable difference in-between that makes us strangers to another (we can find the same chiasmatic difference within ourselves too).

We argued that this insight is important for the theory of performance and performatives but that it requires a political translation to be understood in the context of this study. Here we referred again to Arendt's theory of political action on the public sphere.

Arendt's publicness is closely related to topography and visibility, the public sphere being premised on the possibility of actors to see and be seen. That space ceases to be public, and the common world dis/appears, in case it does not enable the reversibility of visibility. One of the focal points of Arendt's theory is that the political reality of the public sphere relies on the simultaneous presence of multiple perspectives and aspects. It is through these that the common world 'discloses itself.'

Let me now briefly recapitulate what we wanted to establish in chapter four. Instead of accepting the one-sided interpretation of the modern gaze as the 'absolute look' that has the power to invade the body and normalize it, we paid attention to the intersubjectivity of vision and found the possibility for resistance in the reversible play of looks between subjects, or between subjects and power. The analyses of public performances in this study have showed how the objects of the look can resist their objectification and normalization by getting assertively in the way and by returning the look. Objects have, as Merleau-Ponty realized, their own stubborn way of being in the world and ways of relating to those who are looking. Looking and being looked at are reversible acts which in political terms means that power (the authorities, elites, dominant ideologies) can never be certain of its position as the supreme *voyant*, but must fear that it will be exposed to critical looks back at it by those who used to be its silenced and gazed targets. This is one of the most important things that public political performances can accomplish.

7.6. Aesthetic communication

In chapter five we continued the discussion on the constitution of performative communication by arguing that political performance is not simply visual but, more precisely, aesthetic communication. We noted that performances can be conceived aesthetically because they give visible shape to performers' experiences and ideas thereby expose the limits of the existing political realities to be publicly evaluated and judged. My understanding of the performance at the Tampere City Hall came with a gut feeling that what was at stake in the act was not only a 'visual message' but a much richer communicative event loaded with various dimensions. For example, our standing in the balcony made explicit that in political decision-making processes only certain

accredited actors have speaking rights. On the other hand, we did not agree to be completely marginalized in the situation. Our physical act communicated that there are other actors involved who have a different political stand in the issue. Our silent performance signified then, on a small scale, a struggle over the 'limits of the political world.' (In our case, the visual-aesthetic struggle also involved publishing, by the citizen groups, alternative illustrations of the planned bridge, which competed with those of the local government and ended up creating a skirmish in the local media. This is a good example of the kind of struggle over the 'partitioning' of the world which defines the meaning of aesthetic politics.)

In chapter five we took account of those theoretical and political views which are suspicious of 'aestheticized politics' and the use of art for political purposes. We argued that such views are partly based on a misunderstanding and claimed that all politics is aesthetic in that its representations play with notions of good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. Accordingly, we cannot distinguish between aesthetic and non-aesthetic politics but should, instead, carefully analyse how each representation, be it ideology, political speech, or public performance, sketches out reality (and with what consequences). Aesthetic politics need not be conflated with, say, the politics of Nazi-Germany. We must understand and be able to scrutinize a whole range of different political aesthetics. Likewise, political aesthetic is not a 'surface phenomenon' which could be explained by reference to the cultural politics of the modern mass entertainment. In a nutshell, aesthetic politics can be critiqued from a number of perspectives, but it is not *the concept itself* that should be blamed for the particular cultural-political developments of the 20th century.

We then moved to explore the aesthetic qualities of political performances through three theoretical figures. First, we took up the aesthetic theory of John Dewey who was a rare thinker in the 20th century for not identifying communication (at least *in toto*) with speech and for understanding the meaning of art and aesthetics for human life widely. Dewey stressed the intertwining of art and everyday life and criticized the alienation of art from experience. While Dewey's theorization on art and politics proved to be too simple at some points, his overall value of his work is in showing that there is nothing odd about thinking political action in aesthetic terms.

We also discussed the politics-aesthetic relationship from a very different viewpoint. By reference to the work of Jacques Ranciere, we defined aesthetic politics in terms of how those things which are concretely visible in society configure political reality and condition the possibilities for political action within it. To Ranciere, politics is always an 'aesthetic question' because it determines how the political world is concretely 'partitioned.' He distinguishes between two kinds of politics, politics as reproducing the 'police order' of society, and politics as *la politique* which takes place when the practices of the police order clash with disruptive political action.

Another way through which Ranciere approaches aesthetic politics is by relating it to the concept of art. Here we encountered two different politics of art. First, 'life as art' politics, where the conventions of art and society become so intimately linked that art is in danger of losing its character as something out-of-the-ordinary with an ability to both fascinate and outrage people. When art develops into everyday culture, it may become so normalized that it practically turns invisible. The second type of politics of art stresses the autonomy of art from political power. Here art can preserve its role as oppositional force and alternative communication, but the danger is that its critical potential remains trivial because things that are 'only art' need not be taken seriously in public discourse.

As Ranciere recognized, art which aspires to be effectively critical, must walk on a tight rope between these two poles, remaining close enough to everyday life, while at the same time maintaining its distinctiveness and ability to surprise people. We noted that political performances often have a problem with their communicative efforts in such conditions. The public may have difficulties in interpreting whether performance is just a 'joke,' which is basically acceptable but can be practically disregarded; 'only art,' which poses no danger to the political order; or aesthetic-political action, which potentially threatens the legitimacy of the political system. Performances may fail (and often do fail) to generate productive interaction between the act, the public, and political authorities, which leads to them being publicly disregarded or, in the alternative scenario, judged so problematic and dangerous that the authorities try to disappear them from the public political map (by banning public demonstrations, jailing political opposition, inducing the public to condemn the acts, etc.). For example, in the Tampere performance we were surprised by the aggravated reactions of the councilmen to our

act. While the performance was not meant to be aggressive, many councilmen interpreted it as a threatening provocation.

Thirdly, in order to be able to show how political performances are meant to be evaluated and judged publicly, we turned again to Hannah Arendt. We started by noting that, like Nietzsche, Arendt criticizes modern instrumentalization of action and the popular degradation of the world of appearances. Arendt often uses performative imageries to underscore (what to her is) the very special nature of political action. Any political theory, she says, which genuinely wants to recognize political plurality, must be able to reach beyond means-ends thinking and focus on the action itself (as performed). According to her, men are free as long as they act, 'for to be free and act are the same thing' (here we can understand the term acting in a double sense as both 'doing' and 'en/acting'). Moreover, Arendt does not think that politics should not be judged morally. Political action can only be judged by the criteria of *virtu*, because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary.

We then explained why Arendt thought it necessary to turn in her theory of political action and judgment to Kant's Third Critique. Arendt understood both the possibilities and the dangers involved in 'agonistic' political action and was concerned with maintaining the conditions for public deliberation as well. She did not, however, take deliberation in terms of giving praise to modern reason and rationalization, but more in terms of acknowledging and understanding the plurality of political tastes. Arendt argues that taste judgments in art share with political opinions in that both are concerned with discussion and persuasion without any final criteria of which judgments are 'true.' Like Kant, Arendt finds it important that political actors be able to move beyond their immediate political passions and interests and reach for a more disinterested stance ('enlarged mentality') towards common issues. Yet, we critiqued Arendt by arguing that this sort of disinterestedness cannot be regarded the only means of 'enlargening' our understanding of the common world and its plurality. The analyses of performances in this study have shown that sometimes a more comprehensive and sympathetic understanding towards other people is achieved only after people are 'touched' by the others' experiences through seeing, feeling, and sharing them. With Theodor Adorno, we criticized Arendt's and Kant's tendency to intellectualize political matters. We must

not forget the role of the body for political communication, even if Arendt saw it as rather unpleasant and constraining fact of the human condition.

We concluded the chapter by discussing the aesthetically intensive performative communication of political protests in Serbia in the 1990s. This example turned out to be interesting because the protestors themselves were explicitly attuned to using aesthetic and artistic imageries when making sense of political events in Serbia at that time. By interpreting politics through the framework of theatre, protestors were able to expose the ‘made’ and performed character of Slobodan Milosevic’s government as well as write alternative ‘political scripts.’ For example the Faluserbia performance, to which we referred in the analysis, worked aesthetically in this double sense when it showed the ‘phallistic nationalism’ on which Milosevic’s policies were based and, by the same token, through the act itself, created public space for resisting those policies.

7.7. The media

In chapter six the discussion on performative communication and politics moved to another level. While earlier the implicit assumption had been that public political performance represents direct, unmediated communication ‘in the streets,’ we now took under consideration the critical argument according to which the conditions of the globalized institutionalized media have profoundly changed the practices and possibly the integrity of political communication. According to this argument, mediatization has turned politics into a constant fight over public attention and media time in which all political actors are compelled to take part. Should we not be suspicious, then, towards such media circus which today practically dictates the possibilities of political actors, public political performances notwithstanding, to communicate to wider publics?

We started our discussion by noting that even if the structures and practices following modern mediatization deserve serious critique, we should also take into account other points of view. Namely, if we acknowledge the performative and theatrical nature of politics to start with, we need not accept the argument that all kinds of political performing are deceptive and morally reproachable. One of the aims of the chapter was to show how the demand for authenticity in the contemporary critique of politics and

media is actually a historically constructed idea that has to do with the development of the modern techniques of power and control (this was Foucault's point). This norm of authenticity can, in fact, be set against a different kind of norm of public presentation which grew up even earlier, at the dawn of the European city life, and which required that people unknown to another establish common 'performative codes' for regulating their common life and public conduct (this is the development outlined by Sennett). We then claimed that it is easier to approach and understand performances when we take into account that they represent a different kind of paradigm of public presentation compared to the paradigm that is now prevalent. This sort of political expression has, interestingly enough, stubbornly persevered through all the normalizations and 'governmentalities' of the modern society. In the discussion we made the conclusion that even if mediatization and the norms of the media circus certainly influence public communication, performative communication *as a phenomenon* is not a product of the mass mediated world (or, for that matter, of postmodernity).

The second important point of the chapter related to the concept of the media itself. We criticized the one-dimensional meaning it is often conferred upon and claimed that we can understand media more fruitfully and widely as the carrier(s) of 'in-between communication.' At the same time we will be able to see more clearly how the communication of the different carrier-media (in plural) overlap and attach to one another, which means that the media do not have any one meaning or one effect. Subsequently, the meanings of a performance reported in, say, the evening TV-news are not emptied by the framing of the event by the news corporation and the journalists. (Their definitional power is great but not in any way total.) Visual communication plays an important role here. It is no coincidence that political actors prefer being *seen* on the media; it is one way of retaining at least some control over their communicative power.

The third task of the chapter was to ponder how the internet has changed the modern constellations of communication, what kind of new opportunities the new technologies (more lately especially the social media) have provided for political communication, and how political communication features on the net. We noted how, from the performative point of view, the net is almost 'hyperactive,' in that it provides virtually endless possibilities to communicate disruptively and bring out into view different political stands and visions. One of the most peculiar and most interesting features of

this new virtual political culture is the work of ‘citizen journalists’ (Wikileaks is one of the most extreme expressions of this work). The documents and videos portraying the (secretive, compromising) actions of politicians and powerful corporations that these ‘journalists’ (ordinary people, really) publish and share on the net quickly and effortlessly, can be seen as one way of resisting and ‘looking back’ at power. This is certainly one of the most significant political innovations that the development of the internet has brought along.

In the chapter we analysed one short instance of political performance, a confrontation in the UCLA library between an Iranian-American student and the campus police, spontaneously recorded on the spot by a fellow student and immediately sent to circulate on the net’s blogosphere. This example underlined the way in which offline political performances today can resonate and grow on the net to constitute quite autonomous phenomena which may attract phenomenal attention worldwide. In such circumstances, political performances can have far greater relevance than they would if they were reported merely in the ‘old’ media (or not reported at all). One of the impacting factors here is the proliferation of the new, easy to use digital technology and social software. This has profoundly changed the earlier ‘gate keeping’ mechanisms of political communication. Now virtually anybody can publish information on the net and reach wide (even global) public attention, which has, at least arguably, made the net’s public space much more inclusive than the traditional public spaces were.

On the other hand, in the discussion we also brought up the other, more negative side of this development. We noted that, in a sense, virtual publics are in a constant state of war with one another, struggling ceaselessly for ‘hits’ and ‘friends’ and other forms of virtual public attention. On the net, publics can emerge and wither almost in an instant. In such circumstances, communication is becoming ever more dispersed, disarticulate, and possibly meaningless, in terms of its capability to combine people. If we continue to assume that political communities always need collectively shared markers and representations to be able to hold together, the current disintegrating developments on the net can potentially pose a radical threat to the existing communities.

7.8. Performance, deliberation, and democracy

We have travelled a long journey by now towards developing a deeper understanding of political performance as communication. One final issue remains to be addressed before closing the study. What should we think about the democraticness of public political performance and its relationship to the deliberative model of communication?

Let me first state the overall conception of democracy underlying this study. I understand democracy most importantly as *a discursive formation* (in Foucault's sense), which entails that we can never know what democracy finally *is* but we can know the terms and assumptions through which it is defined in different discourses. This equals saying, *pace* the argument of this study, that democracy too is a 'performative' that needs to be 'done' and cited in speech and action in order to exist. The central ideas of modern democracy as a discursive formation centre around notions of self-governance, freedom, and equality. They establish the primary criteria and limits to what, within the terms of this discursive formation, counts as democracy and what does not.

This way of approaching democracy means that it is taken as a permanently unfinished project, defined less by particular institutional articulations than by *movement* and action in the name of self-governance, freedom, and equality. Seen this way, our spontaneous performance in the City Hall was democratic in a sense that it was generated by our passion for democratic ideas, especially participatory democracy. Jacques Ranciere's term 'demos' captures this fleeting character of democracy as a movement. He states that democracy is the business of 'demos,' that abstract assemblage of ordinary people who have no individual title to govern. Demos is not a 'body' but a 'pure addition of chance' that eschews all forms of domination and notions of personal virtue destining a special category of people to govern. In practical terms demos is constituted by the activities of those transitory assemblages of people who make public pronouncements and demonstrations where and when they are not supposed, expected, or allowed to do so. These unruly subjects give themselves collective names, the people, citizens, the proletariat (or *Madres de Plaza*, *Tute Bianchi*, etc.), and impose a *reconfiguration* of the sensible social-political order by making visible what was not visible before. This view implies, therefore, a constant reformulation of demos, and subsequently of democracy, in different contexts.

Deliberation is a term that has recently successfully made its way into the center of the discursive formation of democracy. It expresses and seeks to combine the three bedrock ideas of democracy, adding to it a fourth element, the requirement that the democratic process be rational. Now, there is nothing wrong with the idea(l) of deliberation as such, at least as long as the model does not fall upon identitarian thinking and start totalizing itself to stand for the whole concept of democracy. But we must note that also political performances often pursue democratic ideas. It is just that they do so in rather peculiar ways. These two modes of communicating and ‘embodying’ democracy are not necessarily at odds, however. There are several ways in which they can relate and their communicative intentions cross. Let me explain this by reference to Iris Marion Young’s discussion in *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000).

Young criticizes Habermas’s normative theory of the public sphere and deliberative democracy, arguing that his model problematically privileges argument and assumes an exclusionary norm or orderliness and articulateness (we touched on such critiques when discussing Habermas in chapter three). Here argument, that is, presentation of reasons in a fashion that others can accept without force, constitutes the legitimate form of discourse in the public sphere. According to Young, this can be exclusionary in two ways. First, it assumes shared premises and conceptual frameworks: “The effort to shape arguments according to shared premises within shared discursive frameworks sometimes excludes the expression of some needs, interests, and suffering of injustice, because these cannot be voiced with the operative premises and frameworks” (op.cit., 37). Second, privileging argument favors norms of articulateness and dispassionateness, which may work against the possibility of radical critique and presentation of marginalized perspectives. As an alternative, Young suggests bringing in contestatory, performative political speech and action, which she thinks do better justice to deep plurality and disagreements between structural conflicts of interest.

In emphasizing alternative forms of democratically feasible communication, Young is not, however, arguing against the deliberative ideals as such. She finds inclusive political communication as the key element of democratic practice and thinks that the legitimacy of a decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the processes, just like deliberationists do. In delineating the relationship

between rhetorical strategies and deliberative democracy, Young then argues that oppositional styles are valuable if they contribute to a certain level of *reasonableness* (this is not the same as ‘the reasonable’ which evokes norms of dispassionateness, civility, and articulateness), which means that opposition should be interested in and moved by communication, understanding, inclusion, and openness. Protest is reasonable and contributes to democratic legitimacy insofar as its purpose is to communicate and persuade, not ‘merely’ be oppositional. The value of contestatory communication therefore lies on its ability to gain inclusion for excluded perspectives to deliberative arenas where they can be recognized and legitimated through speech.

Now, we can interpret (in part) political performances in Young’s sense as contestatory communication which seeks to contribute to democratic process by bringing up and making visible new problems and perspectives so that they can be dealt with in the formal democratic institutions. Performances can therefore be (more or less) ‘rational’ as long as they have this contribution in mind. This was also what Habermas thought informal deliberations and their ‘dramatic activities’ should do, and what we basically referred to in chapter six when we discussed the possibilities of performances to produce ‘enlarged mentality’ and other-regarding attitudes.

On other hand, we should *also* bear in mind that the value of political performances is not *determined* by their relationship to deliberative processes. Sometimes they pursue a very different kind of action, the purpose of which is not to gain inclusion to the deliberative arena but to create or extend public space where actors, identities, and different imageries can simply *appear*. Chaloupka explained this difference by distinguishing between two types of political action, discursive and protest action. Making and defending statements is the affair of discourse (the deliberative process). Discursive action requires that participants can arrange their arguments so that these support their position. But in protest action the protestor is not (necessarily) making arguments or trying to claim that his action represents the truth. His much more modest objective is to expose in public the contingent nature and the limits of the powerful models of thinking and acting. To do so, the protestor positions himself deliberatively in the margins of communication, utilizing puns and jokes and caricature to expose the limits of what is being said.

By drawing attention to the importance of public performative communication I have not wanted to argue that deliberation, inclusion, and rationality are not important for democratic processes. My argument is, rather, that performances as contestations of political realities can have special value for political freedom. We can finally conclude, in agreement with Jane Drexler (2007), that democratic theory needs to learn to understand that category of political action which *performs* political freedom rather than *asks* for it.

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