



# A RECOGNITIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY AND THE STRUCTURING OF PUBLIC SPACE

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a theory of the self as produced through processes of recognition that unfold and are conditioned by public, political spaces. My account stresses the dynamic and continuous processes of identity formation, understanding the self as continually composed through intersubjective processes of recognition that unfold within and are conditioned by the public spaces wherein subjects appear before one another. My theory of the self informs a critique of contemporary identity politics, understanding the justice sought by such politics as hampered by identity enclosure. In contrast to my understanding of the self, the self of identity enclosure is understood as a series of connecting, philosophical pathologies that replicate conditions of oppression through their ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological positions on the self and political space. The politics of enclosure hinge upon a presumptive fixity, understanding the self as abstracted from political spaces of appearance, as a factic entity that is simply given once and for all. Beginning with Hegel's account of identity as recognised, I stress the phenomenological dimensions of recognition, using these to demonstrate how recognition requires a fundamental break from the fixity and rigidity often displayed within the politics of enclosure. I further defend my account of recognition against several overarching critiques of the recognitive tradition, as postulated by Foucault, Oliver, and Markell – a defence which requires a break with these preceding traditions in exchange for a far clearer spatial and phenomenological grounding acquired through a turn towards the work of Hannah Arendt. This turn develops into an examination as to how political spaces condition processes of recognition through producing variable conditions of visibility, dynamics I explore through the works of Arendt, Ahmed, and Gramsci. Given that the politics of enclosure find striking forms of expression in social media fora, my final chapter provides a critique of these fora as spaces of appearance. Contra to techno-optimist accounts of social media technologies as *de facto* sources of popular, democratic empowerment, I contend that the pathologies of identity enclosure find a particularly intense expression within online spaces. I show that the praxeis of mainstream identity politics are severely hampered by these pathologies, and I argue that a praxis informed by a recognitive theory of the self would be better placed to achieve the transformative projects of these politics – particularly with respect to their underlying ethical motivations.

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# INTRODUCTION: THE VAMPIRE'S MASQUERADE

## THE LOGIC OF ENCLOSURE

This thesis establishes an account of identity and subjectivity partially in response to the shortcomings of contemporary identity politics. I understand these politics to be beset by a series of philosophical pathologies that I term identity enclosure. I develop my understanding of these politics of enclosure as producing an enclosed self that suppresses several core aspects of subjectivity through an examination of what it omits. Counter to the enclosed subject's abstraction, my focus is on how relationality and mutuality are fundamental to the notion of individuality. My initial touchstone for this is the Hegelian understanding of recognition, which understands self-consciousness as fundamentally reliant upon a relationship between plural subjects. Contrary to preceding readings of Hegel that reduce recognition to 'the master/slave dialectic', my reading of the dialectical subject foregrounds and centralises the notion of mutuality within subjectivity, counterposing this with enclosure's implicit and disavowed deployment of essentialism. Given the widespread influence of Hegelian recognition, and its crystallisation into 'the recognitive tradition', I develop my account alongside critical responses to this tradition. Though I do not lay claim to any more authentic account of recognition, I do contend that those critiques targeting the tradition represented by Taylor and Honneth do not so easily apply to my reading of Hegel. In this sense, my understanding of recognition should not be understood as another contribution to this tradition, but instead as a distinct vein of critique that shares only superficial similarities to it. For this reason, I have distinguished my understanding of recognition from both these traditions and those who have sought to critique them.

In my considerations of those theorists who attempt to break from recognition as I understand it, I demonstrate how their alternative accounts – *assujettissement*, witnessing, and acknowledgement – do not require a substantial break from recognition. The resistance to the dialectic expressed by these alternative accounts tends to chafe against what they regard as the inherent constraints of the dialectic, constraints that are thought to restrict and limit the subject. In so considering these critiques, my task has been to demonstrate how recognition enables us to understand the subject as mediated and

navigated, without thereby crystallising an ossified schematic of subjectivity that determines in advance how subjectivity and identity are to be configured.

This is not to suggest that there are no determining factors for identity and subjectivity. The phenomenological dimension of my analyses brings these out, especially in its focus on the role of spatiality as a constraint on the appearance of the subject, both to others and themselves. It is at this juncture that my considerations of recognition come into direct conversation with the political theory of Hannah Arendt. Following Arendt's notion of the political and its rootedness within plurality, I have sought to understand how the production of the subject through recognition is a spatially situated process that requires a phenomenological elaboration. This elaboration revolves around Arendt's notion of the space of appearance, using the work of Sophie Loidolt to support my reading of Arendt as a phenomenological thinker. When Arendt's framework is brought into dialogue with a Hegelian understanding of recognition, the processes that underpin identity, the categories of identity available to us, must be understood as deeply connected to the public, shared, political conditions that impose various constraints upon how we are able to appear before others. The subject is never straightforwardly determined by space nor can it ever be entirely detached from it. The politics of enclosure is a way of erecting a distortive mythology<sup>1</sup> of the subject as prior to its conditions of spatialisation. This is to say that though enclosure's abstraction amounts to an attempt to detach the subject from its constitutive conditions – an attempt that can never be fully successful – my account understands the relationship between the subject and space as one of constitutive mediation, rather than a straightforward production from conditions that are independent of the subject.

Instead, I understand the conditions of subjectivity that inform the categorising machinery of identity as rooted within a performative account of subject production. Selves appear and are recognised both by themselves and by others in terms of this appearance, though this appearance does not stand apart from the subject. Following an Arendtian account of political action, I view the subject's appearance as a matter of its own activity, though this neither repeats nor endorses an account of agency that understands action in terms of sovereignty. On the contrary, agency is understood as mediated, never pre-existing the relational elements of the self that are therefore not understood as mere limitations upon

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<sup>1</sup> See: Chiara Bottici, 'Myth', *Political Concepts*, 3.5, 2012  
<<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/category/issue-3/issue-3-5/>>.

one's ability to act. However, this relationality does condition the actions of agents – with the internal dimensions of a political space acquiring a determinant (though not determining) shape. I understand the internal contours of political space in terms of performativity, drawing the Arendtian framing of action into conversation with Butler's use of performativity and specifically its inheritance within Sara Ahmed. Ahmed's understands performativity in terms of lifelines carved into shared spaces through repeated activity. Proceeding, then, from an Arendtian understanding that action both requires the world as its precondition but simultaneously shapes and 'produces' (albeit not as an artefact) the world, my perspective understands activity as before and in relation to others as fundamental to the production of identity. Categories of identity are about how a subject is rendered intelligible; it is a matter of how a subject appears through their actions, and how these actions are recognised.

Despite the stress my account places upon the plasticity of these conditions, my project has been situated within those contemporary discourses and movements that seek to oppose present conditions of oppression and domination – conditions that are sustained and produced by structures of power. Therefore, this project has optimistically sought to stress the malleability implied through understanding the self as mediated whilst simultaneously engaging in a sustained critique of these systems of power. The final considerations of this project have thus focused on how the plasticity of these conditions of the subject have themselves become constrained and assumed a rigid form. These considerations have further attempted to explain the perspective within which identity enclosure is immersed, understanding how its pathologies have become internalised and popularised. I have explored the pervasive dimensions of enclosure through Gramsci's account of hegemonic power, particularly deploying his distinction between the wars of position and movement to understand how enclosure reproduces this deeper political logic that plays into the very structures of domination it avowedly seeks to oppose. The language of hegemony enables me to conceptualise how structures of power serve to produce a uniformity across distinct spaces occupied by distinct subjects, explaining how – to once again return to Arendtian language – plurality becomes eclipsed by sociality. Ahmed's performative lifelines of identity acquire a much stronger form at the hegemonic level,<sup>2</sup> a level of domination that I understand as beyond a Foucauldian, panoptic grid –

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<sup>2</sup> A distinction notable in the difference between Ahmed's presentation of heterosexuality as a straight line, well-worn through space, and more wide-reaching accounts of compulsory heterosexuality as an overarching determination of the political field in general.

instead conceptualising this as a lattice that permits a great deal of superficial plurality, movement, and malleability, whilst simultaneously occluding a deeper structure of ossification and domination.

These elements coalesce in the focus of the final chapter of this project, wherein I turn my attention to the specific ways in which internet communications technologies constitute fora for subject production. Challenging the virtual/real distinction as it is often uncritically leveraged in these discussions, I distinguish my engagement from those cynical accounts that view social media spaces as of lesser significance than their physical alternatives. Furthermore, I reject those overly naïve techno-optimist perspectives that simplistically regard these technologies as liberatory from ‘antecedent’ systems of domination. I understand online fora as neither simply positive nor negative with respect to systems of power. Conversely, my concern has been to understand how online spaces constitute spaces of appearance and the conditions of these. I understand these spaces as those that can and do occasionally subvert or challenge dominant structures of power through the production of novel ways of relating, and the production of distinct forms of virtual community. Yet remain cautious about the liberatory narratives often implicitly reproduced in treatments of technology, noting how online fora routinely go beyond the mere reproduction of oppressive structures of power, often further intensifying this domination. Indeed, enclosure as a pathology is only possible given the presence of online fora, though this does not restrict its influence to online spaces alone. In challenging the dichotomy between reality and the virtual, I reject the simplistic presentation of these spaces as distinct. Instead, virtual spaces such as social media surround us constantly, and one’s presence is decreasingly ever divorced from either kind of space.<sup>3</sup>

Fundamentally, I understand identity-speak as a shorthand for keeping track of the subject as it moves and changes across political space. The ossification of identity into a fixity to which the self can be reduced – this being the central, abstractive move of the politics of enclosure – is itself a totalitarian reduction of subjectivity into the machinery of categorisation. Abstracting these categories from the processes of their production and from the conditions within which these processes are situated further serves to essentialise the subject and its identities into an ahistorical form.

My theory of identity operates, in part, as a direct response to the limitations of contemporary identity movements, though has a broader significance to ‘crises’ – both inherited and contemporary –

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<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, one is never divorced from physical space – though one’s attention can be so absorbed into the virtual that one experiences a kind of dissociation from one’s own body.



over the notions of the self and the political. With respect to identity politics, I have focused on an interrogation of contemporary 'left-wing' or 'progressive' identity politics. I have asked how these discourses typically understand the self, and how this understanding of the self implicitly informs its praxeis. Given the embeddedness of contemporary structures of oppression within pervasive systems of political power, I have been prompted to ask how the notion of the self, as it is understood within contemporary discourses, opens up various avenues of critique. Yet, through my examination of the self and its spatial conditions, I have also come to pose this question in reverse, exploring: what avenues of critique are foreclosed by enclosure's notion of selfhood? I understand the prevalent notion of selfhood within identity politics as beset by a philosophical pathology I have termed identity enclosure. Rather than deploring the politics of enclosure and those who – mostly unwittingly – proliferate its harms, I have focused my attention on a critical elaboration as to what alternatives may be available to us, whilst simultaneously presenting an understanding as to how the pathologies of enclosure are proliferated.

I began with an elaboration as to the harms caused by identity enclosure, with particular focus on those integral elements of the self omitted by this picture. This was presented through a reading of contemporary identity politics, drawing upon several contemporary controversies. My critique is situated within identity discourse, rather than repeating those top-down critiques that produce a partially salient response, but which simultaneously elide the core, ethical concerns of these discourses. I understand the harms of identity enclosure as fundamentally resting upon its enactment of a kind of discursive fracture, with this notable *prima facie* through the mainstream proliferation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy as regulative of identity production. Indeed, I understand this discursive fracture as underpinned by an abstractive move undertaken within mainstream discourse that understands the self as fundamentally separate to and outside of the political spaces in which it appears, moves, and acts in relation to others. This understanding produces a conception of the self that bears some similarities to those of essentialism and reification, though does not simply repeat these dynamics. Instead, my contention is that identity enclosure produces a particular onto-epistemological framework of selfhood, with its framework also conditioning the phenomenological account of individuality, personhood, and subjectivity that comprise its notion of 'lived experience'.

# IDENTITY AND VISIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES OF THE SELF

Among critiques of identity politics, none have perhaps gained more infamy than Mark Fisher's 2013 essay *Exiting the Vampire Castle*.<sup>4</sup> Beginning with a commiseration on the dispiriting nature of left-wing Twitter, Fisher laments the rise of a witch-hunting moralism wherein objectionable or 'problematic' figures are called out, condemned, and bullied. Though he does not excuse the behaviour that prompted such responses, Fisher fears that the "open savagery" of these moralising responses constituted a fundamental threat to the possibility of comradeship and solidarity. Furthermore, Fisher maintains that identity-speak is replacing genuine class-consciousness, that the material concerns of class are being eclipsed by the seemingly symbolic concerns of the identitarians, those who advocate on the basis of sex, gender, sexuality, race etc.<sup>5</sup>

Behind these troubling developments, Fisher claims, is the ideological structure of the Vampire Castle, a metaphor Fisher never fully explains but which conjures a particular image of the left as the prisoner of a monstrous leech and its servants. Ideologically, Fisher claims that the Vampire Castle enables the dis-articulation of class from other categories of oppression. The Vampire Castle enables a reconciliation between the possession of capital and the desire to appear marginal – a point which has been read as an indictment of the victim mentality of left-wing identity politics. Fisher understands the Vampire Castle as operating through the individualisation of social dynamics so as to render structural critique impossible; through a paralysis of thought and action (with these understood as so difficult that the status quo becomes idly accepted); the propagation of guilt; essentialist ontologies; and the adoption of mainstream, liberal ideologies.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, Fisher notes that these tendencies are only possible due to social media:

It might have been possible to ignore the Vampires' Castle and the neo-anarchists if it weren't for capitalist cyberspace. The VC's pious moralising has been a feature of a certain 'left' for many

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Fisher, 'Exiting the Vampire Castle', *OpenDemocracy*, 2013  
<<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/exiting-vampire-castle/>> [accessed 1 July 2020].

<sup>5</sup> This list is far from exhaustive and could further include physical disability, neurodiversity, mental health, among many others.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Fisher.

years – but, if one wasn't a member of this particular church, its sermons could be avoided. Social media means that this is no longer the case, and there is little protection from the psychic pathologies propagated by these discourses.<sup>7</sup>

Responses to Fisher's essay understand him to be perpetuating disparities of power by denigrating the concerns of those who speak from an identity political perspective. Though Fisher's piece comes from a left-wing, 'progressive' perspective, it has been read as presenting a conservative understanding of identity politics. The essay received a hostile reaction from those it was seen to target, but has also received praise from those who regard identity politics as a distraction from or a threat to 'real' politics. Among the responses from identity politicians, Ray Filar denounced Fisher's heavy-handed repudiation of the 'moralism'<sup>8</sup> he saw within left-wing spaces as well as his tendency towards class reductionism. Filar's response is framed in straightforwardly identitarian terms invoking watered-down accounts of both intersectionality and 'queer politics' that possess more rhetorical than critical value.<sup>9</sup> Fisher's explicit comparison between the dogmas of identity politics and Christianity has led to many condemning these politics as a religion.<sup>10</sup> For example, Frances Lee maintains that their own experience of social justice activism retains a religious quality reminiscent of their experiences with evangelical Christianity – noting here the emphasis on purity, preaching, as well as the colonialist logics often repeated by certain activists.<sup>11</sup>

*Exiting the Vampire Castle* marks the beginning of a focus on left-wing identity politics in public discourse. The treatment of identity politics reduces into a singular concept a series of diverse practices

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Fisher.

<sup>8</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Robert Boyers, see: Robert Boyers, *The Tyranny of Virtue* (New York: Scribner, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Ray Filar, 'All Hail the Vampire-Archy: What Mark Fisher Gets Wrong in "Exiting the Vampire Castle"', *OpenDemocracy*, 2013 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/all-hail-vampire-archy-what-mark-fisher-gets-wrong-in-exiting-vampire-castle/>> [accessed 1 July 2020].

<sup>10</sup> Mark Bauerlein, 'The Religion of Identity Politics', *First Things*, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2020/03/the-religion-of-identity-politics>> [accessed 16 July 2020]; Inquisitor, 'Identity Politics: Our New Religion?', *The Big Smoke: Australia*, 2020 <<https://www.thebigsmoke.com.au/2020/02/21/identity-politics-our-new-religion-residents-politics-identity/>> [accessed 16 July 2020]; Antonia Senior, 'Identity Politics Is Christianity without Redemption', *UnHerd*, 20 January 2020 <<https://unherd.com/2020/01/modern-politics-is-christianity-without-redemption/>> [accessed 16 July 2020].

<sup>11</sup> Frances Lee, 'Excommunicate Me from the Church of Social Justice', *Autostraddle*, 2017 <<https://www.autostraddle.com/kin-aesthetics-excommunicate-me-from-the-church-of-social-justice-386640/>> [accessed 18 July 2017].

ranging from the mere invocation of identity-speak to the political pressure of organisations seeking to produce political change. Frequently, the term is used polemically, denoting a lesser kind of ‘special interest’ politics that does not, or perhaps should not, concern those outside of the groups it is seen to form. Of course, for mainstream discourse, it is usually the perspectives of the marginalised that are viewed as identity politics – and outside of progressive circles it is rare to witness critical considerations of the identity politics practiced by those in power. In many ways, public conversation has largely not moved beyond the denigration of identity politics. In his 2019 piece *Stuck Inside the Vampire’s Castle*, Peter Heft contends not only that Fisher was correct, but that things have worsened in the intervening years with the “vampiric left” directly responsible for the rise of the alt-right.

This claim is echoed within Angela Nagle’s *Kill All Normies*. Focusing on the online culture wars, Nagle documents the rise of the alt-right and its transition from troll-haunted online fora to acts of domestic terrorism as well as its expression in the Trump administration.<sup>12</sup> Discussing notable cases of violence such as Elliot Rodger (the perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista killings),<sup>13</sup> Nagle’s contention is that there has been a failure of ‘the left’ to protect political institutions from the rise of this online populism. Instead, online spaces have become the site of a culture war between ‘left’ and alt-right camps – a war that the left have not only, in Nagle’s mind, been losing – but one that they have made far worse.<sup>14</sup> In her view, the online left has become more concerned with a hand-wringing moralism, a liberal repudiation of ‘the deplorables’, to echo the expression of once-presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton.<sup>15</sup> Citing Tumblr’s gender politics as a specific example of ‘the left’s’ overly abstract and bizarre worldview, Nagle blames left-wing identity discourse for the rise of the alt-right, with her work often regarded as a rejection of

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<sup>12</sup>Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan to Tumblr and the Alt-Right* (UK: Zero Books, 2017). This, along with the precedents in previous US politics, is documented in Neiwert’s *Alt-America*, see: David Neiwert, *Alt-America* (London: Verso, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> See: BBC News, ‘Elliot Rodger: How Misogynist Killer Became “Incel Hero”’, *BBC News*, 26 April 2018 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-43892189>> [accessed 4 August 2020]; Nicky Woolf, ‘Chilling Report Details How Elliot Rodger Executed Murderous Rampage’, *The Guardian*, 20 February 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/feb/20/mass-shooter-elliott-rodger-isla-vista-killings-report>> [accessed 4 August 2020].

<sup>14</sup> Roisin Kilberd, “Kill All Normies” Is About the Alt-Right But the Left Ends Up Looking Worse’, *Vice*, 2017 <[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/bmwdm5/kill-all-normies-is-about-the-alt-right-but-the-left-ends-up-looking-worse](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bmwdm5/kill-all-normies-is-about-the-alt-right-but-the-left-ends-up-looking-worse)> [accessed 8 July 2020].

<sup>15</sup> See: Katie Reilly, ‘Read Hillary Clinton’s “Basket of Deplorables” Remarks About Donald Trump Supporters’, *Time Magazine*, 10 September 2015 <<https://time.com/4486502/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables-transcript/>> [accessed 6 August 2020].

identity politics *tout court*.<sup>16</sup> *Kill All Normies* traces a line from identity politics through to the corruption of political institutions – thereby presenting it as a threat to democracy.

Both the Fisher and Nagle pieces have contributed to the proliferation of the denigrating view that identity politics is a lesser form of the political. This perspective spans from cynicism about ‘special interest politics’ to the view that identity politics serve to corrupt the political.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this last stance sometimes leads to the claim that identity politics forecloses the possibility of genuine politics, thereby casting those who engage in it as anti-political, or even as unwelcome interlopers within public fora.<sup>18</sup> Of course, this routinely expresses itself as another mode of intensification of those oppressive power structures that sustain marginalisation. As a result, oppressed communities see their concrete efforts reduced to invasive and anti-political acts.<sup>19</sup>

Concerns over an increasingly anti-political climate and the unconstrained zealotry of identity politics were given a somewhat timely voice in the recent publication of a letter on Harper’s Magazine.<sup>20</sup> The letter, written by Thomas Chatterton Williams and signed by numerous academics and public figures, condemns “the intolerant climate” and the “dogma or coercion” that it understands to contribute to “the forces of illiberalism” that represent “a real threat to democracy”.<sup>21</sup> The letter was a milquetoast appeal for tolerance, debate, and ‘free speech’, though considers these as empty principles divorced from context – which only ever figures superficially. The letter seems *prima facie* to support identity politics

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<sup>16</sup> Jen Izaakson, “‘Kill All Normies’ Skewers Online Identity Politics”, *Feminist Current*, 12 August 2017 <<https://www.feministcurrent.com/2017/08/12/kill-normies-skewers-online-identity-politics/>> [accessed 15 July 2020]; Jemima Kelly, ‘Angela Nagle on Identity Politics and Puritanical Internet Purges’, *Financial Times*, 28 June 2019 <<https://ftalphaville.ft.com/2019/06/28/1561722124000/Alphachat-Angela-Nagle-on-identity-politics-and-puritanical-internet-purges/>> [accessed 15 July 2020]; N.B., ‘How the Grotesque Online Culture Wars Fuel Populism’, *The Economist*, 3 August 2018 <<https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/08/03/how-the-grotesque-online-culture-wars-fuel-populism>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

<sup>17</sup> A.L., ‘Can Liberal Democracies Survive Identity Politics?’, *The Economist*, 30 September 2018 <<https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/09/30/can-liberal-democracies-survive-identity-politics>> [accessed 15 July 2020]; Mike González, ‘It Is Time to Debate—and End—Identity Politics’, *The Heritage Foundation*, 2018 <<https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/commentary/it-time-debate-and-end-identity-politics>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

<sup>18</sup> Michael Ignatieff, ‘Is Identity Politics Ruining Democracy?’, *Financial Times*, 5 September 2018 <<https://www.ft.com/content/09c2c1e4-ad05-11e8-8253-48106866cd8a>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

<sup>19</sup> Kay C. James, ‘Mal-Educated Rioters and Spineless Politicians Wage a War Against Democracy’, *The Heritage Foundation*, 2020 <<https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/commentary/mal-educated-rioters-and-spineless-politicians-wage-war-against-democracy>> [accessed 16 July 2020].

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Chatterton Williams, ‘A Letter on Justice and Open Debate’, *Harper’s Magazine*, 7 July 2020 <<https://harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/>> [accessed 8 July 2020].

<sup>21</sup> Williams.

through its explicit invocation of the recent anti-racist protests in the US. However it explicitly targets the moral attitudes it regards as underpinning the intolerant climate. As such, the letter echoes Fisher's and Nagle's worries.

In response, a letter was published in *The Objective* that attempted to both substantiate the points of the Harper's letter as well as to refute them.<sup>22</sup> This second letter noted, as have several others, how the Harper's letter surreptitiously takes aim against identity politics whilst also unavowedly participating in an identity politics of its own. The letter calls for a vision of political tolerance and good faith disagreement that sees itself as above the special interests of identity politics. A universal notion of what is sufficiently political is manoeuvred against the particular voices of those who already struggle to speak.

The implicit identity politics of the letter concerns it as a political act rather than an argument. As an argument, the letter has little substance, depending upon vagaries and platitudes. As a political act, it is not the content of the letter that is central, but the signatories. Many have pointed out the 'elite' status held by many of the signatories, as well as their own interventions into identity discourse. For example, the principal author of the letter is well-known for his advocacy of 'post-racial' politics,<sup>23</sup> and two other notable signatories include Bari Weiss – whose attempts to 'de-platform' Palestinian advocates<sup>24</sup> indicates an ulterior motive to seeking 'freedom of speech' – and JK Rowling,<sup>25</sup> who signed

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<sup>22</sup> Anon., 'A More Specific Letter on Justice and Open Debate', *The Objective*, 10 July 2020 <<https://theobjective.substack.com/p/a-more-specific-letter-on-justice>> [accessed 12 July 2020].

<sup>23</sup> Friedersdorf, Conor, 'Unraveling Race: Thomas Chatterton Williams Wants to Discard Traditional Racial Categories.', *The Atlantic*, 5 November 2019 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/11/thomas-chatterton-williams-self-portrait-black-white/601408/>> [accessed 15 July 2020]; Tobi Haslett, 'Irrational Man: Thomas Chatterton Williams's Confused Argument for a Post-Racial Society', *Book Forum*, September 2019 <<https://www.bookforum.com/print/2603/thomas-chatterton-williams-s-confused-argument-for-a-post-racial-society-23610>> [accessed 15 July 2020]; Summer Sewell, 'Is It Time to Unlearn Race? Thomas Chatterton Williams Says Yes', *The Guardian*, 15 October 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/15/thomas-chatterton-williams-race-books-interview>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

<sup>24</sup> Nathan J. Robinson, 'Why We All Hate Bari Weiss so Much', *Current Affairs*, 25 September 2019 <<https://www.currentaffairs.org/2019/04/why-we-all-hate-bari-weiss-so-much>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

<sup>25</sup> Alison Flood, 'Rowling, Rushdie and Atwood Warn against "Intolerance" in Open Letter', *The Guardian*, 8 July 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jul/08/jk-rowling-rushdie-and-atwood-warn-against-intolerance-in-open-letter>> [accessed 8 July 2020]; Jake Kanter, 'J.K. Rowling Signs Open Letter Railing Against Cancel Culture', *Deadline*, 2020 <<https://deadline.com/2020/07/j-k-rowling-signs-harpers-open-letter-railing-against-cancel-culture-1202980126/>> [accessed 8 July 2020].

the letter days after facing an online backlash for her persistently ‘gender critical’<sup>26</sup> and transphobic comments.<sup>27</sup> Several other signatories have likewise been accused of anti-trans hate speech.<sup>28</sup> This occasions one to ask: is the letter itself a good faith engagement? Furthermore, does the letter surmount the ‘atomistic’ concerns of identity politics or is it an obfuscated work of identity politics itself?

We must understand the Harper’s letter as an act of identity politics, which reveals how attempts to denigrate the concerns of identity politics are not themselves outside of the politics of identity. Condemnations of identity politics uncritically reproduce pre-existent systems of identity – including their disparities of power and mechanisms of marginalisation. As attested by *The Objective* letter as well as Gabrielle Bellot, the context of the Harper’s letter’s signatories places it unavoidably in the centre of contemporary struggles centred around racial and trans identities.<sup>29</sup>

As an act of discourse, the letter has re-opened contemporary debates about freedom of speech and permissibility of expression, centring these around the phenomenon of cancel culture. Cancel culture is an ill-defined phenomenon that has been bubbling within public fora over the past few years. Though its recent ascent to popularity occurred in tandem with the James Charles YouTube drama in 2019,<sup>30</sup> its earlier origins centre around the ‘cancellation’ of Taylor Swift in 2016.<sup>31</sup> 2019 not only saw the term entering into the mainstream lexicon, but also saw its application to radically disparate cases.<sup>32</sup> In its most generic form, cancel culture appears to refer to the penchant within online cultures for ‘overzealous’ and absolutist responses to perceived shortcomings and failures of individuals to perpetuate publicly accepted

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<sup>26</sup> Danielle Moreau, ‘What Is “Gender Critical” Anyway? On Essentialism and Transphobia’, *Overland*, 8 May 2019 <<https://overland.org.au/2019/05/what-is-gender-critical-anyway-on-essentialism-and-transphobia/comment-page-1/>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

<sup>27</sup> Garrard Conley, ‘J.K. Rowling’s Bigotry Is Painful and Maddening’, *CNN*, 2020 <<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/07/opinions/jk-rowling-conversion-therapy-transphobia-conley/index.html>> [accessed 8 July 2020]; Phaylen Fairchild, ‘JK Rowling Confirms Stance Against Transgender Women’, *Medium*, 2020 <<https://medium.com/@Phaylen/jk-rowling-confirms-stance-against-transgender-women-9bd83f7ca623>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>28</sup> Anagha Srikanth, ‘Harper’s Letter Condemning “cancel Culture” Draws Debate on Social Media’, *The Hill*, 8 July 2020 <<https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/arts-culture/506458-what-the-harpers-letter-says-about-cancel-culture>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>29</sup> Anon., Gabrielle Bellot, ‘Freedom Means Can Rather Than Should: What the Harper’s Open Letter Gets Wrong’, *LitHub*, 8 July 2020 <<https://lithub.com/freedom-means-can-rather-than-should-what-the-harpers-open-letter-gets-wrong/>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>30</sup> Morgan Sung, ‘2019 Was the Year “cancel Culture” Took on a Gorgeously Messy Life of Its Own’, *Mashable*, 25 December 2019 <<https://mashable.com/article/cancel-culture-2019/?europe=true>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Hagi, ‘Cancel Culture Is Not Real—At Least Not in the Way People Think’, *Time Magazine*, 21 November 2019 <<https://time.com/5735403/cancel-culture-is-not-real/>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>32</sup> Sung.

opinion. In contemporary discourse, these behaviours have been decried as the sign of a dangerous mob mentality, prone to stifling democracy with threats and outrage.<sup>33</sup> The purported crises of cancel culture have provoked frenzied reactions, with some lamenting the destruction of liberalism before the ‘woke’ left,<sup>34</sup> which is consequently understood by some as a self-appointed ‘ministry of truth’ seeking a totalitarian domination of public discourse.<sup>35</sup> As we have seen in the aftermath of the Harper’s letter, many pundits have seen fit to decry the nature of the responses, often speaking down to those who have voiced concerns<sup>36</sup> – citing vague universals such as free speech whilst leaving the substance of the responses unaddressed. Rebukes of cancel culture often take contradictory approaches, simultaneously regarding it as a real and profoundly harmful suppression of freedom of speech, and as a childish tactic that demonstrates millennial entitlement. The jury remains out on whether any of those who have purportedly been cancelled have disappeared from public fora, or whether their cancellation has paradoxically improved their public image, producing celebrity through cancellation.<sup>37</sup> Either outcome can be argued depending on the case in question, granting cancel culture remarkable rhetorical flexibility.

This rhetorical use of cancel culture wilfully conflates diverse situations into a singular, confused concept. As many have pointed out, cancel culture is an oversimplification<sup>38</sup> that often allows an individual to deflect from criticism – particular criticism from below. As Billy Bragg noted in The

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<sup>33</sup> Antony L. Fisher, ‘The Harper’s “letter” Proves We Need to Have a Serious Talk about Free Speech’, *Business Insider*, 9 July 2020 <<https://www.businessinsider.com/harpers-letter-proves-serious-free-speech-chomsky-rushdie-steinem-kasparov-2020-7?r=US&IR=T>> [accessed 9 July 2020]; Kevin D. Williamson, ‘Social Justice Warriors Are Waging a Dangerous “Cancel Cultural Revolution”’, *New York Post*, 13 June 2020 <<https://nypost.com/2020/06/13/social-justice-warriors-are-waging-a-cancel-cultural-revolution/>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>34</sup> Brigid Delaney, ‘Can Liberalism and Its Gatekeepers Survive the Seismic Changes in Our Society?’, *The Guardian*, 11 July 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/12/can-liberalism-and-its-gatekeepers-survive-the-seismic-changes-coursing-through-our-society#>> [accessed 11 July 2020].

<sup>35</sup> Janice Turner, ‘The Woke Left Is the New Ministry of Truth’, *The Times*, 11 July 2020 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-woke-left-is-the-new-ministry-of-truth-vmrgt823b>> [accessed 11 July 2020].

<sup>36</sup> The tone of pieces such as Moore’s leave little room for doubt, see: Suzanne Moore, ‘Cancellation Might Feel Good, but It’s Not Activism’, *The Guardian*, 3 July 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/03/cancellation-activism-persuasion-cancel-culture-twitter>> [accessed 11 July 2020].

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Albas, ‘Cancel Culture Has Made Celebrities out of Its Victims’, *Spiked*, 21 February 2020 <<https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/02/21/cancel-culture-has-made-celebrities-out-of-its-victims/>> [accessed 9 July 2020]; John McDermott, ‘Those People We Tried to Cancel? They’re All Hanging Out Together’, *New York Times*, 2 November 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/style/what-is-cancel-culture.html>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

<sup>38</sup> Hagi.



Guardian, many of the signatories of the Harper's letter are longstanding cultural arbiters – those who are accustomed to a narrow range of accountability that has now significantly widened due to social media.<sup>39</sup> The cancel culture debate wilfully equates freedom of speech with the right to an audience, often understanding this culture as the desire to 'no-platform' those who already enjoy public visibility. In this context, the Harper's letter reads more as an attempt to protect those who are already able to speak from critics than as a desire to promote a pluralisation of voices in public fora. As the response letter, published through *The Objective*, contends: the letter never addresses those marginalised voices that have been historically and are presently denied the visibility and security enjoyed by many of the letter's signatories. In this sense, instead of demanding free speech for all, the letter should be understood as a demand to return to the status quo, as not only freedom from accountability, but the continued freedom of many of its signatories to retain their dominance over public discourse unchallenged. Within this context, it is clear that cancel culture is being used rhetorically as a defence from criticism, and is thereby rightly and, consequently, being dismissed as a "scam"<sup>40</sup> and a "con".<sup>41</sup>

Cancel culture often serves as a rhetorical tool that allows the powerful to masquerade as victims when faced with criticism that they believe to originate from those they consider beneath them. It is further an excellent illustration of contemporary discourse on the politics of visibility – a concern that runs throughout this project and that forms a fundamental aspect of the politics of enclosure.

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<sup>39</sup> Billy Bragg, "Cancel Culture" Doesn't Stifle Debate, but It Does Challenge the Old Order', *The Guardian*, 10 July 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/10/free-speech-young-people>> [accessed 10 July 2020].

<sup>40</sup> Michael Hobbes, 'Don't Fall For The "Cancel Culture" Scam', *Huffington Post*, 10 July 2020 <[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/cancel-culture-harpers-jk-rowling-scam\\_n\\_5fo887b4c5b67a8obco6c95e?rii8n=true&ncid=fcbklnkushpimgooooo063](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/cancel-culture-harpers-jk-rowling-scam_n_5fo887b4c5b67a8obco6c95e?rii8n=true&ncid=fcbklnkushpimgooooo063)> [accessed 12 July 2020].

<sup>41</sup> Osita Nwanevu, "The 'Cancel Culture' Con", *The New Republic*, 23 September 2019 <<https://newrepublic.com/article/155141/cancel-culture-con-dave-chappelle-shane-gillis>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

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# 1: PATHOLOGY AND MEDIATION

## THE POLITICS OF ENCLOSURE

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2017, acclaimed feminist journal *Hypatia* released its spring volume, which included an article by Rebecca Tuvel, an assistant Professor of Philosophy at Rhodes College, Tennessee. Entitled “In Defense of Transracialism”,<sup>42</sup> the article provoked an almost immediate backlash both from those outside the academy and those within.<sup>43</sup> In terms of its composition, the article premised its argument on a comparison between Caitlyn Jenner, whose trans identity has already passed through the proverbial media storm, and Rachel Dolezal, an ostensibly white woman who infamously lived as a Black woman (and who served as the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) chapter in Spokane, Washington) for many years due to her self-identification with Black identity. Tuvel’s central point is that the justifications often deployed in favour of transgender identities apply equally well to cases of transracialism, and yet Jenner is celebrated<sup>44</sup> whereas Dolezal is outcast, abused, or reduced to a punchline. In light of the great complexity of articulating the intersections between gender and race, Tuvel’s conclusion was a tentative suggestion that perhaps popular concepts and attitudes towards identities require re-examination. Following the media focus on Dolezal, we have

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<sup>42</sup> Rebecca Tuvel, ‘In Defense of Transracialism’, *Hypatia*, 32.2 (2017), 263–78.

<sup>43</sup> See: Kelly Oliver, ‘If This Is Feminism...’, *The Philosophical Salon*, May 2017 <<http://thephilosophicalsalon.com/if-this-is-feminism-its-been-hijacked-by-the-thought-police/>> [accessed 2 October 2017].

<sup>44</sup> Though she has been widely criticised (see: J. Bryan Lowder, ‘Criticizing Caitlyn Jenner Isn’t “Harsh.” It’s Necessary.’, *Slate*, 14 September 2015 <[http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/09/14/caitlyn\\_jenner\\_s\\_i\\_am\\_cait\\_ends\\_but\\_criticism\\_of\\_her\\_comments\\_shouldn\\_t.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/09/14/caitlyn_jenner_s_i_am_cait_ends_but_criticism_of_her_comments_shouldn_t.html)> [accessed 3 October 2017]; Itay Hod, ‘How Caitlyn Jenner Went From Icon to Outcast’, *The Wrap*, 3 November 2017 <<http://www.thewrap.com/how-caitlyn-jenner-went-from-icon-to-outcast/>> [accessed 3 October 2017].), her identity as a trans woman is both respected and defended (see: Sara C Nelson, ‘Caitlyn Jenner Mocked And Misgendered By Fox News Anchors Who Call Her Bruce’, *The Huffington Post*, 6 February 2015 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/06/02/caitlyn-jenner-mocked-misgendered-fox-news-anchors-bruce\\_n\\_7491452.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/06/02/caitlyn-jenner-mocked-misgendered-fox-news-anchors-bruce_n_7491452.html)> [accessed 3 October 2017]; Megan Lasher, ‘What You’re Really Doing When You Misgender Caitlyn Jenner’, *The Huffington Post*, 6 September 2015 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/megan-lasher/what-youre-really-doing-when-you-misgender-caitlyn-jenner\\_b\\_7535040.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/megan-lasher/what-youre-really-doing-when-you-misgender-caitlyn-jenner_b_7535040.html)> [accessed 3 October 2017].). Furthermore, she was shortlisted for Time’s person of the year (see: Katy Steinmetz, ‘Person of the Year, The Short List: Caitlyn Jenner’, *Time Magazine*, 2017 <<http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2015-runner-up-caitlyn-jenner/>> [accessed 3 October 2017].) and was featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* (see: Buzz Bissinger, ‘Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story’, *Vanity Fair*, July 2015 <<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-bruce-cover-annie-leibovitz>> [accessed 3 October 2017].).

seen an onslaught of clever think-pieces seeking to put her back where she belongs, to reaffirm her whiteness.<sup>45</sup> Again, this marks a disparity of treatment between transgender and transracial subjects. Were commentators to attempt to ‘reaffirm’ Jenner’s masculinity or maleness in a similar manner, it would be considered misgendering at best or at worst an act of transphobic violence.

My concern is not to present a defence of Tuvel, but to examine how the responses her article provoked reveal something about the nature of contemporary identity discourse – most importantly how these demonstrate the foreclosure of critique. Responses were overwhelmingly damning. Beginning on social media, the article was widely insulted, with many suggesting that Tuvel’s personal idiocy or lack of understanding was the only way to explain such ‘outlandish’ views and responses further focused on the ‘offensive’ or ‘harmful’ nature of its content. A representative example is the response of Nora Berenstein, of the University of Tennessee, who stated on Facebook that Tuvel’s article contains “discursive transmisogynistic violence”.<sup>46</sup> The responses came to a head in an open letter to *Hypatia*,<sup>47</sup> which called for the article’s removal on the grounds that it failed to meet appropriate academic standards (failing to use the ‘correct’ words or to ‘correctly’ understand the cited theory) and that it caused “many harms”<sup>48</sup> (the exact nature of which the letter itself fails to articulate). The open letter makes these and a number of additional accusations about the content and nature of the text, most of which remain unsubstantiated and have no clear basis within the text itself.<sup>49</sup> Though it has mostly faded from popular attention, this ‘transracialism controversy’<sup>50</sup> has resulted in the resignations of *Hypatia*’s board of associated editors,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ijeoma Oluo, ‘The Heart of Whiteness: Ijeoma Oluo Interviews Rachel Dolezal, the White Woman Who Identifies as Black’, *The Stranger*, 2017 <<https://www.thestranger.com/features/2017/04/19/25082450/the-heart-of-whiteness-ijeoma-oluo-interviews-rachel-dolezal-the-white-woman-who-identifies-as-black?fbclid=IwARoHQMYGE032uT9yMqqQkNoHv23-IC3R-P2VA3iDUXyyWW707lYddgjS8jM>> [accessed 26 February 2020].

<sup>46</sup> Justin Weinburg, ‘Philosopher’s Article On Transracialism Sparks Controversy (Updated with Response from Author)’, *Daily Nous*, 5 January 2017 <<http://dailynous.com/2017/05/01/philosophers-article-transracialism-sparks-controversy/>> [accessed 2 October 2017].

<sup>47</sup> See: Jesse Singal, ‘This Is What A Modern-Day Witch Hunt Looks Like’, *New York Magazine*, 5 February 2017 <<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/05/transracialism-article-controversy.html?mid=fb-share-di>> [accessed 2 May 2017].

<sup>48</sup> Quoted from the letter, cited in: Singal.

<sup>49</sup> Weinburg, ‘Philosopher’s Article On Transracialism Sparks Controversy (Updated with Response from Author)’.

<sup>50</sup> The event is of such significance that it has warranted its own entry on Wikipedia.

<sup>51</sup> Justin Weinburg, ‘Hypatia’s Associate Editors Resign’, *Daily Nous*, 24 July 2017 <<http://dailynous.com/2017/07/24/hypatias-associate-editors-resign/>>.

and has demonstrated several of the deep fissures present within contemporary identity scholarship, as well as the intersection of this scholarship with non-academic discourses.<sup>52</sup>

I regard the lack of critical engagement within the Tuvel affair as representative of contemporary identity politics and its pathologies. Through an analysis of this controversy it becomes possible to articulate a philosophical diagnosis of those pathological shortcomings that greatly limit the efficacy of mainstream identity politics. Understanding her text within the context of contemporary identity discourses enables us to understand how this explosive reaction took place, and how it felt justified in the minds of her critics, both those within and without of the academy. But even more importantly, correctly contextualising this incident enables us to apprehend the current state of identity politics more widely, an understanding of which is indispensable to the project of elucidating the construction of identity concepts. The responses to Tuvel's article are representative of the conditions underpinning identity politics to the configuration of political space, particularly its practices regarding the justification for and interdiction against various forms of political action. Notably, the largely reactionary (an appropriate descriptor when we consider how little Tuvel's own words actually figured in the responses and in the quick lapse<sup>53</sup> into name calling) rejection is indicative of a narrowing of the discursive, both in terms of the standard of academic discussion and as a more foundational notion of intersubjective exchange. This conducts an implicit closure of the horizons of discourse, with this having profound implications on our notions of identity. If we follow the manifold bodies of theory that understand the self as produced within discourse, such closure impacts how we are able to articulate processes of subject production – perhaps even acting as a process of subject production itself – as well as shaping our implicit understandings of political space, causing us to question 'the political', our place within it, and how we live together as political subjects.

Previous iterations of this project attempted a theorisation of these pathologies in terms of an 'identity populism' – looking at how these politics attempt to work as a collective and universal reorientation of meaning against oppressive structures of power. However, 'populism' proved an ill-fit for

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<sup>52</sup> Oliver, 'If This Is Feminism...'

<sup>53</sup> This is perhaps too charitable a term, as it implies that there was initially some serious engagement with the text, evidence for which is overwhelmingly lacking.

this theorisation,<sup>54</sup> and instead I seek to understand the pathologies of contemporary identity discourse in terms of 'identity enclosure'. To claim that identity is enclosed is to examine the discursive conditions within which identity is produced, as well as the spaces within which identity-speak moves and is circulated. Indeed, as shall be explored in later chapters, it is a question of how identity is itself spatialised. Centrally, enclosure is a narrowing of the conditions of appearance of the subject, with this in the first case enacted through varying kinds of discursive restraint, underpinned by its particular onto-epistemological framing. With discursivity shaping how the self can appear, a narrowing of the horizon of possibilities for such appearance impacts the terms upon which the self can be recognised.

What is therefore at stake within the pathologies of identity enclosure is the political - in the Arendtian sense of our ability to live together.<sup>55</sup> Through the process of enclosure, identity discourses come to police themselves and to propagate a privatising, essentialising ontology of the self that capitulates to an anaemic account of subject production - if indeed the subject is understood to be produced at all. Enclosure is motivated by the desire to affix the subject, to hold it in place as an object of knowledge - knowledge that can then form the basis of identity praxis to oppose the asymmetries of power that underlie exploitative and harmful structures of oppression. This desire to follow the Socratic maxim to 'know thyself' is motivated in response to conditions of violence - both physical and epistemic. In my theorisation of these discursive strategies, I foreground the aspect of induced precarity within these conditions of violence<sup>56</sup> - which is to say the ways in which the processes of production of marginalised identities and the perspectives and experiences of those who bear and claim them are rendered vulnerable - both epistemically threatened as identities, and physically threatened as living, embodied beings. Given contemporary relations of power and domination, these strategies seem to be quite reasonable - but it is my contention that their very reasonableness stems, in most cases, from the refusal and inability of such strategies to conduct any significant break from the very systems of domination they seek to oppose. This should not be taken as a puritanical reproach of such kinds of politics - for our complicity within power

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<sup>54</sup> For many of the reasons explored by Laclau, see: Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso Books, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> As I shall explore within my fourth chapter, *The Structuring of Public Space*.

<sup>56</sup> See: Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso Books, 2006); Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2016).

cannot be fully avoided.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the puritanism here is to be located within the enclosures enacted by these politics themselves - in the ways that they attempt to affix subjects and categories of the self into either closed systems of subject production, or into fixed essential selves. The impact of such a framing on our notion of community and the political 'we' is quite devastating, abstracting us away from how identities are lived and experienced within historical contexts into a perspective that wishes to understand identity as something that is straightforwardly factic. Philosophically, this is the reduction of identity, the self, discourse, and community to the status of abstract universality - a term drawn from Hegel's project. Identity enclosure seals the self off from the processes of its own production - a process I theorise within this thesis in terms of Hegelian recognition.

However, following both Hegelian and Foucauldian veins (unhappy bedfellows though they may be), this project should not be understood as the pursuit of a limitless discourse (which would be an impossibility) nor a politically naïve call for an 'anything goes' approach to language use. Arguments (both within and without of the academy) surrounding political uses of language - particularly, in the case of identity, slurs - are widely circulated within the current discursive climate. Though we may wish to turn a critical eye to the specifics of various iterations of these arguments, I consider it centrally important that we do not ignore implications (both implicit and direct) of particular uses of language that repeat and invoke historical and ongoing dynamics of oppressive subject production. Instead, it is to note how the desire for 'deconstructive justice' (the kind of justice that comes through the dismantling of oppressive systems of subject making) can often become conflated with the desire for a kind of security that can only come through the enclosure of the self into a regulated discourse that can repeat, at the ontological level, a reliance on an abstract universal - from which derives the (il)legitimacy of the discursive restraint. The caution here is against the taking for granted, or taking as factic, the abstract terms of population.<sup>58</sup>

My project draws upon examples from popular identity discourse, allowing these to both contribute to and be critiqued by my analysis of identity. The question of the relationship between

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<sup>57</sup> As the godparents of queer theory, Foucault and Butler, remind us frequently, see: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1991); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> With this being explicitly explored within chapters 4 and 5 as to how such hegemonic framings of identity and political space result in a politics of resistance that fails to constitute a fundamental resistance, through its repetition of a subjectifying logic.

academic and popular discourse is a far-reaching, historically specific, and empirically inflected question beyond the scope of this thesis to answer in its entirety. This project understands academic and popular discourse as distinct discursive modes that often operate in distinct spaces but does not regard this distinction as total – instead understanding these discourses as connected in processes of constant cross-pollination. This is to suggest that I make no strong claim about the relationship between philosophical argumentation and public discourse, though refuse to reduce one into the other. Instead, my project engages and intervenes at this interstice of cross-pollination, actively engaging popular discourse with academic tools and bringing non-academic discourse to bear upon the formulation and practice of theory within the academy.

Throughout the course of this project, I use the term identity enclosure as a characterisation of a series of trends within contemporary identity discourse. Though pervasive, I do not regard enclosure as either monolithic or as totalising. My characterisation of enclosure understands this as a pervasive collection of interrelated configurations of the self, identity, and the political; I do not, therefore, suggest that enclosure should be primarily understood as an attitude, but is instead understood to be part of the conditions of contemporary discourse. Though the specific framing of enclosure can be practiced more or less explicitly,<sup>59</sup> it is rarely a conscious attitude that is straightforwardly expressed by various interlocutors. Instead, enclosure is the result of an arrangement of power that constrains the very activity that produces it. This point is explored in greater detail in my later chapters that focus on the connection between identity and spatiality (specifically in the context of a cartography of social space), particularly as these are configured online. This project both describes and evaluates identity enclosure: I describe this broad set of contemporary conditions and articulate how these play out philosophically as well as exploring the motivations behind these approaches. Though enclosure can be said to contribute some positive tools for identity discourses, I contend that these are outweighed by the severe limitations they simultaneously impose. Enclosure therefore demands a heavy price for its comparatively superficial gains.

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<sup>59</sup> There are several examples – examined directly or referenced over the course of this project – of where enclosure is at its most explicit such that it operates more overtly as an attitude. I already examined a set of these in my introduction with reference to the Harper's Letter signatories and Mark Fisher. Further philosophical figures are the Tuvel detractors (discussed later in this chapter), Alexandre Kojève (discussed in chapter 2), and Charles Taylor (discussed in chapter 3), as well as those criticised for reification (explored at the end of this chapter) or essentialism (explored in chapters 2, 3, and 4). Though in these cases enclosure operates similarly to an attitude, in no case is it reducible to one. It remains a set of conditions of discourse.

Some of my contemporary allies in this critique against enclosure<sup>60</sup> are: Judith Butler, for her widespread interventions in contemporary discourse;<sup>61</sup> Patchen Markell, for his reclamation of recognition from its ossified tradition;<sup>62</sup> Sara Ahmed, for her contributions on the phenomenology of identity;<sup>63</sup> and Sophie Loidolt, for her phenomenological treatment of Arendt's conception of the political.<sup>64</sup> (Though this list is far from exhaustive.)

Therefore, as a general condition of contemporary discourse, enclosure cannot be satisfactorily explored as an attitude, disposition, or view (though in chapter 3 I explore its proximity to philosophical work on identity). Accordingly, this project does not attempt to pin enclosure on a few interlocutors, but instead widens the breadth of its scope to focus upon the conditions of appearance of subjects, the discursive conditions within which it is possible for a subject to appear. My claim is therefore that the pathologies of enclosure operate as a tacit proliferation of discursive restrictions that condition the possible articulations of subjects and their identities. This is to suggest that enclosure is descriptive of a series of discursive norms that shape common-sense, and frequently unavowed, assumptions of selfhood, subjectivity, identity, and the political.<sup>65</sup>

Despite my contention that enclosure is pervasive, I do not understand it to monolithically condition discourse. Though enclosure operates to foreclose and problematise many avenues of critique and praxis that do not repeat its limiting approach, it fails in universally conditioning identity discourse. My project thereby stresses a perhaps subtle difference between the claim that enclosure describes a series of factors that condition discourse and the claim that these factors could render these discourses fully determinant. Indeed, as is further elucidated in chapter 4, my claim is more specifically that enclosure aims towards the total determination of discourse and that though this totalisation is never possible, its pursuit imposes manifold limitations on identity discourses that only serve to hamper and hamstring the praxeis they can occasion. This is to say that my project is not concerned with an evaluation of identity

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<sup>60</sup> Though they would not formulate their critiques precisely in these terms.

<sup>61</sup> Butler's work is cited throughout the thesis, but receives specific treatments in chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>62</sup> This is explored in chapter 3, alongside my critiques of Markell's formulation.

<sup>63</sup> These are explored in chapter 4.

<sup>64</sup> This is explored in chapter 4.

<sup>65</sup> In this sense, we can suggest that enclosure has an ideological function, see my section 'Hegemonic Recognition: Structural Codifications of Modes of Encounter' in chapter 4.



politics and praxis that solely aims at its philosophical coherence – but instead examines how its philosophical underpinnings operate and specifically contribute to the shaping of these politics.

When examining the wide berth of contemporary identity discourse, it is my contention that the underlying pathologies of identity enclosure can be identified as clustered around two central focal points. I consider the first of these below in the section ‘Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy as Regulative Identity Practices’. This pathology concerns the troubled relationship between enclosure and notions of the discursive. Due to its implicit interest in the creation and deployment of an identity orthodoxy and this orthodoxy’s manifestation as a series of orthopraxic restraints, enclosure often constitutes itself as something of a discursive block. When operating as such, enclosure constrains intersubjective exchange, which not only problematises its place within a democratic or discursive framework generally, but further serves to undermine its ability to realise its own goals regarding a reorientation of socio-political meaning.

This is only made worse by the second focal point, which concerns the phenomenological and ontological underpinnings of its notions of both self and identity. I discuss the second pathology below in the section ‘Obscured Privatisation’. This concerns how identity enclosure articulates those individual subjectivities, on behalf of which it wishes to advocate, as an ontological independence. The individual becomes an absolute, fixed individual, whose constitution is treated as if wholly independent from both other individuals and collective systems of public and political meaning. The contextual element of the self may be referenced, but its deeply formative role is ignored in favour of a confused picture of personal, subjective authenticity. Identity thus takes the role of a series of descriptors that are then applied to qualify one’s subjective experience, with the significance and salience of identity-speak determined only with reference to the individual’s self-apprehension. The meaning and significance of identity come to concern the individual alone, and are thus viciously detached from any notion of shared meaning. The self, as well as the modalities of its description, which is to say identities, become privatised, a rhetorical move that clearly echoes a kind of stoic withdrawal.<sup>66</sup> Politically, this echoes certain trends within political liberalism, but constitutes a break from those political projects, such as Arendt’s, that derive a schema of the political from the classical Greek distinction between the *polis* and the *oikos*, the public

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<sup>66</sup> Though this withdrawal is fundamentally anti-political, with none of the ‘horizon-expanding’ elements found within certain elements of classical stoicism.

and the private.<sup>67</sup> Identity enclosure blurs the distinctions between notions such as public and private, between objectivity and subjectivity, but does so without a philosophical examination of the distinctions between these conceptual spaces. As such, identity comes to issue from the private into the public; it remains wholly private in its ontology, carefully fashioned into a form of personal knowledge whereby only the individual can authentically speak to their identity, yet one which must then become public in order to be politically salient. The result is a political movement solidified around strictly private selves, which then seeks to deploy these classically subjective articulations of the self as the basis for a revolution in political meaning.

Both pathologies result in an erosion of discursivity as both political action and a characteristic mode of intersubjective exchange. Enclosure's pathologies thereby come to undermine notions of both politics and the political more generally, creating a situation in which abstracted notions of personal subjectivity and authenticity become the immovable, sacrosanct foundations of identity practices – enshrined as abstract universals. As I shall make clear over the course of this chapter, when its pathologies come to the fore, identity enclosure becomes the site of fracture, disabling the very transformation it requires to achieve its ends. My focus within this first chapter is a specific elucidation as to how enclosure operates but I have noted, where appropriate, alternative examples of identity practice that oppose enclosure. In keeping with my methodological focus on the cross-pollination of discourses, I have drawn such examples from both academic and popular discussions.

## ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXY AS REGULATIVE IDENTITY PRACTICES

Despite the relative rarity with which the aim of founding an orthodox system is made explicit,<sup>68</sup> or is even actively disavowed, the manner by which identity is usually mobilised within contemporary discourse commonly takes on the form of an orthodox imposition. Within its present context, notions of identity are continuously contested, precipitated by the rise of a seemingly new language of the self and

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<sup>67</sup> A distinction foundational to the political work of Hannah Arendt, an exploration of which forms a key basis of my fourth chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Those who would regard contemporary identity politics in terms of a 'regime' are usually its opponents and almost exclusively use this term in the pejorative sense. Whilst I remain critical of contemporary identity politics, it is not my intention to repeat this largely reactionary motivation.

its facets. Alongside novel modes of articulation come new codes of practice, and where these new criteria emerge and are enforced, they resemble an imposition of new meaning, predicated on the abandonment or erasure of those previous or different to it. With regard to those antecedent hermeneutics, enclosure's problem is not that it fails to respect some notion of 'traditional' identity – understandably, traditionalism within conceptualisations of identity is one of enclosure's central targets.<sup>69</sup> Conversely, the problem develops when identity enclosure breaks away from the wealth of critical conceptions and insights developed within those vast bodies of scholarship<sup>70</sup> that critically consider frameworks of identity oppression. This is only partially a concern with anti-intellectualism, nor is it a demand that academic discourses should determine those of the public, but instead notes a trend towards a reclassification of identity categories irrespective of the historical conditions in which such identities emerged. This transition is motivated by a desire to unpick the systems of political oppression that still affect many subjects. Often, this translates into an impoverished understanding of oppression, when an individual occupies either one side or another of an absolutist division between those supporting the oppressive system and those undermining it. The desire to respect subjectivities thus becomes a narrow politics of respectability,<sup>71</sup> concerned with the development and enforcement of an ideological purity. When ordered into an orthodoxy, these motivations come to form a framework of understanding in which one is either an ally or an enemy, either with the posited 'us' or against it.<sup>72</sup> As such, this orthodoxy comes to enclose the horizons of discourse within its narrow standards, heavily prefiguring what it is willing to hear and what it refuses to hear.

Though many of its advocates would object to the invocation of terms such as orthodoxy when describing their politic, rightly associating the word with those imposing modalities of power they seek

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<sup>69</sup> Importantly, when enclosure does give some consideration to 'traditional' forms of identity, it often responds reactionarily to reject or criticise the limits of these conceptions. This obscures the contexts in which 'traditional' conceptions developed, as well as limits enclosure's ability to be critical, as it largely refuses to engage these concepts at all.

<sup>70</sup> Here I am referring to works across the feminist spectra, as well as to queer theory, critical race studies, post-colonial theory and several other interlinked subfields.

<sup>71</sup> Again, despite the widespread denunciations of 'respectability politics'. See: Fredrick C. Harris, 'The Rise of Respectability Politics', *Dissent*, 2014 <<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-respectability-politics>> [accessed 10 August 2020]; Sarah Molano, 'The Problem with Respectability Politics', *Pipe Dream*, 23 April 2018 <<https://www.bupipedream.com/opinions/94369/the-problem-with-respectability-politics/>> [accessed 10 August 2020].

<sup>72</sup> This downplays reflectivity of one's own relationship with oppressive structures of meaning, encouraging individuals within this framework to assume that sexism, racism etc. is always something committed by another.

to oppose, their approach towards identity remains manifestly normative, concerned with the creation and standardisation of identity norms. We can thus begin to conceptualise the orthodoxy of current identity politics through understanding how they produce and seek to enforce such normative standards of discourse. Much contemporary identity politics is concerned with a series of regulatory practices in which the specific constraint and compulsion of certain discursive practices constitute rhetorical hermeneutics in opposition to contemporary systems of oppression. The reduction of plural modalities of identity into a unified framework of articulation seeks to generate a space of possibility for a shared political vision, one which includes and considers the concerns of those 'within' these identities and the frameworks through which such categories are articulated. The universal inclusivity of this vision enables enclosure to view itself as grounded in popular opinion, to appear as a straightforward democratisation, yet it reduces these normative standards to the status of abstract universal.

This enclosure follows a line of orthodoxy in as far as it attempts to sanction particular identity practices (both in the sense of granting permission or approval, and conversely penalisation or interdiction). Within this framework, sanctioning is constituted as a founding act of meaning,<sup>73</sup> in the sense that enclosure is largely concerned with prefiguring a set definition for its notions of identity – supposedly basing these in individual subjective apprehensions. Often justified *via* appeals to notions of respect, the manner in which identities may be discursively constituted and treated comes to follow particular linguistic conventions. From this stance, we can see the emergence of a regulatory framework, where certain notions have gained a perceived authority due to the semblance of collective assent. Through the development and deployment of these conventions, this politic appears to put into place a novel system of static normative standards, a project that it sees as enabling a social shift towards inclusivity and 'tolerance'.<sup>74</sup> An all-welcoming inclusivity is often the apparent goal of this politic, where inclusivity is regarded as the granting of a voice (as well as an audience) to those of its constitutive identities. This is then regarded as representing the concerns of members of the political movement, a

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<sup>73</sup> This term is drawn from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, where she distances her performative account of gender as a system of meaning requiring constant repetition from the notion of a prefigured sense of meaning inherited from a single, historical, definitive act. See: Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 198.

<sup>74</sup> With the centrality of this term revealing the deep affiliation such politics have with liberalism, see: Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2008).

gesture of both validation and solidarity. As a universalising project, identity enclosure seeks to articulate all subjects within the confines of its own framework. Conversely, it only permits difference within its own terms, in the ways that it divides identities from one another, and is absolutely opposed to tension, disagreement, indeterminability, and exclusion. Identity enclosure contains identity within an orthodox structure that seeks to totalise all identity-speak and thus attempts to foreclose any articulations of the self beyond its own. In this sense, enclosure seeks to absolutely condition the discursive, to become discourse itself.

We can see this in the abstracted way enclosure treats the notion of community, abhorring any practice that could be considered 'exclusionary' of particular kinds of subjects. Indeed, the central role given within this politic to those rhetorical practices motivated by this desire for inclusivity is key to its formulation as an enclosure. To be inclusive is to represent and respect<sup>75</sup> the concerns of those subjectivities one is including – failure to so-include particular perspectives is seen to further the conditions of silence that enable the endurance of oppressive structures. Accordingly, it is thought that through this transformation of codes of practice and language, this political exclusion and oppression can be overcome. Through the modality of its own rhetoric, this enclosure operates under a strategy of imposition, through consistent attempts at enforcing the norms it has also created. In this sense, we have a movement that both determines the norm, often with the explicit desire to oppose pervasive and historical cultural attitudes (which are, rightly or wrongly, conflated with oppressive power structures), and then holds others to this standard. As such, enclosure seeks to transform political space. Usually, the criteria for determining whether or not a speech-act is damaging, and whether it constitutes a form of violence, is the extent to which it is seen as enforcing conservative or exclusionary (once again, these terms are often invoked interchangeably) notions of identity, or simply the degree to which an idea contradicts other components of the politics of enclosure.

Contradiction and deviation are thus redescribed as forms of violence – and are summarily excluded from the discursive, becoming repressed.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, both the notions of political inclusivity

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<sup>75</sup> Within this discourse, this is supported by a solipsistic framing of the self, as I explore within the second half of this chapter, in the section 'Immediate Self Knowledge'.

<sup>76</sup> This is somewhat ironic given that deviancy from and contradiction of public systems of meaning are usually celebrated with respect to queer identities, which form a large subsection of identities with which enclosure is overtly concerned.

and identity itself are elevated to the status of abstract universality. Within contemporary identity politics, the fissures of identity categories are covered over in favour of a vision of a possible socio-political space where identities are seamlessly organised so as to resolve the internal tensions of this system of categorisation. The result is an identity system that is held as an abstraction, as a series of idealised standards to be imposed on our conduct and thought in order to engender social transformation. Identity is mapped out for us, and public, political space becomes cartographically understood. Discourse, too, is mapped - not only in the sense that it acquires strict boundaries, dividing the interior from that which is considered to be 'outside' the borders of the map, but also in the sense that whatever discourse belongs within the map appears already having acquired its approved directionality - the map determines where the discourse can go.<sup>77</sup> Through treating identity as a tight, interlocking system of self-definition, such politics not only profoundly fail to break from identity as a system of domination and imposed meaning, but they also foreclose the possibility of critical engagement with this system. Because identity is upheld as a tight interlocking system, calling any component into question results in a perceived attack on progressive politics as a whole. Enclosure attempts to carve an absolute division between total support for or complete rejection of its various articulations of identity.<sup>78</sup> One is thus seen as either entirely for or against the social structures of systemic oppression - one is either guilty of sexism, racism, or homophobia etc., or one is fighting against them.<sup>79</sup> This too becomes a form of identity, the clash between the 'woke'<sup>80</sup> progressive and the ignorant bigot. Thus, orthodoxy primarily focuses on identity as a system of abstract definition, and is thereby largely unable to conceptualise the self as it is lived. Though it claims to honour individual 'lived experience', enclosure fails to think this experience outside of the abstracted universality of its own map of identity. Its appeals to lived experience are phenomenologically abstract, claiming to refer to individual experiences yet simultaneously approximating these experiences to collective

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<sup>77</sup> As I shall develop in my fifth chapter, *Online Discourses of the Self*, the movement of this discourse maintains stasis. There is nowhere for this discourse to go.

<sup>78</sup> For example, see: Lee.

<sup>79</sup> This stance ignores the complexities of political injustice, and enables individuals to overlook their own complicity with systemic oppression by enabling them to identify with a movement that claims to oppose them.

<sup>80</sup> The term has its roots within Black subcultures, representing the idea of being aware of one's own social position and thus one's understanding of systemic racism. However, this has largely degraded into an internet slang term that only vaguely references notions of progressivism. See: Charles Pulliam-Moore, 'How "woke" Went from Black Activist Watchword to Teen Internet Slang', *Fusion*, 1 August 2016 <<http://fusion.kinja.com/how-woke-went-from-black-activist-watchword-to-teen-int-1793853989>> [accessed 11 July 2017].

narratives, disavowing those experiences that do not fit with the discourse as it has already been mapped out. Thus, as a project of transformation, contemporary identity politics pursues this transformation from a distance as it is unable to conceptualise of the lived conditions of the subject.

I shall demonstrate the orthodoxy of contemporary enclosure with reference to two examples. The former is the contemporary notion of gender identity with its ramifications on notions of gender, biological sex and sexuality with regards to political identity. I will focus on modes of address and language policing. The second is the notion of 'Black culture' which epitomises the particular tendency of contemporary enclosure to conflate race, culture and nation into almost entirely interchangeable categories, as well as granting them a foundational degree of ontological fixity. My treatment of 'Black culture' will not only make the problems of such a conflation apparent, but will also demonstrate the untenable position in which it regularly leaves these categories. Both of these topics have received widespread popular attention, as well as increasingly coming under academic scrutiny, and it is not my intention within to treat either comprehensively. Instead, I seek to focus my critical attention on those aspects of these concepts that participate in the greater pathologies of contemporary identity politics. Whilst not all uses of these terms fall into such pitfalls and whilst I contend these terms should not be summarily dismissed or abandoned, many of their popular uses do remain objectionable, thus warranting critical attention if these concepts are to be usefully deployed. I shall then explore how enclosure preconditions what can be heard and understood – focussing on platforming as an identity praxis.

## GENDER IDENTITY AND BLACK CULTURE AS ABSTRACT UNIVERSALS

### GENDER IDENTITY

The role of gender within contemporary identity politics is dominated by the notion of gender identity, a conceptualisation of gender that stresses personal identification with gender categories.<sup>81</sup> Within this framing, gender is understood in connection with the lived experiences of individuals, who are then invited to articulate their relationship to systems of gender on their own terms, claiming and discarding labels depending on how well these reflect their personal identification. From this brief summary, it is

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<sup>81</sup> An example of this is Sally Hines' *Is Gender Fluid?*, a text that understands itself as a 'primer' for precisely this viewpoint, see: Sally Hines, *Is Gender Fluid?: A Primer for the 21st Century* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2018).

already clear how gender identity can be understood as a democratisation of gender, encouraging individuals to explore their personal relationship with gender and to actively claim the identity of their choosing. As such, we should understand the motivation of those who deploy gender identity and its terminology as a direct response to the exclusionary mechanisms embedded within those normative systems of gender it seeks to critique. In this section I shall explore how the notion of gender identity constitutes itself as a universal language for gender, noting how it deploys neologisms in order to reorientate collective senses of meaning. However, my concern is that gender identity can go beyond constituting a new framing of gender and that it can instead work to discursively undermine alternative framings of gender – and the related identity categories of sex and sexuality – by forcing a translation of these alternate framings into its own language. When gender identity engages in this process of discursive enclosure, precisely what we lose are explorations of gender that focus on gender as a power structure. Furthermore, we lose any grounded notion of lived experience, reducing subjectivity to mere abstraction. Though gender identity discourse attempts to illuminate the subjective experience of gender in a way that preceding articulations omitted, the reduction of structural critique to a primarily individualistic language results in a broader reduction of gender identity's ability to advocate for those marginalised subjects it wishes to champion. My concern is not that gender identity is inevitably flawed, but that its articulation in these subjective, individualistic terms – when taken as exhaustive – defeats itself.

Gender identity's function as an orthodox framework is demonstrable in the approach it takes towards language, particularly in the way it mobilises definitions as part of a new lexicon. Its neologisms have been collected into lists, presumably to be used as a basis of reference. Examples of such lists appear on social media websites such as Tumblr,<sup>82</sup> in the manifold gender options now available on Facebook,<sup>83</sup> and those that are presented by larger media organisations such as *CBS News*.<sup>84</sup> In each of these cases, the labels are given a short definition, though this is merely stated rather than referenced or drawn from its wider use. The implication is that such lists are to serve both as a collection of neologisms, which may

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<sup>82</sup> Gender Fluid Support, 'Gender Master List', *Tumblr* <<http://genderfluidsupport.tumblr.com/gender>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>83</sup> Russell Goldman, 'Here's a List of 58 Gender Options for Facebook Users', *Absc*, 13 February 2014 <<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/02/heres-a-list-of-58-gender-options-for-facebook-users/>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>84</sup> Cydney Adams, 'The Gender Identity Terms You Need to Know', *CNN*, 24 March 2017 <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/transgender-gender-identity-terms-glossary/>> [accessed 6 July 2017].



well be used elsewhere, but that they further serve as sites through which their meaning is created as well as proliferated. They do not seek, as a dictionary would, to make clear their uses within other texts or within the hypertextual environments of the internet and thus do not draw their definitions and meaning from how these terms have been or are presently being used by others. Nor do such lexicons serve as a clear measure of the frequency of the labels' use. Instead they assist in the generation and circulation of these identity labels, with such articles presenting the definitions they contain based on no external, linguistic usage. These collections serve as prescriptions of meaning for those identities they are complicit in founding. The lexicons directly participate in the creation of the very terms they serve to record. It is clear from the use of certain phrases such as "Need to Know"<sup>85</sup> that such articles consider themselves as both educational and indispensable. Through the mobilisation of such novel definitions, new definitions of the self, in the sense of fixed attributes of subjectivity, become central to these contemporary gender politics. To denote such terminology as neologisms is not to denigrate or demean their significance or reputability, but to note their novelty and to demonstrate how certain uses of gender identity concern themselves with the establishment and subsequent defence of various fixed definitions.

Through the mobilisation of these definitions, contemporary gender politics is frequently constituted as "a plural but static constellation of gender identities",<sup>86</sup> with the motivation behind this stasis to secure the voices of those subjectivities who are marginalised by the prevailing, normative map of gender. As such, this rhetorical move plays a central role within much trans rights activism, and it is crucial that this move is understood within this context. Those many, variable subjectivities that fall under the trans umbrella share in common an alienation from normative structures of gender, with the language and definitions of gender identity often understood to give voice precisely to this alienation, and to also ground their experiences within a novel identity category. Given this proximity to trans politics, critique of gender identity must understand precisely why it has such a central role for this kind of trans politics, and it must furthermore be mindful not to collapse into a mere repetition of transphobic erasure.<sup>87</sup> It is therefore my contention that gender identity cannot be reactionarily dismissed, indeed

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<sup>85</sup> Adams.

<sup>86</sup> Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (London: Verso Books, 2018).

<sup>87</sup> I have elsewhere written on the theorisation of transphobia outside of individualistic discourse, see: Benjamin Carpenter, 'Gender Precarity: Gender Identity and the Economy of Authenticity', *Excursions Journal*, 9.1 (2019), 71–88.

such a dismissal would be unable to understand the important concerns gender identity does address. It is important to note how gender identity brings individual experience to the fore, and how it is motivated by political inclusion – even if it transpires that this inclusivity is ultimately self-defeating. Thus, my critique does not seek to admonish gender identity, but instead seeks to explore how it has been transformed into an abstract universal and how this is to its detriment.

Within contemporary identity politics, gender identity does not merely constitute another way of articulating gender, but that it is routinely mobilised as **the** singular structure of gender. Its associated language is regarded as having supreme explanatory power. My trouble with the orthodox elements of gender identity are not solely rooted within its definitional approach to the self<sup>88</sup> but is primarily a matter of how it has come to totalise contemporary gender politics. By aspiring to be hegemonic, as the singular framing around which all other articulations of gender revolve, gender identity forecloses alternative critical framings of gender. Through its new orientation of language, and its definitional approach to the self, gender identity reduces all articulation of gender into its own terms. As a linguistic framework, it forces a translation into its own terminology even if the original utterance proceeds from quite a different theoretical basis.

Routinely, such translations produce contradictions – which are wont to occur when attempting to force two distinct framings together so crudely. And herein it is clear to see how gender identity can constitute itself as an orthodoxy: it seeks to enclose all articulations of gender within its own language, forcing a translation into its own terms, and then it rebukes those clunky translations it finds wanting. This act of forcible translation amounts to language policing as a kind of identity praxis. It becomes a rebuke of that which ‘fails’ to use the expected language, a rebuke of that which is to straightforwardly be seen as wrong – and, as we have seen, this becomes a matter of absolutist division. In this way, gender identity comes to fundamentally condition contemporary discourse, to enclose it within its own set of standards. This rebuke often ends up becoming a more or less puritanical rejection of anything that contravenes the central framing of gender identity and its focus on subjective experience, albeit in an impoverished form. As a result, the forcible translations of articulations that concern structural critique are often those that find themselves rebuked – and when this becomes par for the course gender identity

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<sup>88</sup> I shall explore this definitional approach and its shortcomings in the second half of this chapter: Obscured Privatisation.

comes to enclose its own articulations of identity within an abstractly subjective framework. This is a devastating limitation for an identity movement that seeks to champion the lived experiences of marginalised subjects, as precisely what it loses are the lived experiences of those subjects, their very conditions of subjectivity and all that remains is an abstracted identification – which amounts to an ill-fitting placeholder. The practical results of these orthodox restraints can be clearly seen in the discursive rupture characteristic of contemporary gender discourses, when the motivation to defend subjectivity becomes abstracted so that any form of tension or disagreement becomes immediately redescribed as a violent imposition against a subject. Though this does not render permissible the routine acts of transphobic violence trans politics seeks to illuminate and oppose, this reduction of gender to an abstract subjectivity that must be militantly defended does routinely misconceptualise the tensions within identity as harms.<sup>89</sup> It is on these grounds that gender identity then attempts to produce its orthodox stabilisation of identity concepts, attempting to resolve these insurmountable and constitutive tensions through an imposed fixity of definitions and terminology.

We can see elements of this at work within the Tuvel affair, when responses particularly admonished her for failing to use the expected terminology. I have two further examples as to how this plays out practically, how the orthodox framework produces orthopraxic constraints. The first concerns how feminist writer and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie found her language policed, highlighting how this forcible translation often results in a combative rupture that more often than not gets caught up in an abstraction from what is actually being expressed. The second concerns the language policing of RuPaul, which is particularly relevant given that it highlights the ways in which identity is constructed by contemporary discourse in an ahistorical way.

Whether avowed as such or not, one of the primary concerns of Tuvel's detractors was the upholding of a linguistic orthodoxy. Within the responses to her article, there was an overt concern with the supposed appropriateness of her language, best summarised by the open letter's concern that she "uses vocabulary and frameworks not recognized, accepted, or adopted by the conventions of the relevant subfields".<sup>90</sup> Aside from those inferences we could draw, the letter leaves out what these "relevant

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<sup>89</sup> The overstatement of harm as a discursive block is more generally explored by Schulman, see: Sarah Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility and the Duty of Repair* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016).

<sup>90</sup> Singal.

subfields” are, and restricts its examples of objectionable terminology to Tuvel’s use of ‘transgenderism’ and her supposed ‘deadnaming’<sup>91</sup> of Caitlyn Jenner. Without providing a clear rationale for taking umbrage at these and whatever other astray terminology she uses, this objection becomes effectively reducible to opposing Tuvel based on her ‘failure’ to speak as she was expected to. As the letter itself states, the objection concerns a disparity between Tuvel’s articulation and the supposed convention of whatever subfields are here at play. It is thus Tuvel’s perceived unwillingness or inability to uphold the standards of an expected precedent that becomes the source of this criticism. Importantly, I am not suggesting that one cannot or should not critically engage with Tuvel’s language, or with other speech acts more generally, or that one can never object to how words are used in specific contexts – this would serve equally as a sweeping discursive restriction – but that this objection is premised solely upon ambiguous references to vague notions of ‘academic subfields’ indicates that Tuvel’s sin (such as it is thus) concerns a failure to live up to a general pretence. It is thus unclear what Tuvel’s mistake is, other than that she has somehow spoken ‘out of turn’. This concerns wider questions than those considered by theorists who take upon themselves the dubious task of disciplinary gatekeeping. These unmet pretences are reflective of the imposed discursive standards of identity enclosure more widely due to both their unclear grounding and general application. It is also clear to see how an orthodox account of gender identity is implicated here, as the harassment of Tuvel focuses on how she has been perceived to trespass on another’s subjective self-apprehension. As such, what Tuvel is expressing within her article is largely irrelevant to this objection, as it specifically rejects the terms through which her expression takes shape.

This leaves us with a kind of “language orthodoxy”, a term specifically used by acclaimed feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in a public address as part of an event for Politics&Prose.<sup>92</sup> This address followed a – thankfully brief and comparatively mild – bout of online harassment she received

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<sup>91</sup> Deadnaming is referring to a trans person by their pre-transition name. This is widely considered not merely disrespectful, but actively harmful by members of the trans community. See: KC Clements, ‘What Is Deadnaming?’, *Healthline*, 2017 <<https://www.healthline.com/health/transgender/deadnaming>> [accessed 2 June 2020]. and Dawn Ennis, ‘10 Words Transgender People Want You to Know (But Not Say)’, *Advocate*, 2 April 2016 <<https://www.advocate.com/transgender/2016/1/19/10-words-transgender-people-want-you-know-not-say>> [accessed 9 October 2017].

<sup>92</sup> David Smith, ‘Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on Transgender Row: “I Have Nothing to Apologise For”’, *The Guardian*, 21 March 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/21/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-nothing-to-apologise-for-transgender-women>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

after an interview with her had been aired by Channel 4.<sup>93</sup> Within this interview, it is Adichie's comments on trans identities, specifically her hesitancy to conflate the experiences of trans women and "women" (her term), that drew negative attention.<sup>94</sup> The controversy was sparked when Adichie said:

...my feeling is that trans women are trans women. I think if you've lived in a world as a man with the privileges that the world accords to men and then...change, switch gender it's difficult for me to accept that then we can equate your experience with the experience of a woman who has lived from the beginning in the world as a woman and who has not been accorded those privileges that men are. I don't think it's a good thing to conflate everything into one, I don't think it's a good thing to talk about women's issues being exactly the same as the issues of trans women.<sup>95</sup>

Though her comments neither overtly nor covertly suggested anything of the sort, they have been taken as a total rejection of the legitimacy or validity of trans identities.<sup>96</sup> The grounds for this is partially the distinction Adichie makes between 'trans women' and 'women', which, when combined with her references to the concept of male privilege, were read as an exclusion of trans women from the category of 'woman'. Following this, she has been described as transphobic, described as someone who hates trans people, and 'called out' on her 'ignorance'.<sup>97</sup> Noted transgender activist and actress Laverne Cox attempted to 'correct' Adichie's misguided comments,<sup>98</sup> and an activist by the name of Aaryn Lang created the '#Maleprivilegediaries' as an attempt to rally opposition to Adichie.<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, Raquel

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<sup>93</sup> Channel 4 News, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie On Feminism*, 2017 <<https://www.channel4.com/news/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-on-feminism>> [accessed 15 March 2017].

<sup>94</sup> Noah Michaelson, 'Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Under Fire For Comments About Trans Women', *Huffington Post*, 3 November 2017 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-transgender-women-feminism\\_us\\_58c40324e4b0d1078ca7180b](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-transgender-women-feminism_us_58c40324e4b0d1078ca7180b)> [accessed 15 March 2017].

<sup>95</sup> Channel 4 News.

<sup>96</sup> Maya Oppenheim, 'Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Faces Backlash for Suggesting Transgender Women Are Not Real Women', *The Independent*, 3 December 2017 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-transgender-women-channel-four-a7625481.html>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>97</sup> Laurie Richards, 'No, Trans Women Do Not Grow up with Male Privilege', *ThinkProgress*, 15 March 2017 <<https://thinkprogress.org/trans-women-do-not-grow-up-with-male-privilege-e51ebaieb42c#.cttiqolhw>> [accessed 15 March 2017].

<sup>98</sup> Laverne Cox, 'Laverne Cox - Twitter'

<[https://twitter.com/Lavernecox?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/Lavernecox?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)> [accessed 15 March 2017].

<sup>99</sup> Aaryn Lang, 'Now, Thanks to Chimamanda, the Jig Is up. It's Time for Trans Women Talk about Our Male Privilege. #Maleprivilegediaries', *Twitter*, 2017 <[https://twitter.com/AarynLang/status/840596647285534721?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buzzfeed.com%2Ftamerragriffin%2Fchimamanda-adichies-comments-on-trans-women](https://twitter.com/AarynLang/status/840596647285534721?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buzzfeed.com%2Ftamerragriffin%2Fchimamanda-adichies-comments-on-trans-women)> [accessed 11 July 2017].

Willis, a national organiser at the Transgender Law Centre, responded with a series of tweets,<sup>100</sup> many of which deliberately misconstrued Adichie's point. Among these was the assertion:

We know exactly what you mean when you say, "Trans women are trans women," but can't simply say, "trans women are women."<sup>101</sup>

Presumably, Willis' contention (not made explicit because 'We know' already) is that the refusal to "simply say" that "trans women are women" amounts to the claim 'trans women are not women' or even 'trans women are men'. Here, Willis is underhandedly accusing Adichie of using her platform and reputation to harm or damage trans people through the delegitimisation of their identities. She attributes an attitude of transphobia and trans exclusion to Adichie based on her phrasing, for both what she said and also what she did not say. Yet these implications are her own inference, made because Adichie's language did not follow the rules that Willis has presumably come to expect. This was then combined with the criticism that Adichie's comments about trans identities constituted an act of 'speaking for' or 'on behalf of' trans people, which she has neither the right to do nor is she qualified given her own subject position as that of a cis woman. This is where gender identity as an orthodoxy becomes insidious, as Willis likely does not regard herself as imposing discursive constraints or engaging in forcible translation, precisely because gender identity has become a totalised framing of the self.

As she mentions within CLARIFYING,<sup>102</sup> a Facebook post written by Adichie in the direct aftermath of the interview, her comment was not to deny that trans women are women, but instead to express a caution against conflating their specific experiences with those of cis women. She critically distinguishes between the socialisation of cis women and female bodied people on the one hand, specifically highlighting the sociological concerns in the construction of their identities, and the experiences of trans women on the other. More importantly, within both her CLARIFYING post and her Politics&Prose address, Adichie highlights the ways in which her own language was policed. Though her

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<sup>100</sup> Raquel Willis, 'A Trans Woman's Thoughts on Chimamanda Adichie', *Twitter*, 2017  
<<https://twitter.com/i/moments/840397499101675522>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>101</sup> Raquel Willis, 'We Know Exactly What You Mean When You Say, "Trans Women Are Trans Women," but Can't Simply Say, "Trans Women Are Women."', *Twitter*, 2017  
<[https://twitter.com/RaquelWillis\\_/status/840370359396311040](https://twitter.com/RaquelWillis_/status/840370359396311040)>.

<sup>102</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'CLARIFYING', 2017  
<<https://www.facebook.com/chimamandaadichie/photos/a.469824145943.278768.40389960943/10154893542340944/?type=3&theater>> [accessed 15 March 2017].

point itself did draw fire, the majority of her detractors were concerned with the way in which she had articulated herself, the language and words she had used and the connotations others could (and did) then draw from them. As she said herself

Had I said, 'a cis woman is a cis woman, and a trans woman is a trans woman', I don't think I would get all the crap that I'm getting, but that's actually really what I was saying... it really becomes about language and the reason I find that troubling is to insist that you have to speak in a certain way and use certain expressions, otherwise we cannot have a conversation, can close up debate.<sup>103</sup>

Adichie's situation, as well as her own insightful commentary, foregrounds the way in which contemporary enclosure constrains the manner in which identity may be articulated. This creates particular limits of permissibility, the defiance of which is enough to earn public scorn as well as accusations of bigotry and violence. Despite widespread calls for further conversations about trans identities and the issues that trans individuals often face,<sup>104</sup> one's engagement with the topic and the statements one makes about it must abide by enclosure's standard of practice or be seen as a refusal to comply with the apparently agreed senses of meaning, and thus a dismissal of trans identities. As soon as one no longer complies, one falls from the position of ally to the other side of the absolutist division becoming an oppressor and nothing else.<sup>105</sup> To call this framework of meaning into question to any degree becomes grounds for a *de facto* culpability, often placing one in a position akin to a pariah.<sup>106</sup> That there are those within the contemporary movement that do regard this as a matter of absolutes is further exemplified within 'doxxing' campaigns, another prevalent form of online harassment whereby one's personal information (such as one's name and address) are publicly shared online so that you can be found by those who wish to do harm.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> David Smith.

<sup>104</sup> Such as transgender day of visibility, see: TSER, 'Transgender Day of Visibility', *Trans Student Educational Resources*, 2017 <<http://www.transstudent.org/tdov>> [accessed 17 July 2017].

<sup>105</sup> In this sense, one false move invalidates any number of right moves. See: were-all-queer-here, 'Hate TERFs All You Want.', *Tumblr*, 2017 <<http://were-all-queer-here.tumblr.com/post/160496780909/hate-terfs-all-you-want-youre-allowed-to-be>> [accessed 6 July 2017].

<sup>106</sup> With this being how the term TERF is claimed to function, see: Sarah Ditung, 'How "TERF" Works', *Feminist Current*, 29 July 2014 <<http://www.feministcurrent.com/2014/07/29/how-terf-works/>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>107</sup> Andrew Quodling, 'Doxxing, Swatting and the New Trends in Online Harassment', *The Conversation*, 21 April 2014 <<http://theconversation.com/doxxing-swatting-and-the-new-trends-in-online-harassment-40234>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

Another example of language policing was the widespread criticism received by RuPaul for his use of terms claimed as anti-trans slurs. One of the world's most influential drag performers, RuPaul's reality TV show *RuPaul's Drag Race*<sup>108</sup> came under fire for some of its terminology (a reoccurring gimmick in which an alert would sound saying "You've got she-mail!",<sup>109</sup> parodically invoking the pejorative term 'shemale'),<sup>110</sup> as well as the use of the t-word in one of Ru's records, 'Tr\*nny Chaser'.<sup>111</sup> The central complaints were attributed to Monica Beverly Hills and Carmen Carrera, two trans women and previous contestants on RuPaul's show. Their contention was simply that the terms in question are transphobic slurs and are thus taboo, especially for cis people. Though a drag queen, RuPaul is not a trans woman, but a cis man and thus does not have the licence to 'reclaim' this term – meaning to repurpose the word as a positive moniker for oneself, displacing it from the position of pejorative slur it occupies within dominant culture.<sup>112</sup> This invokes a popular approach to language through which pejorative terms should only be reclaimed by those of the identity to which they have been applied. This is an understandable attitude, as it is difficult to conceive of how an individual outside of such a group could use such pejorative language without simply repeating oppressive power structures. However, in this instance, the pejoratives in question were treated as if they only 'applied' to trans identities, obscuring the reality that such slurs have been historically used and are still presently used against all manner of gender-non conforming people, whether they are transgender, transsexual, or transvestite.

RuPaul defended his use of the word through first appealing to drag's inherent desire to challenge such static notions of language and identity,<sup>113</sup> and secondly to the way in which he has had this word used against him, thus he regards himself as having earned the right to use it for himself.<sup>114</sup> Though the t-

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<sup>108</sup> RuPaul and Nick Murray, 'RuPaul's Drag Race' (Logo, 2009).

<sup>109</sup> RuPaul and Murray.

<sup>110</sup> This term commonly refers to a transgender woman who retains male genitalia. It is commonly used within the sex work industry.

<sup>111</sup> Daniel D'Addario, 'RuPaul's Aggressive Tirade in Defense of the Term "Tranny"', *Salon*, 27 May 2014 <[http://www.salon.com/2014/05/27/rupauls\\_aggressive\\_tirade\\_in\\_defense\\_of\\_the\\_term\\_tranny/](http://www.salon.com/2014/05/27/rupauls_aggressive_tirade_in_defense_of_the_term_tranny/)> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>112</sup> Words such as 'faggot', 'dyke' have undergone a similar process of reclamation. Terms such as 'queer' have been reclaimed such that they are now used by those outside the group to which the term refers without this being regarded as controversial (though many members of the LGBT+ community, particularly older members, oppose the widespread acceptance of this term).

<sup>113</sup> In this case, one could argue that the invocation of such language was an attempt to purify the label, subverting its degrading aspects and thereby aiding a shift in cultural perceptions towards gender non-conforming and trans people.

<sup>114</sup> Jase Peeples, 'RuPaul Further Responds to Transphobic Accusations: "I've Been a "Tranny" For 32 Years"', *The Advocate*, 26 May 2014 <<https://www.advocate.com/%5Bprimary-topic-path->



word has been used as a slur against trans people, historically trans identities and crossdressers (including drag performers) would not have been seen as distinct categories. Drag queens have had this term used against them, thus granting them as much ‘right’ (at least under the widely agreed upon reclamatory framework) as a trans person to reclaim the label. Whilst we should acknowledge the differences between these identities within our present context, we cannot simply ignore their shared, common history. To ignore the historicity of these identity labels is to ignore the conditions of subjectivity, it is to ignore the lived experiences within which these categories claim their very grounding. In this instance, gender identity again acted as an orthodoxy, fixing down the meanings of these identity categories and using these to derive various permissions for members of certain categories – yet precisely what it ignores is the origin of these identifiers, and the ambiguities between them. Again, gender identity seeks to protect various marginalised subject positions, but in overzealously seeking to fix these positions in place, it can conduct an erasure of those subjectivities within the intersections, as well as those beyond it. Despite the basis of RuPaul’s defence in both his own lived history and personal experience as a gay, cis drag performer, he was still regarded as having breached the code of conduct. When he spoke out in criticism, his response was characterised as “aggressive”<sup>115</sup> and was dismissively labelled as “ranting” and as a “tirade” – all common characteristics of tone policing.<sup>116</sup> Regardless of his personal political stance, the offending instances have since been removed from the show’s format.

Language policing inherently sustains both narrow and rigid conceptions of meaning through the creation of linguistic stagnation. Through the deployment of these restrictions, discourses and their mobilisations of meaning become unable to cope with the dynamic nature of subjective experiences. As such, language policing opposes any usage regarded as novelty or alterity. Not only does this obscure the realities of those subjectivities that do not fit within the orthodox framework, but this obscurity can become an outright denial of even critical articulations of these identities. As represented in the largely reactionary responses to Tuvel’s paper, whilst her articulations of identity were called into question (and summarily dismissed as mischaracterisations) the response, uncritical as it was, did not engage with

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raw%5D/2014/05/26/rupaul-further-responds-transphobic-accusations-ive-been-tranny> [accessed 10 July 2017].

<sup>115</sup> D’Addario.

<sup>116</sup> Which is another form of marginalisation to which popular identity politics is opposed, see: Kathryn Wheeler, ‘What Is Tone Policing?’, *Happiful*, 26 September 2018 <<https://happiful.com/what-is-tone-policing/>> [accessed 26 February 2020].

Tuvel's own critical articulation. Her detractors did not deem it necessary to do so, for they seemingly regarded their criticisms as concerning something more 'fundamental', such as the conceptions of the identities at play. Through so seeking to dismiss a critical engagement with notions of identity, solely with reference to an alternative account of how an identity should be understood, many of Tuvel's detractors are attempting to establish a fixed, underlying ontology for the identity categories in question. As such, their response to Tuvel's claim that we should consider transgender and transracial identities in conjunction becomes simply that 'transgender identities are legitimate because of the nature of gender' and conversely 'transracial identities are illegitimate because of the nature of race'. In both cases, non-reflective appeals to these kinds of solid foundation begin to depart from the wealth of post-structuralist and post-colonial accounts of identity that staunchly oppose trying to establish some notion of 'fixed truth' for any identity.

In these senses, we should understand gender identity as one among many potential framings of gender, accordingly understanding that a single framing necessarily includes limitations, aporia, and omissions. When a single framing thereby comes to be understood as universal – which we could also phrase in hegemonic terms – these omissions cease to function as mere absences, but instead come to be much more fundamental ruptures in meaning.

An example of a more refined approach to the lived experiences of trans people can be found in Talia Mae Bettcher's "Trans Identities and First Person Authority", wherein she argues for an account of first person authority that does not ultimately rest in an essentialist account of first person experience. Whilst maintaining that a basic denial of authenticity is central to many transphobic and sex essentialist practices<sup>117</sup> (both within and beyond the academy), Bettcher dislocates the central problematic of the conversation away from metaphysical definitions of gender, towards what she understands as an existential account primarily concerned not with the 'truth' of one's bodily configuration, but instead with a negotiation of social attitudes.<sup>118</sup> Bettcher does not use the language of recognition within this chapter, but her account of First Person Authority focuses on an ethical – as opposed to epistemic – authority that grounds a respect for identification not in a notion of lived experience that entails an

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<sup>117</sup> I have argued similarly elsewhere, see: Carpenter.

<sup>118</sup> Bettcher, Talia Mae, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority", in *You've Changed: Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity*, ed. by Laurie Shrage (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 110.

assumed or proactively claimed kind of self-expertise,<sup>119</sup> but instead in an account that stresses the importance of recognising and respecting the experiences of others. On my reading, Bettcher's account does not require that we hold a strict view of gender identity as a fixed categorisation reliant solely on an abstracted account of lived experience. Instead, the question is shifted to concern dignity and respect over attempts to secure 'accurate' definitions of identity categories. This perspective overcomes the abstraction implicit within mainstream accounts of gender identity not by reducing identification to a mere affect that is passively determined within a field of social power; conversely, the importance of lived experience is stressed without its reduction to mere facticity. Indeed, the authority present within Bettcher's term does not denote an unquestionable assuredness, but instead reflects a centring of a first-person perspective that is not understood to be divorced from its constituent relationality. Bettcher comments on how the epistemic dimension of this authority is derived not from a purely solipsistic access to one's own factic authenticity,<sup>120</sup> but instead follows from what I read as a gesture towards hegemonic power relations, resulting in dominant regimes of truth - to borrow from Foucault - rendering subaltern knowledges less visible.<sup>121</sup> It is therefore a lack of familiarity with what Bettcher refers to as 'resistant contexts' that produces an imbalance of authority - with these contexts explicitly tied to the lived experiences of oppressed communities.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the improvements introduced by this view, however, I contend that it does not quite go far enough in its deconstruction of gendered categorisations. This is particularly evident in her attempt to distinguish between metaphysical and existential identities as a distinction between a 'what' and a 'who'. As shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 - this distinction between a what and a who is an important element in Arendt's political philosophy. Though it is echoed in Bettcher, her characterisation of the who is complicit in the very slippage Arendt points us to: the examples Bettcher gives of 'who' quickly reduce into categories of the self, which is to say they reduce into accounts as to 'what' a subject is. This is to suggest that though Bettcher's work demonstrates an important site of resistance to many of

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<sup>119</sup> Bettcher, Talia Mae, p. 111.

<sup>120</sup> Bettcher, Talia Mae, p. 113.

<sup>121</sup> This is to express Bettcher's work within the language of this project's conceptual framework.

<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Bettcher refuses to essentialise these resistant communities, understanding them to often repeat many of the dynamics they are attempting to resist.

the problems discussed with respect to mainstream uses of gender identity, that her work can still be fruitfully developed in order to fully break out of the pathologies of enclosure.

## BLACK CULTURE

This pathology is also apparent within those discourses concerning racial, cultural and national identity, albeit with a slightly different manifestation. Where gender identity discourses can create dogma through the proliferation of fixed definitions, racial discourses begin to appear dogmatic through their conflation of race with narrow, universalised notions of culture. The large number of heated arguments surrounding ‘cultural appropriation’ are incredibly lengthy and fraught with a mix of both philosophical and moral concerns (of varying degrees of legitimacy).<sup>123</sup> Importantly, within contemporary discourses of racial identity, notions of culture are employed in increasingly racialized categories, serving to reorientate certain deployments of race along the lines of different kinds of cultural participation. Sometimes, this amounts to little more than the mobilisation of racial stereotypes, but often evolves into numerous appeals to a fixed and restrictive notion of ‘Black culture’. Not only does such a restrictive deployment of such a notion serve to ignore the inherent diversity of those ‘Black’ identities in question, but it is a creation that takes place within a context of white supremacism and then goes on to both mirror and support the framework of racial distinction it seeks to oppose.

The central motivation behind the notion of Black culture is to create a counter-narrative to the white-washed accounts of history produced by colonial power structures, and their vestiges, within the western world.<sup>124</sup> According to such accounts, which often appeal to notions of enlightenment, the white western world is attributed the historical accomplishment of civilisation itself. This is most clearly evident

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<sup>123</sup> Useful summaries of these debates can be found within: James O Young and Conrad G Brunk, *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts (New Directions in Aesthetics)*, 2nd edn (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell (an imprint of John Wiley & Sons Ltd), 2008); Igor Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’, in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (Cambridge Studies in Social & Cultural Anthropology)*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>124</sup> See: Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2001). Furthermore, it should be noted that the racism of this history, and its percolation into the culture of the present, does not, of course, solely target those with Black identities, but affects anyone who is to be perceived as a person of colour. However, my focus here is on the notion of Black culture, which is centrally concerned with Black identities.

within colonialist narratives that not only produced the ‘scientific’<sup>125</sup> grounds of race to essentially imbue ‘non-whites’ with dehumanising traits,<sup>126</sup> but which then further justified horrific acts of subordination and violence through their own self-proclaimed role as harbingers of culture, as bringers of civility. Not only do advocates of Black culture directly point out such accounts of history, through direct appeals to critical tropes such as the white saviour,<sup>127</sup> but they further seek to highlight and celebrate the achievements of Black people. Prevalent accounts of history are centred around the contributions of white people,<sup>128</sup> deliberately erasing the cultural contributions of Black people.<sup>129</sup> Thus, to celebrate Black history is to undo the historical revisionism implicit within many mainstream historical practices enacted within white-supremacist social hierarchies. Many of its advocates desire to articulate Blackness as more than a pure state of ‘alterity’, as a mere foil to a positive notion of white identity. In this sense they wish to articulate their race outside of the strict purview of whiteness as a hierarchal and racialising series of organisational attitudes. Such accounts can usefully serve as ways of decentring whiteness from its prioritised position, undermining – to use Patricia Williams’s term – the ‘x-nomination’ of whiteness.<sup>130</sup>

However, given the pervasive nature of whiteness,<sup>131</sup> as well as the racist ideologies yet prevalent beneath the spaces where such attempts at reorientation are made, it is difficult (perhaps even

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<sup>125</sup> Although this is now rightly regarded as pseudo-science, I am wary of the nature of this rhetorical move in as far as it erases the role played by historical scientific thought.

<sup>126</sup> See: Karen E Fields and Barbara J Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London, United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2014).

<sup>127</sup> Celia Edell, ‘Here’s What a White Savior Is (And Why It’s the Opposite of Helpful)’, *Everyday Feminism*, 20 June 2016 <<http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/06/white-savior-problem/>> [accessed 17 July 2017].

<sup>128</sup> In many instances, historical figures of note are often anachronistically considered white. For example, ancient philosophers are widely regarded as white, despite their predating our modern notion of whiteness by several centuries and, for many of them, their middle-eastern origins.

<sup>129</sup> One oft-discussed example is blues music, see: Wesley Morris, ‘Why Is Everyone Always Stealing Black Music?’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/music-black-culture-appropriation.html>> [accessed 2 July 2020]; Imran Rahman-Jones, ‘White People, Blues Music and the Problem of Cultural Appropriation’, *Medium*, 2016 <<https://medium.com/@IRahmanJones/white-people-blues-music-and-the-problem-of-cultural-appropriation-3e61b8d25c03>> [accessed 2 July 2020]; James O. Young, ‘Art, Authenticity, and Appropriation’, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, 1.3 (2006), 455–76; James O. Young, ‘Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 63 (2005), 135–46.

<sup>130</sup> This term indicates the state of whiteness as the perceived norm, with other racial identities conceived of in terms of variation. See: Patricia Williams, *The Emperor’s New Clothes* (BBC Radio 4 - The Reith Lectures, 1997).

<sup>131</sup> See: Sara Ahmed, ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’, *Feminist Theory*, 8.149 (2007) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>>; Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

impossible) to formulate a truly distinct notion of Black identity, particularly one that does not repeat the racialising logics that underpin most positive notions of white identity.<sup>132</sup> To quote Zadie Smith, “The real fantasy is that we can get out of one another’s way, make a clean cut between Black and white, a final cathartic separation between us and them.”<sup>133</sup> In contemporary enclosure, the idea of Black culture often becomes relevant in debates about cultural appropriation. Within these discourses, specific examples of aesthetics and language are spoken of as appropriated and subsequently treated as objects of property, owned by ‘Black culture’. Examples include hairstyles,<sup>134</sup> expressions of language,<sup>135</sup> and media representations.<sup>136</sup> Whilst it is my own contention that the concerns of cultural appropriation discourses

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<sup>132</sup> Many instances of online discourse which celebrate Black identity do so whilst simultaneously denigrating white identity. Many examples are detached from the many legitimate criticisms one could make of both racial whiteness and specifically of white supremacy, such comments often inadvertently repeat racialising logics.

<sup>133</sup> Zadie Smith, ‘Getting In and Out’, *Harper’s Magazine*, 2017

<<https://harpers.org/archive/2017/07/getting-in-and-out/>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>134</sup> See: Malsha Z. Johnson, ‘7 Reasons Why White People Should Not Wear Black Hairstyles’, *Everyday Feminism*, 28 July 2015 <<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/white-people-black-hairstyles/>> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Danielle Kwateng-Clark, ‘No, Whoopi Goldberg: Black Women Are Not Cultural Appropriators For Wearing Weave’, *Essence*, 4 July 2017 <<http://www.essence.com/hair/whoopi-goldberg-black-women-weaves-cultural-appropriation>> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Jennifer Whitney, ‘Braid Rage: Is Cultural Appropriation Harmless Borrowing or a Damaging Act?’, *The Independent*, 20 May 2017 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/braid-rage-is-cultural-appropriation-harmless-borrowing-or-a-damaging-act-a7744331.html>> [accessed 17 July 2017].

<sup>135</sup> Zeba Blay, ‘12 Words Black People Invented, And White People Killed’, *The Huffington Post*, 19 October 2015 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-slang-white-people-ruined\\_us\\_55ccda07e4b064d5910ac8b3](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-slang-white-people-ruined_us_55ccda07e4b064d5910ac8b3)> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Zeba Blay, ‘This Poet Perfectly Captures The Problem With Appropriating Black Slang’, *The Huffington Post*, 4 April 2016 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-poet-perfectly-captures-the-problem-with-appropriating-black-slang\\_us\\_57029b22e4b083f5c6083935](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-poet-perfectly-captures-the-problem-with-appropriating-black-slang_us_57029b22e4b083f5c6083935)> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Luna Malbroux, ‘How Appropriating Slang Can Be Problematic: Yaaaasss Queen, Even for You!’, *Broke-Ass Stuart*, 6 February 2016 <<http://brokeassstuart.com/blog/2017/06/02/how-appropriating-slang-can-be-problematic-yaaaasss-queen-even-for-you/>> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Malsha Z. Johnson, ‘6 Ways You Harm Me When You appropriate Black Culture – And How to Appreciate It Instead’, *Everyday Feminism*, 24 August 2015 <<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/appropriating-black-culture/>> [accessed 10 July 2017]; Coming of Faith, ‘The Internet’s Love of Black Slang Makes Some of Us Uncomfortable’, *The Huffington Post*, 1 May 2015 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/coming-of-faith/the-internets-love-of-bla\\_b\\_8903778.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/coming-of-faith/the-internets-love-of-bla_b_8903778.html)> [accessed 17 July 2017].

<sup>136</sup> There are many examples of such controversies. Among the major examples was the, predominantly white, casting of the *Gods of Egypt* film. See: Alex Proyas, *Gods of Egypt* (Summit Entertainment, 2016); Monique Jones, ‘How Gods of Egypt Adheres to Racist Fantasy Rules’, *The Nerds of Colour*, 3 November 2016 <<https://thenerdsofcolor.org/2016/03/11/how-gods-of-egypt-adheres-to-racist-fantasy-rules/>> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Noura Joust, ‘Gods of Egypt – If You’re from Africa, Why Are You White?’, *Pop Culture Uncovered*, 2016 <<https://popcultureuncovered.com/2016/03/02/gods-of-egypt-if-youre-from-africa-why-are-you-white/>> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Carly Silver, ‘“Gods of Egypt”: A Deeply Problematic Film About the Ancient World’, *Thought Co.*, 25 April 2016 <<https://www.thoughtco.com/gods-of-egypt-problematic-film-3959444>> [accessed 17 July 2017]; Scott Woods, ‘Gods of Egypt Is the Most Racist Film Ever.’, *Scott Woods Makes Lists*, 2016 <<https://scottwoodsmakeslists.wordpress.com/2016/02/25/gods-of-egypt-is-the-most-racist-film-ever/comment-page-1/>> [accessed 17 July 2017].

are often legitimate, it is clear that the theoretical framework often remains impoverished. To quote Smith again, “when arguments of appropriation are linked to a racial essentialism no more sophisticated than antebellum miscegenation laws, well, then we head quickly into absurdity.”<sup>137</sup> Not only do such discussions imbue cultural boundaries with an almost absolute fixity, ignoring the malleability required by any notion of culture that appreciates its historical condition (with this being a clear gesture of enclosure), but they often further treat diverse aspects of culture as artefacts of property. Appropriation thus becomes considered an act of theft and is thus quickly conflated with notions of vandalism and violence.<sup>138</sup>

Though acts of appropriation certainly can and do contribute to practices of both violence and violation,<sup>139</sup> the notion of cultural appropriation remains dangerously unclear, often serving to group together a wide array of disparate concepts and acts under a singular label. Though the property metaphor can be useful to a certain degree, in order to do the rhetorical work demanded for this framework to hold, the very notion of ownership becomes overextended to near absurdity. This lack of clarity applies both to notions of appropriation and the conceptualisation of culture, recurrently leading to a construction of culture as a monolithic, universal entity. Notions of ‘Black culture’ frequently follow this line. Often, the constituent parts of this culture are rooted not solely within lived histories, but further within stereotypical extensions of what is thought to comprise a positive notion of Black identity. Advocates of this kind of ‘Black culture’ have been known to make vague appeals to African ancestry,<sup>140</sup> not only repeating the racialising rhetoric that conglomerates the cultural diversity of an entire continent into a convenient singularity but furthermore often opening themselves to accusations of appropriating the

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<sup>137</sup> Zadie Smith.

<sup>138</sup> Notably, this attitude is repeated by academic contributions to popular discourse, see: P. L. Thomas, ‘Privilege Is Inhumane, And Appropriation Is One Of Its Strongest Weapons’, *The Huffington Post*, 7 February 2017 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/resisting-cultural-appropriation-a-human-response\\_us\\_5958dbbee4b0326coa8d115d](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/resisting-cultural-appropriation-a-human-response_us_5958dbbee4b0326coa8d115d)> [accessed 14 July 2017].

<sup>139</sup> Though, again, I maintain that we should be wary of making simplistic conflations or overextending our concept of violence

<sup>140</sup> For examples, the notion that “if you believe we all come from Africa, is it really? We’re trying to embrace roots that we were forcefully detached from” which only serves to obscure the very cultural differences this kind of appropriation discourse rests upon.” See: Fatou Sow, ‘Can Black People Appropriate African Culture?’, *Caged Bird*, 14 February 2017 <<https://www.cagedbirdmagazine.com/single-post/2017/02/13/Can-Black-People-Appropriate-African-Culture>> [accessed 15 July 2017].

lived cultures of contemporary Africa in the process.<sup>141</sup> Interestingly, some who endorse this positive Blackness cast the notion of whiteness, and thus any notion of ‘white culture’ as completely empty. What this reveals is the abstract universality of white culture as a monolithic entity – that white culture consists of a broad, ahistorical conflation of plural cultural contexts into a racialised framework. Yet, when Black culture is then mobilised within these discourses, despite the clear rhetorical rationale as an anti-colonial gesture, it repeats this reliance on abstract universality.

‘Black culture’ then becomes regarded as collectively owned by all Black people, and this then often gets transformed into a standard of ‘Black authenticity’. One’s racial identity then becomes bound to one’s cultural and national identities.<sup>142</sup> The conflation of these categories is relatively common within contemporary identity discourse concerning race, and is not at all limited to Black culture.<sup>143</sup> We can clearly see this within the regressive identity politics of the far right.<sup>144</sup> The admixture of such categories is not based on the desire to make apparent the interchangeable way in which such notions are used, which can serve as a strategy for the re-examination and deconstruction of such categories, but instead serves only to simplify and unify these disparate concepts, producing a perspective in which such identities are not only joined and interrelated, but become completely interchangeable. Black racial

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<sup>141</sup> See: Zipporah Gene, ‘Black America, Please Stop Appropriating African Clothing and Tribal Marks’, *Those People*, 2017 <<https://www.thsppl.com/thsppl-articles/2017/4/13/black-america-please-stop-appropriating-african-clothing-and-tribal-marks>> [accessed 15 July 2017].

<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that this entanglement has persisted since the enlightenment attempt to distinguish these categories, see: Immanuel Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View (1784)’, in *On History*, trans. by Lewis White Beck (The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963); Johann Gottfreid von Herder, *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. & trans. by Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>143</sup> A prominent example of this is the debate surrounding the casting of Disney’s live action remake of *Aladdin*. Many people are understandably protesting the idea that a white actor should be given the part, but this had led into many discussions as to where *Aladdin* is ‘really’ from. Despite his fictional status, as well as the completely fictive nature of the setting, which can be accurately described as an act of orientalist world building, many are hotly debating where the part should be given to an Indian or Middle Eastern actor, often asking who has the right or should be entitled to ‘authentically’ represent the part. See: BuzzFeed Entertainment, *Yo, Where the Fuck Is Aladdin Even From?*, 2017 <[https://www.facebook.com/BuzzFeedEntertainment/videos/1884174271834551/?hc\\_ref=ARTRM6eCdVpx57KB7uDZDppv5P68RSxzT6moKOKogfsSZYkwdifxyj678gaA6xPGFo](https://www.facebook.com/BuzzFeedEntertainment/videos/1884174271834551/?hc_ref=ARTRM6eCdVpx57KB7uDZDppv5P68RSxzT6moKOKogfsSZYkwdifxyj678gaA6xPGFo)>.

<sup>144</sup> See: Neiwert.



identity then begins to be described as a form of cultural participation, unifying diverse cultures (which are – accurately or anachronistically – conceptualised as ‘Black’).<sup>145</sup>

Within this universal, one’s Blackness becomes tied to a conception of culture as property, where the owned aesthetics, language and cultural mannerisms are objectified into artefacts. These are unified in a performative account of race, by which norms of racial behaviour can be articulated and subsequently enforced.<sup>146</sup> The proximity or distance of one’s relationship to these norms begins to become a metric of one’s genuine Blackness. We thus have an emerging line from racial stereotypes that moves through a fixed notion of culture as property to create an orthopraxic standard for authentic ‘Blackness’.<sup>147</sup> When ‘Black culture’ is deployed along these lines,<sup>148</sup> its original aims of the subversion of those pervasive racial perceptions that establish and enforce racial divisions can become lost in its own attempts to create an orthodoxy of Blackness. In this form, ‘Black culture’ no longer serves to interrogate the racial categories of the past, but instead redeploys them under the guise of progressive politics. This is not to say that the acknowledgment and celebration of cultural diversity and difference, or that the very mention of race becomes an endorsement of the very framework of racism, for this would only serve as a crude rhetorical tool to obfuscate the racist reality of contemporary power structures and to undermine potential sites of resistance.<sup>149</sup> Instead, my contention is that the specific deployment of stereotype and the creation of a narrow standard of identity that can then come to dictate a code of Black performativity, which in turn makes possible the division of the ‘authentically’ Black from those who are not, reduces itself to a mere repetition of the very racist structure it supposedly undermines. Ultimately, this reinscribes and

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<sup>145</sup> A ‘Black’ culture, in this context, indicates that these cultures are predominantly or ‘entirely’ constituted by Black individuals. As aforementioned, this is particularly the case with African cultures.

<sup>146</sup> One example of this comes from the work of Amira Virgil. Having experienced a lack of racial diversity within *The Sims* videogames, Virgil began ‘The Black Simmer’ project where content creators could mod the game to include more accurate skin tones and clothing aesthetics. However, they also modified Sim behaviours to make them more ‘black’. See: Al Jazzera+, *Black Representation in the Sims: The Black Simmer*, 2017 <<https://www.facebook.com/ajplusenglish/videos/1001518806656293/>> [accessed 21 July 2017].

<sup>147</sup> This is partially employed within the film *Dear White People*, where the character Samantha White is seen as modifying her behaviour in order to fit the expected standard of Black identity. By the end of the film, she is seen as rejecting this as necessary to her own resistance to racism. See: Justin Simien, *Dear White People* (Lionsgate Roadside Attractions, 2014).

<sup>148</sup> As I have noted, this is not always the case. However, increasingly, notions of ‘Black culture’ leave themselves open to exploitation along these lines.

<sup>149</sup> As Sara Ahmed points out over the course of many examples within *Living a Feminist Life*, see: Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (USA: Duke University Press, 2017).

perpetuates racial stereotypes without calling them into question, inadvertently supporting the very racist foundations it wishes to destroy.

Cultural appropriation discourses that predicate themselves upon the wrongful quality of mischaracterising the supposed truths of closed notions of culture become quickly problematized in the face of the fundamentally discursive nature of identity. However, this neither invalidates the legitimate concerns of cultural appropriation, nor does it collapse into a blanket state of permissibility for all those actions that may be described as such. Instead, a concern is raised over the way in which articulations of identity which rest upon closed and fixed definitions create a state of resistance against alternative engagements with the very problems of oppression enclosure seeks to address. As bell hooks contends, the artefacts examined by the discipline of cultural criticism serve to construct the very culture in which they exist, thus their examination is required in order to discover what it would mean to create a culture free of certain kinds of prejudice.<sup>150</sup> I agree, and further contend that this examination requires an understanding of the conditions of subjectivity, and the nature of belonging that does not essentialise or universalise abstract notions of race.

It is important to be attentive to the use of the term “mischaracterizes”<sup>151</sup> within the context of Tuvel’s detractors. *Prima facie*, the term seems to merely state that Tuvel has failed to understand or to accurately articulate the theory she supposedly mischaracterises, the obvious implication being that her article was (or is premised on) ignorance – and perhaps we are thus to view Tuvel herself as ignorant. But the philosophical implications of this linguistic choice are both more interesting and more far-reaching than this. To mischaracterise is to characterise – in the sense of formulating and articulating the character of something in an incorrect, inauthentic or disingenuous way. Characterisation concerns definitional questions, but further has (particularly in this case) a specific connotation of identity. Tuvel is accused of mischaracterising critical theories and engagements with identity. Given characterisation’s implicit link to identity, the objection is framed as a misrepresentation of the identity of identity-theory. The alternative, an accurate representation of this theory, one which does not fail to afford it the appropriate respect, appears to refer to nothing other than the repetition and proliferation of the articulations and engagements of these previous texts. This Tuvel evidently fails at, for her critical engagement (regardless

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<sup>150</sup> bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> Singal.

as to its own merit, this being a distinct question)<sup>152</sup> by its own status as critical engagement must go beyond mere repetition. That it does not leave prior theory where it found it, and that Tuvel brings prior theory into a place that disagrees significantly with identity enclosure's orthodoxy together become the grounds for dismissing her engagement as 'inauthentic'. The notion of mischaracterisation is already a concern with identity, and thus to articulate the concern on these terms is to prefigure a set framework of authentic identity articulation. To regard a particular reading or use of a text as inauthentic solely because it does not straightforwardly repeat a popular or orthodox reading is to greatly restrict how one can meaningfully engage with critical literature. The implication of this treatment is that the very possibility of critical engagement, which underpins philosophical engagement in numerous ways (to say nothing directly about its far wider impact on the very notion of discursivity) becomes closed off. All that is left is to straightforwardly reiterate the canonical body of work. Not only does this create an impossibility of novelty and a general lack of receptivity to new ideas and perspectives, that this perceived 'inauthenticity' was seen to legitimise the (partially abusive) tirades against Tuvel herself demonstrates what this system considers to be an appropriate response to perceived dissent. Yet this criticism is not solely one of misrepresentation, but is then broadened into the claim that Tuvel does not "sufficiently engage"<sup>153</sup> with the relevant scholarly work. This resistance to novelty directly manifests as a discursive constraint.

In the sense that this refusal to 'tow the line' is regarded as a total rejection of contemporary identity politics, we can see the beginnings of a series of confluences. At a fundamental level, it begins with drawing together different kinds of identities and unifying them into an amalgamated phenomenon which glosses over their differences, even whilst maintaining an interest in making such diversity explicit. This then quickly develops into a deeper conflation between these supposedly inclusive politics and notions such as political 'progressivism' and 'liberty'. As these words become increasingly interchangeable, the result is not only that participation in enclosure is regarded as a progressive practice in itself, but that in order to be politically progressive in any sense one must endorse this kind of politic. This is not to suggest that the deconstructive aims of this politic are not progressive, nor that progressivism should, or could, ignore questions of identity. It is instead to say that as identity enclosure

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<sup>152</sup> As aforementioned, this is not my primary concern.

<sup>153</sup> Singal.

operates along orthodox lines, an endorsement of this orthodoxy – including a proliferation of its failures – becomes part of the standard for progressivism. The very notion of being a progressive, of progressive thought, becomes bound to the context contemporary identity politics seeks to create for itself. Furthermore, the conflation with liberty not only induces as similar confusion between this identity enclosure and notions of political liberalism, which often serves to divorce these politics from the criticisms of liberalism prevalent in their philosophical and critical roots,<sup>154</sup> but also reconfigures disagreement as an attack upon liberties and freedoms. As soon as one can be accused of opposing another's freedom, being branded an oppressor is but a short step away. Discursive space becomes closed in the face of a presumed violence, and both the inherent potential and utility of discord and disagreement within the discursive are lost. The political becomes an ironic sacrifice in the name of freedom and liberty, though these are understood in an almost exclusively negative sense as independence from regulatory power structures<sup>155</sup> and thus from all others.

## ENGAGEMENT AS COMPLICITY – NO PLATFORMING AS THE FORECLOSURE OF CRITIQUE

My concerns with the enclosure of contemporary identity politics into the mere proliferation of a new orthodoxy of identity categories come to a head within recent debates around 'no platforming'. To 'no platform' is a form of boycott, wherein a speaker is denied the space to speak, an individual is not granted a platform by an organisation, this being a particularly common strategy of student politics.<sup>156</sup> As a political strategy, no platforming has recently come under fire as a violation of free speech. Many recent, high profile cases have involved events hosted by various universities, sparking lengthy exchanges

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<sup>154</sup> A key example of this placing conflations of race and anti-racist movements with liberalism in contention with 'Black' political theory is the work of Angela Davis. See: *If They Come in the Morning ... : Voices of Resistance*, ed. by Angela Davis (London: Verso Books, 2016).

<sup>155</sup> A further, perhaps more prevalent, irony lies in that this enclosure constitutes such a regulatory structure in its own right.

<sup>156</sup> With this focus on student politics clearly highlighted by recent government 'warnings' to universities, see: Kevin Rawlinson, 'Trigger Warnings OK but No-Platforming May Be Illegal, Universities Warned', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/feb/02/government-tells-universities-to-protect-free-speech-on-campus>> [accessed 10 February 2020].

regarding the implications such dialogic constraints have for freedom of speech.<sup>157</sup> My concern with no platforming is not to restage this ongoing debate around academic freedom, nor is it to lament some supposed loss of a liberal, enlightenment ideal of free speech (the prior existence of which is dubious). Instead, my treatment is focused on how the enclosure of identity discourse into orthodox definitions conditions discourse, how any discursive act that could be understood as deviant from this orthodoxy becomes, in a sense, unheard. I seek no sweeping conclusion as to the status of no platforming as an identity praxis – my intention is not, therefore, to decide whether no platforming is ‘fundamentally’ permissible – but instead my concern is with how no platforming is justified as a praxis. Specifically, my concern is with how no platforming is increasingly becoming a default response, particularly when it quickly becomes viewed as the ‘only’ available strategy for identity politics. In particular, my concern is with how identity discourse becomes enclosed by no platforming, the tension between this praxis and discursivity, and how this enables a tacit forfeit of critical engagement with the very identity concepts at play.

The claim that no platforming was “the Only Option” was made with reference to the 2015 no platforming controversy surrounding feminist scholar Germaine Greer’s guest lecture at Cardiff university. A polarising figure, Greer has a history of using an irreverent and inflammatory persona, as well as making statements which have been described as transphobic or trans exclusionary.<sup>158</sup> The lecture,

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<sup>157</sup> Eric Heinze, ‘Ten Arguments for – and against – “No-Platforming”’, *Free Speech Debate*, 28 March 2017 <<http://freespeechdebate.com/discuss/ten-arguments-for-and-against-no-platforming/>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>158</sup> See: Nick Duffy, ‘Germaine Greer: I Don’t Believe in Transphobia’, *Pink News*, 28 January 2015 <<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/01/28/germaine-greer-i-dont-believe-in-transphobia/>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Lydia Smith, ‘Transgender Rights versus Feminism: What Makes a Woman?’, *International Business Times*, 16 May 2015 <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/transgender-rights-versus-feminism-what-makes-woman-1501487>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Cara, ‘Germaine Greer Paints a Portrait of Transphobic Feminism’, *Feministe*, 2009 <<http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2009/08/22/germaine-greer-paints-a-portrait-of-transphobic-feminism/>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Jemma Nott, ‘Germaine Greer: Transphobia Is All in Your Mind’, *Green Left Weekly*, 2 June 2015 <<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/germaine-greer-transphobia-all-your-mind>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

scheduled for November 2015 and entitled ‘Women & Power: The Lessons of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’, drew widespread criticism. Though Cardiff University did not sanction Greer (both in the sense that they allowed her to speak, whilst also making their disapproval of some of those views attributed to her clear)<sup>159</sup> and the event’s cancellation was her own decision,<sup>160</sup> I emphasise the importance of the request for, and the support of, no platforming. This is to focus not on the specific result, but on no platforming as a praxis. The actual call for no platforming was rooted in a petition, created by Rachael Melhuish, the women’s officer at the University of Cardiff Student Union, to cancel the event based on Greer’s “misogynistic views towards trans women”.<sup>161</sup> Melhuish cites no specific example of these views, and thereby her claim is not about something specific that Greer has said (and given how vocal Greer has been on this topic, there surely is no shortage of examples) but about what Greer represents, the kind of subject she is seen to be and thus the kind of interlocutor she is thought to constitute.

*Prima facie*, it seems reasonable enough for an identity politic to focus on the ‘who’ when evaluating specific kinds of discourse. To deny the importance of this ‘who’ is, in itself, a kind of abstraction. However, the way in which the ‘who’ of Greer is regarded in this example is clearly a totalisation, an abstracted understanding of the kind of view she is seen to represent, with the petition itself generalising away from specific acts of discourse. This kind of generalisation is also evidenced by the call for no platforming itself, which was rooted in Greer’s views on trans people (again, quite abstractly conceived), despite the topic of her lecture focusing on a distinct (though not entirely unrelated) aspect of feminism.

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<sup>159</sup> Ben Quinn, ‘Petition Urges Cardiff University to Cancel Germaine Greer Lecture’, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/23/petition-urges-cardiff-university-to-cancel-germaine-greer-lecture>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>160</sup> Quinn.

<sup>161</sup> Rachael Melhuish, ‘Cardiff University: Do Not Host Germaine Greer’, 2015 <[https://www.change.org/p/cardiff-university-do-not-host-germaine-greer?recruiter=59862098&utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_campaign=share\\_twitter\\_responsive&rp\\_sharecardion\\_checklist=control](https://www.change.org/p/cardiff-university-do-not-host-germaine-greer?recruiter=59862098&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=share_twitter_responsive&rp_sharecardion_checklist=control)> [accessed 27 July 2017].

The reasoning put forward to support no platforming Greer was that “While debate in a University should be encouraged, hosting a speaker with such problematic and hateful views towards marginalised and vulnerable groups is dangerous” and that Greer’s “attitudes contribute to the high levels of stigma, hatred and violence towards trans people - particularly trans women”.<sup>162</sup> It is clear that many of Greer’s comments concerning trans identities are understandably considered insensitive and rude – as well as constitutive of a mobilisation of transphobic social norms. Greer is vocal of her rejection of applying the label of women to trans people, even ‘post-surgery’ MTF ‘transsexuals’, and this is a clear point of rupture between her own treatment of trans identities and that which is widely advocated for under identity enclosure as well as within contemporary politics more widely. We cannot isolate Greer as an interlocutor from her trans-critical / transphobic views, nor is this my claim. Instead, my claim is that we cannot reduce her to them.<sup>163</sup> This is particularly important, specifically with figures like Greer, who hold a place within the established canon of feminist theory. This is not a demand that we agree with her, but it is to understand her as an interlocutor worth hearing, even if the result of her being heard is to be met with criticism.

However, the impossibility of conducting a total severance between the speaker and what is spoken does require us to consider the question of the ‘who’. Who is speaking matters. We can see this in another example of no platforming, that of the notorious fascist personality and former senior editor of Breitbart News, Milo Yiannopoulos. Indeed, Yiannopoulos’ recent reduction in fame is often held up as an example that ‘no platforming works’,<sup>164</sup> and is thereby used as a widespread justification for it as a

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<sup>162</sup> Both quotes: Melhuish.

<sup>163</sup> The difficulty with this reduction is explored by Mary Beard in her article about a distinct controversy concerning Greer’s discussion of rape, see: Mary Beard, ‘The Greer Method’, *London Review of Books*, 2019 <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n20/mary-beard/the-greer-method>> [accessed 11 February 2020].

<sup>164</sup> See: Zack Beauchamp, ‘Milo Yiannopoulos’s Collapse Shows That No-Platforming Can Work’, *Vox*, 2018 <<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/12/5/18125507/milo-yiannopoulos-debt-no-platform>> [accessed 2 October 2020]; Rachel Kraus, ‘Milo Yiannopoulos’ Facebook Rant Shows That de-

praxis. Despite his popularity at the time, the event in question was originally intended to be hosted by the UC Berkeley, though it was cancelled after widespread protest.<sup>165</sup> Yiannopoulos' no platforming is rooted in his active participation in inciting violence and harm,<sup>166</sup> not only due to his own comments,<sup>167</sup> but also due to his affiliation and influence within Breitbart News, well known for inciting hate speech<sup>168</sup> and harassment, including doxxing campaigns.<sup>169</sup> Given this pattern of behaviour, Yiannopoulos clearly constitutes himself as a specific kind of interlocutor, one who cares little for free speech beyond its implementation as a rhetorical instrument with which to shield himself from criticism. Platforming an

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Platforming Actually Works', *MashableUK*, 2018 <<https://mashable.com/article/milo-yiannopoulos-deplatforming-alex-jones/?europa=true>> [accessed 2 October 2020]. Given the prior failures of his book, however, no platforming may not have been the sole reason for this, see: Danuta Kean, 'Milo Yiannopoulos Labels Low Sales Figures of Dangerous Memoir "Fake News"', *The Guardian*, 13 August 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/13/milo-yiannopoulos-labels-low-sales-figures-of-dangerous-memoir-fake-news>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>165</sup> Julia Carrie Wong, 'UC Berkeley Cancels "alt-Right" Speaker Milo Yiannopoulos as Thousands Protest', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/01/milo-yiannopoulos-uc-berkeley-event-cancelled>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>166</sup> See: Oliver Darcy, 'Louis Farrakhan, Alex Jones and Other "dangerous" Voices Banned by Facebook and Instagram', *CNN*, 3 May 2019 <<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/02/tech/facebook-ban-louis-farrakhan-infowars-alex-jones-milo-laura-loomer/index.html>>.

<sup>167</sup> Claire Landsbaum, 'Alt-Right Troll Milo Yiannopoulos Uses Campus Visit to Openly Mock a Transgender Student', *The Cut*, 15 December 2016 <<https://www.thecut.com/2016/12/milo-yiannopoulos-harassed-a-trans-student-at-uw-milwaukee.html>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Maya Oppenheim, 'UC Berkeley Protests: Milo Yiannopoulos Planned to "publicly Name Undocumented Students" in Cancelled Talk', *The Independent*, 2 March 2017 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/uc-berkeley-protests-milo-yiannopoulos-publicly-name-undocumented-students-cancelled-talk-illegals-a7561321.html>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Noah Michaelson, 'Here's A Fact-Check On Milo Yiannopoulos' Incendiary Claims About Trans People', *The Huffington Post*, 18 February 2017 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/milo-yiannopoulos-transgender-people-truth\\_us\\_58a84dcae4b07602ad551487](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/milo-yiannopoulos-transgender-people-truth_us_58a84dcae4b07602ad551487)> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Tim Molloy, 'Milo Yiannopoulos Fact Check: Are Trans People "Disproportionately Involved" in Sex Crimes?', *SFGate*, 17 February 2017 <<http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/the-wrap/article/Milo-Yiannopoulos-Fact-Check-Are-Trans-People-10942369.php>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>168</sup> The Japan Times, 'AppNexus Bans Breitbart from Ad Exchange, Citing Hate Speech', *The Japan Times*, 24 November 2016 <<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/24/world/politics-diplomacy-world/appnexus-bans-breitbart-ad-exchange-citing-hate-speech/#.WELdvKIS5g->>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Sean Captain, 'Activists Are Pushing Back Against Tech Platforms That Quietly Empower Hate Groups', *Fast Company*, 5 September 2017 <<https://www.fastcompany.com/40411086/activists-push-back-against-the-platforms-that-quietly-empower-hate-groups>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>169</sup> Lloyd Grove, 'How Breitbart Unleashes Hate Mobs to Threaten, Dox, and Troll Trump Critics', *Daily Beast*, 3 January 2016 <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/how-breitbart-unleashes-hate-mobs-to-threaten-dox-and-troll-trump-critics>> [accessed 27 July 2017].



individual such as Yiannopoulos, whose entire public persona revolves around his reactionary politics, is quite difficult to justify as an act of good faith.

Here, we can begin to distinguish between Greer and Yiannopoulos. Though both can be described as reactionary, it is much more difficult to reduce the former to this term than it is the latter. In the case of Yiannopoulos, there is the open courtship of fascism, and though this does not, perhaps, exempt us from critical engagement, it does pre-condition his engagement as being in bad faith, given that fascism is fundamentally opposed to discursivity and the political in the sense I'm using it in this thesis.<sup>170</sup> Greer's context is quite distinct, as a major figure of second wave feminism, her engagements are more difficult to dismiss as bad faith. They may well be informed by very different conceptions of sex, gender, and the project of feminism, conceptions that we must view critically as part of our philosophical and theoretical inheritance, and she may well engage with select topics (such as trans identity) in bad faith, but this cannot be said to qualify her in the same fundamental way as it does Yiannopoulos. We must instead be more discerning, which is not possible if she is not heard.

My concern is therefore not to defend Greer, nor to appeal to any rights of free speech that sanctions her perspective. Instead, I am concerned with how no platforming proceeds from the perspective that deviance from the orthodox framework of contemporary identity enclosure must not be heard – or from a conflation of engagement and agreement, hearing and complicity. Diversity of perspective cannot be admitted by identity enclosure, and those that disagree must be understood as on the outside, as unwelcome within the discursive space conditioned by its orthodoxy. They do not have the grounds to speak. Who the speaker is cannot mitigate this and so is ignored, as is the context of their

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<sup>170</sup> Evidence for this, were it needed, can be found in Arendt's work on how little regard fascism and totalitarianism have for the discursive, see: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1973); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* (United Kingdom: Penguin (Non-Classics), 1977).

speech, what matters is solely the extent to which both what is said and what the speaker is taken to have said conform to the expected framing.

This often occurs under a framing that readily conflates dissent from the orthodox of identity enclosure with an attack, and that can understand disagreement with the orthodoxy as a form of violence against those who bear the labels of the categories it holds in place. What is sought, here, is a form of security; precisely, it is a form of security that can only come from discursive restraint, this being the motivation for identity enclosure to contain the self within a 'safe' fixity. The pursuit of this security is understandable as praxis for an identity politics that seeks justice for marginalised subjects, particularly given the centrality of epistemic violence<sup>171</sup> within this marginalisation. However, the pursuit of security often additionally serves to prevent criticism of the framing itself, regarding such criticism or dissent from the categorising mechanisms sanctioned by its orthodoxy as a threat. This engenders the absolutist division between those who support the orthodoxy of identity enclosure, and those who are seen to wholeheartedly oppose it. This quickly reduces to a simplification of discourse into either a legitimate proliferation of enclosure's narrowly defined notion of justice, or as a direct attack against the subjects it seeks to champion. The possibility of critique is foreclosed.

This is not to dismiss claims of violence entirely, nor is it to downplay the role of epistemic marginalisation. It is instead to track the transformation of the notion of epistemic violence from its roots within post-colonial theory as a tool used to unpick hegemonic systems of domination to its role within the policing and maintenance of the boundaries of this orthodoxy. Rather than protecting plurality, this concept is now sustaining singularity, mobilised as a tool for identity enclosure to fix its categories in place and to suppress the possibility of dissent. Discourse inherently contains the possibility of

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<sup>171</sup> See: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 271–313; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Words* (London: Routledge, 2006).

disagreement, dissent, and tension, and to conflate these with violence is to surreptitiously fix its horizons in the name of security. This kind of political security is, however, impossible, as to exile disagreement beyond the borders of permissible discourse is to evacuate politics and political speech from itself.

All this succeeds in achieving is enclosing the horizons of the subject within its own limits, reducing everything to its own framework. But in so doing, it obscures the political condition this politics seeks to transform. This is a fundamental concern with no platforming being viewed as ‘the only option’ as it quickly becomes a rationale for refusing to engage with the very conditions of oppression in a sustained, critical manner. All that identity enclosure can do is rebuke these failures, a rebuke that may well be warranted, but which ultimately does not understand its own grounds. Without the ability to critically engage with deviant discourse, enclosure frequently reduces itself to a merely perfunctory proliferation of its own orthodoxy, further conflating this proliferation with seeking security for its subjects.<sup>172</sup> Identity is conflated with personhood, material interests, and safety, and thus the defence becomes rooted in an abstraction, reducing its praxis to a purely epistemic scope. And, in its absolutist fervour, identity enclosure cannot disambiguate between a refusal to proliferate its own orthodoxy, and the active proliferation of the oppressive structures it opposes.

The parallels between the cases of Greer and Tuvel are evident. In both cases, philosophical, feminist work is presented on identity, but was articulated in a disparate way from that expected within contemporary identity enclosure. The dissonance between what these enclosed audiences expected and wanted to hear, and the articulation which has been addressed to them leads to these deviant positions being reduced to ‘misunderstandings’. Tuvel is seen as ignorant, and in the case of Greer, she was presumptively viewed as a bad faith interlocutor – as untrustworthy to speak on feminism *tout court*

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<sup>172</sup> Frédéric Gros notes the affiliation between security and normativity, see: Frédéric Gros, *The Security Principle* (London: Verso, 2019), chap. Biosecurity.

because of her views on trans identity, despite her overt claim that she has no interest in talking about trans people.<sup>173</sup> We can thus see alternative perspectives and engagement becoming directly conflated with spreading misinformation, this being particularly salient with respect to those criticisms received by Tuvel on the grounds of her 'mischaracterisation' of academic theory. So-viewed as misunderstandings, understood as more profound than mere errors to be corrected, these can be rhetorically dismissed, reasserting that the truth of the categories of the self as they are enclosed within orthodoxy.

Through this move, identity enclosure wields its own orthodoxy as a framework of knowledge, with the abstract, universality this term implies. Despite surreptitious claims to the contrary, orthodox framings of identity are particular expressions of historically situated attitudes towards the self. By acting as if the configurations of contemporary identity politics are straightforwardly 'truer' than those that dissent from them, these politics lay claim to a universalised framing of the self, yet one that abstracts away from the conditions that produce its categories and within which they are lived. A reactionary rejection of any contradictory voice reduces this identity politics to an abstract puritanism more concerned with epistemic policing than with critical praxeis, and in the case of Greer serve only to amputate one of most influential commentators of the feminist canon – shortcomings and all. Whatever its limitations, there is much to be learned from her work. The tensions between her feminism and the perspectives of this orthodoxy serve as a site of rupture where both frameworks reveal their limitations. Rather than reducing, as both Greer and her detractors do, their opponents' views to irrational or bigoted statements, an attitude that only serves to undermine critique, such tensions must be resolved through sustained engagement.

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<sup>173</sup> Germaine Greer, Germaine Greer: Transgender women are 'not women' - BBC Newsnight, 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B8Q6D4a6TM>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

We see this too with Tuvel's detractors, whose denunciation of her paper ultimately uncritically perpetuates orthodox understandings of the self through the unqualified use of 'appropriate' academic standards. Through refusing to articulate academic theory in its own terms – which is to say doing more than merely repeating verbatim the contents of pre-existing texts – Tuvel finds her understanding of these sources called into question. It is hard to make sense of the widespread and wholesale dismissal of Tuvel's own critical and philosophical capabilities without reference to this orthodox standard, for it is only with reference to such a standard that it becomes apparent that whatever Tuvel did or did not articulate is largely irrelevant to those who operate within the context of identity enclosure. Her critics are conditioned by identity enclosure to focus on her terminology and then largely forego critical engagement in favour of blanket rejection.

## OBSCURED PRIVATISATION

Having explored some of the discursive dimensions of identity enclosure and shown how its orthodox framings of the self fix identity discourses, this section articulates the ontological dimensions of this pathology. The fixity of identity categories enacted by enclosure both reveals and propagates an ontology of the self, an ontology that fundamentally reduces the self to a pre-political, or pre-discursive entity. This privatisation of the self operates as a process of depoliticisation that reduces the selves articulated within identity disclosure to abstracted entities, removed from the very conditions of their subjectivity. This ontological dimension makes it difficult for our understanding of the subject to inform political praxeis, since it operates with an abstract conception of that self that makes it impossible for us to understand the self's own lived conditions. The result is a break between subjects and political space, a break that interposes itself between this framing and its praxeis. As such, identity enclosure is an enclosure of the self from the political, keeping the political distinct from the subject, which fundamentally prevents any clear theorisation of the very political conditions contemporary identity politics seek to transform.

The notion of subjectivity often deployed by enclosure fundamentally characterises the self as ontologically external to political space and thus abstracts it from the intersubjective.<sup>174</sup> This ontology is not always made explicit, but fundamentally conditions contemporary identity discourses. Of course, this is partially an issue with the ways these politics inherit a representative framework for the political, since identity politics partially understands its own project as securing representation for marginalised subjectivities – more specifically representations that conform to its own standards of articulation. Butler highlights the limits of this framework within the context of feminist critique, although she notes that we cannot entirely reject the paradigm of representative politics.<sup>175</sup> I do not wish to entirely disown the politics of representation but instead focus on the ontological limitations of this framing of the subject and concomitant political praxeis.

In the following section, I shall explore this privatised ontology of the self – beginning with an exploration of how the self becomes enclosed within the logic of objects distinct from relationality and the political spaces composed of/by relations. Within the context of this framing, I shall demonstrate how identity is reduced to a form of predicative qualification – with particular focus here on how these discourses reduce notions such as privilege and oppression into abstract qualities. This will lead into an exploration of the epistemic implications of this ontological framing, when the fundamentally apolitical self becomes enclosed as an abstraction that reveals itself solely through self-disclosure. I shall explore this disjuncture by demonstrating how this manifests in a militant framing of the political, understanding the political as fundamentally antagonistic. In light of this militaristic framing, identity enclosure segregates political space through the introduction of an epistemic bulwark, presuming a straightforward boundedness between subjects both at the micro level of the individual and at the macro level of their identitarian type. I will conclude this analysis by considering how this ontology both plays into processes of reification, and yet cannot be fundamentally reduced to previous accounts of such processes.

## THE OBJECT ONTOLOGY OF THE ENCLOSED SELF

I will begin by considering how enclosure thinks of the self as fundamentally apolitical. As such, enclosed identity politics must be understood as a political movement concerned with the advocacy of individuals

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<sup>174</sup> Importantly, this is far from explicit, as this would cause blatant contradictions with many of enclosure's projects that concern the creation and transformation of political spaces.

<sup>175</sup> See: Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

that possess tenuous relationships with the political. Indeed, politics becomes a domain in which these individuals can, and indeed must, act – but this domain remains at a distance from the subject. Ontologically, the assumption is of an individual whose relationality can only ever be secondary to its constitution, for it is thought to pre-exist the politics with which it must involve itself. This framing, implicit within enclosure, fundamentally conditions not only how the self is understood, but furthermore how the political is theorised –along with it the praxeis of contemporary identity politics.

Thus enclosure uncritically presumes a pre-political individual. This forms the ‘common sense’ of enclosure, which is then unable to understand how individuals (individuation) or how identities are produced. This lacuna persists despite the wealth of critique this vision of the subject has received from schools of thought often drawn upon to support contemporary identity politics, such as post-structuralist,<sup>176</sup> feminist,<sup>177</sup> queer,<sup>178</sup> post-colonial,<sup>179</sup> and critical race<sup>180</sup> theory – even though it is clear how such theory has helped to occasion these politics. This common sense encloses the subject in a specific ontological framework, importing a series of distinctions between self and other, between interior and exterior, and between the individual and the world. It introduces crude distinctions to prefigure the individual as *de facto* separated – in an absolute sense – from its context: the political world, in the sense of its existence alongside others.<sup>181</sup> The enclosed self is a kind of object, albeit one that cannot be understood as the straightforward output of a classical process of reification.<sup>182</sup> The self becomes impermeably bounded, enclosed within itself. This is to say that enclosure’s form of objectification does not reduce the self to a ‘mere’, inert object, but to a ‘subjective object’ – retaining its sense of individuality and agency but that is nevertheless understood in terms of fixity and stasis. Enclosure’s underlying

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<sup>176</sup> See: Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>177</sup> See: Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003); Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>178</sup> See: Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (California: University of California Press, 2008); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 5 vols (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), I.

<sup>179</sup> See: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (London, United Kingdom: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>180</sup> See: Fields and Fields.

<sup>181</sup> This could be understood as an affective dimension of alienation.

<sup>182</sup> As I shall explore within the final subsection of this chapter.

framework thus treats subjectivity and the self as a kind of subjective object – as a fixed entity that is implicitly enclosed from the world which it inhabits (Descartes lives!).

Yet, clearly enclosure does not deny the importance of the political – impoverished as its notion of that sphere may prove to be – since it fundamentally understands itself as a transformative project. It cannot deny the existence of other selves (and thus formally descend into solipsism) and nor can it completely abstract the notion of subjectivity from others. The enclosed self comes to have a strictly temporal relationship with political space, wherein this individual pre-exists this space and then moves into it. We thus see an implicit distinction between the subject and its activity – between the agent as a kind of object outside of the political, and the activity that issues forth from it. This partially repeats the metaphysics of substance,<sup>183</sup> with a bounded self understood as preceding its own actions, constituting a transcendental ground of its activity. To understand this abstraction from political space requires that we see that it not only thinks the self as pre-existing political space, but that it is fundamentally thought to be outside of it. The abstraction produces a rift between the individual and the political that conditions what enclosed politics understands the political to be, and thus how it understands its own project.

This picture of political interaction is thus one in which bounded selves articulate themselves to one another, but their relationality is definitionally superficial as it does not penetrate the surface of the self. The enclosed self is so bounded that the interiority or the subjectivity of the self cannot touch or be touched by political discourse. The enclosed self is thus enclosed outside / from the political but nevertheless cannot help but appear within it, albeit not ‘fully’. Here, a representative framework is inherited, whereby the central concern of identity politics is the locus of appearance. The bind of the enclosed self is therefore that it can never escape its political appearance, that appearance and relationality are conditions it is inexorably forced into, without any consent on the part of the subject. Yet, at the same time, as enclosure understands this compulsory appearance to issue from the self as an object that is closed off from the space of appearance and disconnected from it. With this rift between the self and the political, comes the possibility of ‘inaccuracy’, that the appearance doesn’t match the self. As a result, the precarity of the link between appearance and enclosed self conditions this politics so that it seeks to secure the appearance. We thus have a self that is fundamentally conceived as an object, as a

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<sup>183</sup> See: Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*; Judith Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence* (London: Verso, 2020).



subsistent fixity. Standing at an abstracted distance from the other, the self becomes a fundamentally self-knowing object, a subjective-object in so far as its bounded nature configures it as accessible only to itself. Enclosure's particular concern with identity, and with how identity is deployed as an instrument of oppression is then conflated with this notion of the self as a bounded, self-contained subjectivity. It holds out the hope of a more 'full', whole, or complete self - but recognising that the political does not admit this, retains this bounded self only through abstraction.

With the self understood as an abstract subjective object, identity comes to assume the form of a factic description or qualification of this self. Ontologically speaking, identity categories and labels are understood as matters of fact that can be rightly or wrongly applied to selves – with the veracity of these labels lying within their correspondence to the self that is enclosed outside of politics. Any distance between the self and its identities is collapsed. The self is identified with these descriptions, which become intrinsic features of its subjectivity. For enclosure, identity becomes an essential and definitive fact about a given subjectivity, naturalised into a predicative feature of the self. Like the self, identities trace their origin back to abstracted subjectivity, to that which pre-exists the political and the intersubjective, rendering identity labels and the categories they rely on fundamentally enclosed, outside of politics. The result is a political condition where the (a)political self is qualified by (a)political identities. This is to say that identity enclosure further blinds the political - reducing it to an abstracted domain of appearance, where the boundaries of this appearance are foreclosed by a framework which claims to precede the political.

The enclosure of the self into an abstract object and the enclosure of the political into an abstract space of appearance results in an understanding of identity praxis as the safeguarding and securitisation of appearance. As such, for enclosure the goal is the securitisation of appearance, the defence of an accurate appearance from potential distortion. Given that the veracity of appearance can only be assured by its correspondence with the abstracted self that is appearing (we shall further explore the epistemic dimensions of this later in this chapter), this pursuit of security results in the individual's assertion of their self-understanding in opposition to how they are seen, understood, and recognised by others. This is to regard the understandings of others solely as potential sources of distortion, resulting in an

individualism where the fundamental contact between individuals is a combative struggle.<sup>184</sup> The political becomes a kind of colosseum: a place of antagonistic combat.<sup>185</sup> So on this picture, the political is an imposition on the subject who must defend its own self-disclosure in order to appear ‘accurately’ – overcoming, opposing, and resisting the distorted, imposed meanings of others. This reduction of self and identity into object and accompanying, predicative quality fundamentally conditions the politics of enclosure as a praxis. Its constitutive calls for an appreciation of lived experience readily reduce into calls for a respect for persons abstracted away from the political, who are essentialised into a series of identity labels that are in turn also abstracted away from the political – itself reduced into a site of antagonistic struggle over meaning. Enclosure thereby does not understand what it terms lived experience as it is lived, as it forecloses any acknowledgement of the political processes by and within which selves and identities are produced. The pursuit of security culminates in an ontology of total abstraction. An example of this can be found in the way the notion of privilege is utilised in this framework.

#### POWER AS MERE CALCULUS: PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION WITHIN ENCLOSURE

Enclosure of the subject into an object form and of identity into factic qualities is at work when contemporary discourse speaks of power. Contemporary identity politics inherits many of its concerns from those schools of political philosophy and theory that seek to articulate disparities of power, and that seek to understand how relations of power structure society. Yet, when these discussions of power are at work within the frameworks of identity enclosure, the result is an abstraction of power from relations within a concrete situation. We can see this most clearly in the various ways contemporary politics makes use of the notion of privilege. Within discourses concerned with oppression – both within and without of the academy – the notion of privilege is understood as the converse of oppression. Just as an oppressed subjectivity is constituted so as to be restricted in various ways as well as being subject to violations and violence, a privileged subjectivity is thought to be constituted in such a way that they are enabled to move and act within the socio-political world without being subject to oppressions. These discourses correctly understand that notions of privilege and oppression cannot be considered independently from identity, as identities are the instruments through which social systems of power categorise and hierarchically

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<sup>184</sup> As I shall explore in relation to Hegel’s section on Lordship and Bondage in my second chapter.

<sup>185</sup> With this having a clear precedent in prior readings of Classical Greek culture, see: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Homer’s Contest*, trans. by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

organise subjects. Conversely, identities cannot be considered independently from the social systems of power within which and by which they are constituted, which is to say that these cannot be understood independently of privilege and oppression. Privilege and oppression are thus understood as working in relation to one another, constituting subjects that possess variant degrees of social influence.

However, enclosure reduces privilege and oppression into its framework of individual subjectivity, foreclosing an understanding of these as relational. When the subject as a bounded object is deployed alongside notions of privilege and oppression, these can only be configured in terms of predicative descriptions that then provide a fixed articulation of the subjectivity in question. It therefore becomes commonplace to refer to individuals within certain identities as ‘privileged people’, and likewise to refer to others as ‘oppressed people’. The terms ‘privileged’ and ‘oppressed’ here describe a fixed quality of an implicitly apolitical self. Privilege and oppression become qualities of individuals rather than embedded within the dynamics of a situation. It follows that one can meaningfully be or not be privileged or oppressed, that these terms are descriptors that disclose a determinant feature of one’s subjectivity. Again, this does not entirely miss the mark – but it presents a highly superficial mapping of power. The notion of a privileged or oppressed person is thus not ‘incorrect’, but the constitution of the subject is, on this account, understood to be absolute. As we have seen, within enclosure, the subject is sealed off from its political conditions, which thus cannot play a formative role within it. According to enclosure’s structure of subjectivity, that which can be said to meaningfully describe a subjectivity is considered in terms of accuracy or authenticity, which is to say in terms of its truth value. Again, privilege becomes a matter of respect for pre-extant subjects – with power incorporated into the identities that qualify this subject, with these in turn determining its fixed place within a system of power. This hierarchical mechanism of identity is not at issue here – there are clearly disparities of power between subjects both at the individual level and at the level of identity categories, and these must be made explicit – but the enclosure of this mechanism into qualifications of an objectified subject serve to abstract power from the situations and dynamics within which the subject is inexorably immersed.

Accordingly, when notions such as privilege and oppression become isolated qualities of individuals, rather than ways of describing how notions of identity themselves are hierarchically organised within society, these acquire a fixity that comes at the cost of abstraction. Whilst it is important to note that subjectivity cannot be divorced from power and thus from notions of privilege and

oppression, this framing naturalises subjectivities and reduces them to a simplified schema of the power dynamics that constitute them. A subject is constituted as fundamentally oppressed or privileged – and though this could be understood as a plurality of vectors (class, sex, gender, sexuality, and race to name just a few) it becomes an essentialised part of subjects. This reduces power to a neat metric, ranking subjects according to their qualitative privilege or oppression. Power is thus reduced to a quality of an individual, or a possession, something possessed before arriving on the scene of politics. As a result, this discourse always proceeds from the perspective of individuated subjects that are not merely immersed in power, but who bear disparate conditions of power – with no acknowledgment of how this power is politically constituted. Power ceases to be a matter of relations, which may be more or less dynamic, and is withdrawn – along with the subject – from the political itself. The result is an ossification of power disparities, with these quickly forming orthodox scripts that reinscribe these disparities as universal: as fundamentally unmediated by concrete conditions. Privilege as a quality of persons introduces a presumptive and fundamental antagonism between subjects. As a quality, power becomes a quantitative measure and thus relationships between individuals become reducible to a language of comparative calculation. As such, disparities of power themselves become naturalised and this extends beyond interpersonal relationships to become codified at the level of identity. Enclosure takes the dynamics of oppression as a given – proceeding not merely from a condition within which these are understood to already be at play, wherein they must be presumed. This is a move from understanding systems of oppression as a general orientation of power – as that which does play a fundamental role within the conditioning of political space – towards a prefigured understanding of the mechanisms of oppression. On such an account, power – so-held back from the political itself – cannot be understood as situated. Instead, power becomes essentially encoded into subject – issuing from the status of these subjects rather than constitutive of them. This introduces a kind of fatalism into the project of identity politics, wherein oppression becomes an inexorable condition of the subject – part of their abstracted subjectivity – rather than a political condition, constitutive of subjects, that can nevertheless be critically opposed. Identity enclosure thus traps its politics within the very same political imaginary that wields categories of identity and abstracted models of subjectivity as tools of oppression. This reasserts the representative model, as identity politics tries to express only what is already there, thereby foreclosing the possibility of any departure from these very conditions of disparity and oppression. This is not to suggest that any talk of

the privileged or oppressed becomes meaningless. It is instead to warn against the naturalisation of these dynamics – their reduction into situationally-independent frameworks of interpretation.

Conversely, I contend that it is centrally necessary to understand privilege in terms of the relational contexts within which individual subjects are constituted and within which they move and act. As such, privilege and oppression do not pertain to an individual identity, or to an individual subjectivity and cannot be conceived of in terms of straightforwardly predicative qualities that are either present within an individual or not. Instead, we must understand that individuals are constituted as privileged or oppressed within specific contexts, that these should be understood as relational power dynamics that necessarily occur within embodied situations. What is suppressed by enclosure is this relational and constitutive horizon. We should remind ourselves that notions of privilege and oppression fundamentally apply to situations rather than to individuals. When we consider situations, we are concerned with the constitution of contexts, with the relations of various elements that together form a context. Such situations, as well as the conceptual frameworks within which we can understand them, are constituted by and within power, as are the conditions of appearance for the subject. Privilege and oppression do not stand at an abstract distance from subjects, but can only meaningfully pertain to subjects in so far as those individuals are understood within these contextual dynamics. Strictly speaking, there are no abstractly privileged or oppressed individuals. To be privileged, or to be oppressed is a matter of one's relations within a socio-political context, and these contexts are continually shifting, transforming and are often reasserted. It is not that the privileged subject is not subject to relations with others, as this would imply that relations are solely negative and controlling. It is not the case that only the oppressed are constituted socially and thus that the privileged person is privileged in so far as they are not subjected to social relations.<sup>186</sup> Both privileged and oppressed subjects are constituted as such relationally, which is to say that being constituted as privileged or oppressed is a matter of the ways in which one's identities are mobilised in the context one finds oneself in. This is to understand both privilege and oppression – power itself – as inexorably political, as constituted relationally in how we live together. On this understanding of oppression, we can only have begun with the abstract narrative with which we understand the constitution of social hierarchy as sexist, misogynistic, racist, homophobic (among other

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<sup>186</sup> The denial of relationality will be further explored in my discussion of the dialectic of Lordship and Bondage in Chapter 2.

vectors of oppression). To remain at this level is to remain, again, within abstract universality. This divorces these notions of social stigma and the very structures of oppression from their material conditions. It thus becomes impossible for us to engage the structures of oppression, actively or practically – they constitute mere ideas rather than concrete ideological structures that pervasively manifest themselves within socio-political space. Central to this perspective is that one must recognise that these manifestations are indeed pervasive, but that this does not imply a clear uniformity such that we can comprehensively speak of these structures at the level of abstraction.<sup>187</sup>

When identity is understood as the predication of a subject, the result is a subject that stands outside of shared political space, which amounts to an abstraction of these identities from political contexts. Whilst identities are still thought of as politically salient, this salience is something that identities gain when they enter into spaces of political exchange from the externality of their original position. Identities are thought of as relational only insofar as relations between individual subjectivities are then enacted, they are not relational by nature. This is what it means for identity to become predicative in relation to an objectified notion of self and subjectivity. Identities within contemporary identity politics are therefore increasingly treated as ossified, as indelibly carved into the subjective-object of the self. As such, identity becomes an abstract self-relation, a factic quality of a self-object. Importantly, this privatises self-knowledge, reducing identity-speak into a solipsistic language of self-disclosure as I shall now demonstrate.

## IMMEDIATE SELF KNOWLEDGE

This enclosure of the subject into a bounded, pre-political object enacts, as we have seen, a detachment between selves and conditions, between individuals and political togetherness. Thus far, I have explored this at the level of the discursive trends and as an ontological framing of the subject – in both cases understanding this as a process of abstraction that tends towards a presumptive fixity of individuals and categories of identity. To formulate identities as predicative qualities is to formulate a standard of accuracy for identity articulation that depends on how these correspond or fail to correspond with the predicates of the self in question. As such, an articulation of identity can be straightforwardly correct or

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<sup>187</sup> This point is suggested by Stuart Hall in his treatment of Gramsci, see: Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996).

incorrect with regards to a particular subject, but is fundamentally essentialised and thereby divorced from how this subject appears and acts. Within this section, I shall turn my attention to the epistemic dimensions of enclosure with a particular focus on how enclosure not only codifies identity into a straightforwardly factic form of knowledge – treating identity as a fact whilst simultaneously omitting an account as to how such facts are produced – but also how this knowledge is rooted in (if not straightforwardly reducible to) individual experience. Accordingly, enclosed identity politics does offer a phenomenology of the self – albeit a phenomenology that sees identity as a straightforwardly individualistic project that quickly introduces impermeable epistemic boundaries between categories of identity and each individual. The politics of enclosure largely understands the boundaries between identities and individuals to be impermeable and absolute. When this is understood within the context of factic identity, when identity is understood precisely to be a truth claim, then the truth of identity is conflated with the experience of those who are to be identified. The result is a framing of identity where these social categories are ossified into fixed frameworks, thought to wield a universal power of definition over subjects, but which nevertheless can only be understood by those subjects that are to be identified.

This is clear if we consider identity labels. These labels are mobilised in the politics of enclosure out of a desire not only to increase the subtlety with which the self can be expressed, but their use is also motivated by a perceived need to create a more accurate framework of reference. We can see this in the contemporary focus on generating and circulating novel terms of reference, producing novel labels to describe manifold new genders and sexualities. Labels are understood to conduct representative work, expressing the qualities of a subject – and the sought-after accuracy is then judged from how well this representation aligns with the subjective experience it is attempting to represent. This specificity is a praxis conditioned by enclosure's motivation for security.

Understanding identity as a form of knowledge is not problematic in and of itself. Indeed, understanding how identity works as knowledge is crucial to any critical consideration of identity. For example, this thought runs both throughout Foucault's work and the vast bodies of scholarship his work has both produced and influenced. However, Foucault's presentation of knowledge works with his conceptualisation of political power – thus producing the notion of a regime of knowledge as a condition wherein subjects are constituted and act. What enclosure loses is the ability to understand identity as knowledge categories inexorably immersed within power – precisely because the kind of knowledge

enclosure speaks of is the pre-political, fixed facticity of its impoverished subject. On identity enclosure's account, the project of identity is concerned solely with the uncovering of one's underlying and obscured subjectivity – simply giving voice to its pre-extant features. What shapes the self, the processes through which identity is circulated, and how this subject is immersed within its context are simply not considerations that can arise on this account.

Furthermore, due to the pre-intersubjective constitution of this self as bounded, the self-object is configured as only accessible to the subject in question. The individual as pre-political is thus primordially isolated with its contact with others understood always as a meeting of fully-constituted, independent entities. This creates an absolute distinction between individuals and - in the inverse of Donne's poem<sup>188</sup> - every individual is tacitly thought to be an island. This separation results in the impossibility of ever experiencing the other, and thus the self as an object of knowledge can only be apprehended by itself. Identity is collapsed into a purely subjective experience of an abstract subject-object. We thus have a picture in which only the individual self has epistemic access to their own subjectivity. Socrates' Delphic maxim to 'know thyself' thus assumes a kind of immediacy – for the individual alone has access to themselves as an object of knowledge. This solipsistic individualism frames the arena of politics as an antagonistic struggle, as a space wherein absolute subjectivities attempt to secure their self-understanding, imposing this over and against the perspectives of others. Between individuals there comes to be an insurmountable epistemic bulwark – a term I deliberately use for its connotations of militarism and the security-orientation of this epistemological framework. I, as an individual, can never access or comprehend the subjectivity of an other, only this other is capable of achieving this. But likewise, no other can access my subjectivity. As such, one's personal apprehension of one's own subject is understood as the foundational knowledge that motivates identity politics. This self-knowledge of the individual subject assumes a universal status.

Within contemporary identity politics, this bulwark operates simultaneously at two levels: a 'macro' level that separates distinct categories of identity and a 'micro' level concerned with the absolute independence of all individuals. On a 'macro' level, identity categories are separated by an epistemic divide. Accordingly, subjects with particular identities are understood not merely as not readily

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<sup>188</sup> See: John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (Montreal: Queen's University Press, 1975).



understandable to those who occupy other positions, but as categorically unknowable. We see this manifest in those identity exchanges occurring across the fault lines of identity categories, with the subjective experiences of one identity (particularly of the marginalised) often presented as an unknowable alterity to those beyond the label in question. Of course, the articulation of difference, along with the refusal to subsume the subject seamlessly into the other (a move that repeats the hegemonic dynamics of colonial power) is central to granting voice to marginalised subjectivities. But this bulwark goes beyond a defence against assimilation, instead transforming the fault lines between identities into boundaries between absolute alterities. Meaningful communication beyond pure self-disclosure becomes an impossibility. Identity-speak is thus entirely an articulation of a fixed truth, a stating of what was already, essentially the case. Identity categories become ahistorical and eternal, but also form fundamental divides between these typed subjects. Understanding others across the divides of identity then becomes impossible precisely because identity is reduced to a purely subjective experience. In its noble desire to defend subjectivity, enclosure reduces identity into an abstract subjectivity – one that is both formal and empty.

Importantly, securing against assimilation is motivated by the palpable difficulties that come with the task of making oneself intelligible to another. These are undoubtedly amplified when attempting to speak across the boundaries of those identities that are hierarchically organised, particularly when one is speaking from a marginalised subjectivity. This is because the very constitution of a subjectivity as marginalised is a matter of the subject's conditions of appearance – specifically in terms of how marginalised subjects are rendered inaudible. In this sense, identity enclosure is rightly concerned with the nature of the power-structures it is attempting to amend and overcome – proceeding from not only the recognition that marginalised subjectivities are constituted as such through their inability to speak, but from the further understanding that fields of power maintain this silence in manifold ways. The project of empowering these subjectivities becomes an attempt to push against a torrential current of social forces, all of which are variously aligned in order to maintain disparities of power. It is thus far from a simple task. The barriers between identities can be understood as divides that are created and maintained by numerous matrices of political power, power that is embodied in material political arrangements. Part of the maintenance of these political forces is the denial of their oppressive constitution, which is to say the undermining of the subjectivities that experience oppression at the hands

of the system. Oppressive conditions are created and sustained through creating specific conditions of silence. Whilst concerns about the difficulty of articulating oneself across such divides - particularly those that are constituted as such through silence - are salient to any project concerned with conditions of social oppression, enclosure has consistently demonstrated an inability to conceptualise of the conditions of the subject. Enclosure can only acknowledge conditions in so far as these figure within its representative framework. It thereby misconstrues conditions of silence as an inherent impossibility of communication. With the collapse of identity from conditions of power into pure subjectivity, critique of the social structures of oppression becomes likewise reduced to the experience of individuals. There can be no solidarity across vectors of oppression, there can be no shared project of transformation – instead the presumed immediacy of subjectivity alone understands oppression.<sup>189</sup> Fundamentally, this undermines enclosure's own project, vastly limiting its ability to effect change within public systems of meaning. The reification of communicative difficulties into impassable epistemological barriers undermines enclosure's project. We then need to find an answer to the question as to what end are we seeking to amplify the voices of marginalised communities if these are to be understood as *de jure* unintelligible to those outside those communities?

This is not to deny the role that subjective experiences must play in combating systems of oppression. Despite the structural ways in which oppression is expressed through public systems of meaning such as economics and political practice, it is neither desirable nor possible to attempt an abstraction of power from subjectivity. A significant part of combating conditions of oppression lies in their identification and this process depends upon the subjectivities that are constituted as oppressed by political conditions. Those who experience oppression as part of their own subjectivity are able to identify this oppression at work more readily and more easily than those who are blinded by the relative privilege of their own subject position in relation to the oppression in question. Not only this, but responses to the conditions of oppression cannot merely attend to the 'objective' conditions, but must be directed towards subjects. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed offers a personal and poignant mediation on the numerous ways in which feminist theory is drawn from the subjective experiences of those who suffer patriarchal

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<sup>189</sup> This being the worrying conclusion from Berenstain's work on *Epistemic Exploitation*, see: Nora Berenstain, 'Epistemic Exploitation', *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (2016), 569–90.

oppression.<sup>190</sup> Yet this division is precisely what enclosure enacts, splitting the self from its conditions and then reducing these conditions to subjectivity. Enclosure itself upholds this problematic condition.

## THE MECHANISM OF SELF-DISCLOSURE: ESSENTIALISM WITHOUT ESSENCE

We have seen how the ontological framing of the enclosed self produces an epistemology of the self as unknowable alterity. I have also noted at several points how this produces a naturalism or an essentialism of both selves and identity categories, with this running through not only the ontological considerations but also forming a central thrust in my consideration of how identity enclosure operates as a kind of orthodoxy. We thereby have an understanding of the political that quickly reduces to pure self-disclosure, with this disclosure paradoxically understood to be separated from the very others it addresses. At this juncture, I shall consider how this epistemology of the subject conditions the praxeis of the politics of enclosure, by showing that this mechanism of self-disclosure comes to eclipse the political. The primary lens for these considerations is identity essentialism, though my concern is not solely with how self-disclosure repeats essentialist views of identity, but also with how enclosure conducts an intensification of essentialism. This intensification occurs because enclosure constitutes itself as an essentialism without an essence - a contradictory formulation that is produced by enclosure's operation as an orthodoxy that simultaneously reduces the self into abstract subjectivity. This fragments collective meanings - repeating the solipsistic logics we have just explored - as well as imposing strict limitations on how we can understand subjectivity. Again, given the focus of these politics on defending subjectivity from assimilation or suppression - this is a fundamental concern for, as we shall see, this politics serves to confine subjectivity, albeit in its own frame of abstraction.

The first concern with this model of self-disclosure is how it brings about a fragmentation or breakdown of shared meaning. This is a culmination of the anti-political and anti-discursive trends we have noted over the course of this chapter, leading us to understand that identity enclosure enacts a fundamental rupture within the possibility of politics. Self-disclosure is the sole mechanism of the politics of enclosure, the output of its onto-epistemological framing of the subject. As an abstract object of knowledge, only I can understand myself, and the political task reduces to my disclosure of what I am. Not only is my identity a definitional aspect of myself, but it is one that only I have access to, and one

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<sup>190</sup> See: Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*.

that I am tasked to represent within the political field – above and against the potential perspectives others might have of me, with this site of difference only understood as a potential distortion of who I truly am. But, if it is only I who can understand myself, and if others are fundamentally unknowable to me, then these definitions too become purely subjective. At the micro level, the bulwark makes these meanings entirely private. The language of identity thus becomes private,<sup>191</sup> and thus all identity-speak loses its communicability. Labels and definitions can be stated, but these cannot be communicated, and plural meanings cannot be negotiated and agreed, only pitted against one another. The use of labels no longer serves to make me intelligible to an other, but is only the imposition of my apprehension of myself onto this other. The praxeis of identity politics become thoroughly mired in antagonism; closed, personal definitions clash, competing for dominance.<sup>192</sup>

Once more, this denies the contextuality of the subject, and we could again note how this acts as a kind of naturalism through denying the historical conditions of identity categories. However, there is a much more direct denial of context and relationality within this model of self-disclosure, which is simply that this model leaves the other to which the self is disclosing entirely unacknowledged. Identity becomes a monologue, a representation of oneself through a speech act with the conditions of this action entirely obscured. The ‘I’ speaks, but it does so to a passive audience, one who is a mere listener. And in being a mere listener, the disclosure of this ‘I’ fails to meaningfully pertain to the other. Enclosure thereby reduces the praxeis of identity politics into a mechanism of self-disclosure, but this is a disclosure of an identity rendered uncommunicable that is disclosed to an inert other. This is how the epistemic bulwark stands at the micro level – in the interstice between every subjectivity. With the pervasive division enacted by this bulwark, solidarity between subjects becomes impossible, and identity fails to be salient to the political at all.

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<sup>191</sup> We can consider this in light of Wittgenstein’s anti-private language argument, see: David Bain, ‘Private Languages and Private Theorists’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 54.216 (2004), 427–34; Clyde Laurence Hardin, ‘Wittgenstein on Private Languages’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 56.12 (1959), 517–28; Bernard Gert, ‘Wittgenstein’s Private Language Arguments’, *Synthese*, 68.3 (1986), 409–39; Newton Garver, ‘Wittgenstein on Private Language’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 20.3 (1960), 389–96.

<sup>192</sup> This is reminiscent of a certain account of the Nietzschean will to truth, see: Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Katrina Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (London: Routledge, 1980).

This foreclosure of communicability is an effect of the reduction of identity to pure subjectivity. Yet, this reduction is concurrent with the politics of enclosure's orthodox praxis. We therefore have a tension between absolutely personal definitions that nevertheless seek to impose an orthodox series of constraints into identity discourse – with these constraints understood to be central to its transformative project. Enclosure fundamentally seeks a fixed, definitional approach to identity precisely because it understands its project to be universal in its reach – as applying to all subjects, across all vectors of oppression. However, this politics is deeply concerned with the protection of subjectivity from logics that would subsume or erase it and this limits the kinds of definitional boundaries it can establish. On some level, enclosure recognises that certain kinds of universality are straightforward impositions of particular hermeneutics onto subjects, and as we have seen identity as in any way imposed is anathema to how enclosure understands subjectivity. It thereby recognises these universals as conducive to exclusionary politics – those that impinge upon the ability of a subject to disclose itself on its own terms. As a result, definitions cannot be formulated with positive content in the sense of collectively assented meanings, for these would quickly come into conflict with the mechanism of self-disclosure – they would render enclosure's account of this contradictory by introducing a limitation on what the individual could disclose. Definitions thus cannot be essential. Yet, within its onto-epistemological hermeneutic, enclosure understands identity as straightforwardly predicative of objectified subjects – and in this sense it remains essential to them. Identity is essentially definitive of subjects and yet can never be articulated as an essential definition. The politics of enclosure reveals itself to be an essentialism without essence.

Labels are thus deployed within a double movement that simultaneously wields them as if they had evident, positive content whilst also opposing any positive formulation of these terms. The inability of positive definitions to fully capture all subjectivities is not understood as a fundamental lacuna of this model of universality, thereby leading to its abandonment, but instead results in a project that simultaneously denounces this kind of definitional power whilst continuing to wield categories of identity as if they possessed it. These categories thereby retain their factic structure – with their veracity now reduced to the pure immediacy of the abstract subject. Identities thus come to have an uneasy polarity between being understood as inexorable aspects of our political condition, whilst also only truly being visible to those understood as being 'within' them. The macro and micro levels of the epistemic bulwark force the politics of enclosure into a position wherein its pursuit of universality runs contrary to its desire

to obtain security for subjectivity. An essentialist ontology of the subject is thought to bring security, but, though it encloses identity into facticity, it remains unable to articulate this essence without such an articulation imposing itself onto subjects. The result is a politics that forever seeks settled, fixed definitions of identity but which simultaneously acknowledges, if only partially, the impossibility of this.

This leads to a prefiguring of subjectivity into a narrow hermeneutic. Through its own orthodox framework, enclosure claims to champion subjectivity - but can only articulate a subjectivity that has been defined in advance. As such, the orthodoxy is only able to see - and thereby advocate for - those subjectivities whose self-disclosure aligns with their own, universalised, identity narrative. Enclosure simultaneously denies positive accounts of identity - understanding, on some level, the necessary failure of these to be universally applicable - whilst simultaneously wielding these categories as if they had this positive content. What subjectivity means is already narrowly enclosed within the discursive, ontological, and epistemological constraints of the politics of enclosure, when the conditions of intelligibility for subjectivity have been fixed in advance. What can be recognised is already defined, and anything outside of these presumptive standards is rendered unintelligible - understandable only as error or distortion.

This narrow hermeneutic of the subject surreptitiously produces a normative account of these identities, despite enclosure's avowed resistance to giving positive definitions. Despite its pre-political onto-epistemology of the subject, enclosure still seeks to arbitrate the boundaries of identities, and the fixity of these boundaries presumes the fixed definitional structure enclosure presumes and yet chafes against. Again, enclosure is motivated against the imposition of meaning, and seeks to secure subjectivity from erasure-through-assimilation, it is motivated by the 'danger of a single story',<sup>193</sup> to borrow Adichie's phrasing. This danger is thought to be resisted through allowing subjectivities to speak, through wielding subjectivity against homogenisation. Yet, the enclosure of subjectivity in this narrow hermeneutic prefigures the ways such subjects can appear. Subjects can only be heard within the strict conditions of appearance that enclosure upholds - with enclosure itself unable to theorise these very conditions. This process takes identity categories as given through reinscribing them into the essential, pre-political constitution of subjects. Enclosure therefore fails to protect subjectivity precisely because it prefigures

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<sup>193</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story* (TEDGlobal: TED, 2009) <[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)> [accessed 14 July 2017].

what counts as subjectivity: within enclosure subjectivity can only appear within its narrow, naturalised schema of identity.

In its quest to protect subjectivity, enclosure abstracts the subject to a hermeneutic of self-disclosure that presumes a solipsistic individuation. What the subject is understood to express is itself, but all this mechanism produces is the internalisation of naturalised categories of identity. Schemata of sex, gender, sexuality, race, culture, nationality etc., including all of their constitutive, oppressive relations of power are thereby split from the political and become incorporated into factic conditions of the subject. The privatisation of these terms of disclosure renders unintelligible any articulation of the self that seeks to call into question or critique the current framings of identity, power, and oppression. The politics of enclosure can therefore be seen to epistemically entangle themselves within a logic of the abstract universal that renders itself as utterly powerless to enact its own transformative agenda.

## PACIFICATION AND AGENCY: ENCLOSURE AS REIFICATION

*Prima facie* there are numerous similarities between enclosure's treatment of subjectivity as a subjective-object and the Marxist concept of reification, developed within critical theory. Georg Lukács' work on class consciousness popularised this term within academic discourse, drawing on Marx's use of *Verdinglichung*<sup>194</sup> (most accurately translated as 'thingification'), which Marx uses sparingly to denote the psychological dimension of commodity fetishism.<sup>195</sup> Lukács develops reification to denote the state of a society for which the commodity structure has spread from dominating solely the conditions of the worker to become definitive for all spheres of society.<sup>196</sup> Commodification imbues the products of labour with the semblance of independence – in Lukács' terms a "phantom objectivity"<sup>197</sup> – dividing them from human action. The result is an abstraction of the subject from the product of their own action, obscuring the constructive and constitutive nature of their activity. This "progressive rationalisation"<sup>198</sup> into a detached system of objects serves to obscure the role of human action in the production of these objects

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<sup>194</sup> D. Hawkes, 'Reification', ed. by M. Ryan, *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory* (Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2011) <<https://search-credoreference-com.ueaezproxy.uea.ac.uk:2443/content/entry/wileyitcul/reification/o>>.

<sup>195</sup> Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, 'Rethinking Reification', *Theory and Society*, 16.2 (1987), 263–93 (p. 264).

<sup>196</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1968), p. 91.

<sup>197</sup> Lukács, p. 83.

<sup>198</sup> Lukács, p. 88.

and as such entails a fragmentation of the subject itself.<sup>199</sup> Social, political, and economic systems likewise come to be considered as beyond the sphere of human action so that these structures threaten to consume the subject, to reduce the subject to a mechanical part within the social machinery. Under the conditions of reified thought the only possible relationship with society is fundamentally antagonistic and hostile – though the narrative it perpetuates leaves no possibility for the victory of the subject. The idea of society dominated by reification thus sustains a thoroughly pessimistic account according to which the individual must forever struggle against and fear their subsumption into an abstracted and transcendent social machinery they could never escape. Much like enclosure’s treatment of subjectivity, reification is a social pathology that is constituted by the rupture of the subject from the other and from the socio-political world. The resulting contemplative attitude obfuscates human activity, engendering passivity to the phantom objectivity of social structures<sup>200</sup> – reification is thereby the progressive erosion of human activity. These similarities raise a question as to whether enclosure’s treatment of subjectivity as a subjective-object and its ramifications on identity discourses and practices can be comprehensively described within the schema of reification.

Despite their surface similarities there is a fundamental tension between reification and identity enclosure. Lukács discusses the former as degrading an individual’s “authentic”<sup>201</sup> mastery over their own productive activity, for reification formulates an individual’s labour power as an individual’s possession, thereby separating it from the subject.<sup>202</sup> His primary concern is the perpetuation of a purely contemplative attitude, whereby the subject is individuated from social systems yet remains totally passive in relation them. Within reification, an individual’s labour power – their very ability to act – is divided from them, transformed into a possession among other quantified objects in the world and as such its constitutive nature is forgotten. In this sense, reification is a pathological quietism. Human action is thought to have collapsed into wholly external and transcendent social machinery. However, the subject remains distinguished from the objective condition as an isolated, inactive fragment. The reified subject is pacified and, on some level, knows itself to be.

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<sup>199</sup> Lukács, p. 89.

<sup>200</sup> Lukács, p. 89.

<sup>201</sup> Lukács, p. 89.

<sup>202</sup> Lukács, p. 87.



It is clear that the converse is the case in identity enclosure. Though enclosure retains reification's strict split between the subjective and the objective, it will be clear from my characterisation that it formulates the subjectivity as totally active in its relation with objectivity. Whereas a reified subjectivity is held at the mercy of their 'given' condition, the subjectivity of enclosure is wholly abstracted from any political condition and indeed any other subjectivity. Enclosure's subject is distinct from its activity, in the sense that it – as a subjective object – stands outside of the very realm of its own activity, yet its activity cannot be collapsed into social machinery. Social conditions are understood to have no role to play in either the constitution of the enclosed subject and its actions are to be considered an authentic (unmediated) reflection of it.

There is thus a tension between reification and enclosure in so far as the former is best summarised as the evacuation of the subject into the phantom objectivity of social conditions, whereas the latter is an abstraction of the subject from its social condition. Reification and identity enclosure therefore appear to be pulling in opposite directions between subject and object, though both maintain this division. Though Lukács, as well as Adorno, conceive of the subject-object divide as a symptom of reified thought,<sup>203</sup> the differences between reification and enclosure in the direction of their respective movements indicate that neither can be collapsed into the other. Whereas reification engenders a 'phantom objectivity', enclosure constitutes a 'phantom subjectivity'. To reduce enclosure into the framework of reification would be to mischaracterise enclosure's unique features and the distinctiveness of its pathology.

The root of this is to be found in enclosure's primary motivation: securing subjectivity, with identity serving as a vehicle for this. Yet this central motivation is lacking from the concept of reification, which – as noted by Pitkin<sup>204</sup> – is unconcerned with preserving individual agency from subsumption into phantom objectivity. Whereas enclosure's politics is motivated largely by resisting systems of oppression and seeks as its ultimate goal the disintegration and dismantling of such systems – despite the perversion of this goal so that the other is reduced to an oppressive imposition – resistance to reification is not straightforwardly a struggle for free agency. Reification's concern with action is solely in terms of its

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<sup>203</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso Books, 2016).

<sup>204</sup> Pitkin, 'Rethinking Reification'.

productive ability, it does not articulate a pathology of agency. Once again, a direct conflation of enclosure with reification seems to come at the cost of distorting the phenomena in question.

However, given their mutual concern with the relationship between subject and object, and between multiple subjects, it is clear that the two are related and thus considering them together may prove useful. For just as reification is the obfuscation but not the annihilation of the subject's constructive activity, enclosure hides but does not entirely overcome its own passivity as regards its inability to attend to the intersubjective political condition. Despite wielding abstraction to secure individual subjectivity and agency, the abstraction enacted by enclosure must also be understood as a pacification.

In his text *Reification*, Timothy Bewes emphasises reification's psychological dimension.<sup>205</sup> For Bewes, the psychological experience of reification is a responsive anxiety caused by the process and effects of reification itself. As reification progressively snares the subject in a solipsistic passivity, this provokes an anxiety response in the caught subject. Political resistance to reification is therefore best understood as a politics of anxiety and this description speaks to enclosure's concern with securing the self. Enclosure can be understood as a politics of anxiety, with its enclosing gestures (its discursive restraints and their onto-epistemological underpinnings) thereby understood as seeking a security capable of alleviating this anxiety. However, we should be wary of using this language of reification to straightforwardly reduce enclosure to another instance of alienation – classically understood. The result of this is, as it is for Bewes, a dismissal of all identity politics as an imperfect derivative of class politics, which is given a presumptive primacy over all other vectors of oppression.<sup>206</sup> Parts of such a reading are salient, as is Bewes' lengthy reading of religion and religious thought's connection to Marxist political projects, which broadly highlights the continuity between Christianity and Marxism in so far as both are concerned with transcendence. However, much like his thoughts on religion, Bewes' reduction of identity politics into the schema of reification can only be universalised if one is willing to greatly reduce (and arguably to prefigure) the notion of identity politics so that it is defined as nothing more than anxiety concerning reification in disguise. As such, both Bewes' reading of religion and his desire to reduce identity politics

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<sup>205</sup> An emphasis which is supported by Hawkes, see: Hawkes.

<sup>206</sup> This is not to deny the importance of class so much as it is to emphasise the widespread assumption within Marxist and critical theory that class structures should be considered as more fundamental to an understanding of politics than those power structures at work within other forms of identity. Here, I also call into question the utility of discussing class as if it could be usefully abstracted from other systems of social power.

into the framework of reification omit (if not distort) the breadth of the phenomena he is considering. This conflation may usefully appropriate certain aspects of the projects pursued by identity politics, but it comes at the expense of those legitimate concerns which fail to fit this schema. As such, through presuming that class rests at the root of all identity political concerns the nature of these concerns and the experiences of the concerned are only intelligible to his analysis in so far as they fit his prefigured framework. Class thereby incorporates all vectors of oppression into its own hermeneutic, establishing itself as an abstract universal.<sup>207</sup>

Central to the trajectory of my own project, Bewes' work does configure reification and, more specifically, reified thought in opposition to dialectical thinking. The former is established as the 'logic of the here-and-now',<sup>208</sup> wherein the phantom objectivity bestowed on action and social systems traps us in the thought of our present condition. Conversely, dialectical thinking necessarily reaches beyond the present condition, recognising that this condition is fundamentally the product of mediation and as such comprehending the possibility of change. Dialectical thinking is to be understood as a recognition of the historical composition of objects and concepts, a thinking beyond the merely present. Understanding is thereby rooted in historical conditions. In part, the project of Bewes' text is to demonstrate the distorting role of reified-thought, to give an account of reification as an ideological pathology to which dialectical thinking is both a foil and an antidote.

Though, as I have explained, an explication of identity enclosure's treatment of the subject is not comprehensively possible solely using the schema of reification, I consider the connections Bewes draws between reified thought and the logic of the here-and-now to be useful for giving an account of identity enclosure. If we understand identity politics as a series of would-be revolutionary movements, each pursuing the same goal of overcoming systemic oppression (despite the differences in both their conceptualisations of the problem and their praxis), we can conceptualise identity enclosure as the result of a co-option of these politics' 'revolutionary spirit' by the logic of the here-and-now. Within enclosure, this logic manifests as the naturalisation of abstracted and fixed notions of identity that are both the products of the systems of oppression this enclosure would resist, as well as the very means by which

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<sup>207</sup> A similar universalisation of 'capital' within critical theory is partially explored by Mackenzie Wark, see: Mckenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead Is This Something Worse?* (London: Verso, 2019).

<sup>208</sup> Timothy Bewes, *Reification: The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso Books, 2002), p. 33.

these systems sustain themselves. Enclosure maintains a configuration of politics as solely representative, with its pursuit of fixity foreclosing an understanding of how the subject is mediated by its condition, a process that – due to its interest in destabilising and transcending fixed categorisation – is seen solely as an attempt to undermine the possibility of expression for marginalised subjectivities. We can readily note this rejection of mediation not only through the abstracted ontology of the enclosed subject, but also within the epistemological framing that seemingly endows subjects with an innate knowledge of not only their own subjectivity, but the nature of their oppression. In this sense, the subject is overtly understood to be immediate, available to itself in abstraction from its own conditions. This is to say that identity enclosure can be partially described as a reified form of identity politics but that it does not reduce to these formulations of reification.

Importantly, though this analysis prompts a reorientation of the notions used within identity politics, it does not result in a need to dismiss the projects of identity politics altogether. Bewes is wrong to liken the very use of identity categories to the logic of the here-and-now,<sup>209</sup> as this logic does not manifest in the notion of identity categories as such but through the ontology bestowed upon them by and within the discursive practices where they are used. The emphasis is instead on resisting the enclosure of identity, which renders it unable to adequately challenge contemporary conditions, instead creating a sustained form of anxiety. It is on these grounds that my project seeks to respond to identity enclosure, exploring how dialectical thinking makes available to us an alternate hermeneutic of the subject, one that is able to respond to the abstract universality of the politics of enclosure and the discursive fracture this engenders. This hermeneutic understands the subject in terms of recognition.

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<sup>209</sup> Bewes, pp. 4, 74, 187.

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## 2: THE DIALECTICAL SELF AND SUBJECT

Having outlined the basic structure of identity enclosure and its pathological difficulties, this chapter concerns an elucidation of ‘dialectical thinking’ with regards to identity. I base my understanding of the self on my reading of the dialectical mechanism of recognition as presented within Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Fundamentally, I contend that it is through contrasting identity enclosure with this dialectical framework that enclosure’s pathological onto-epistemological framework can both understood and superseded. I begin my considerations through the contrasting readings of Alexandre Kojève and Judith Butler, the accounts of which omit or under theorise the role of mediation within Hegel’s project. I argue that both Kojève and Butler advance readings of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* that – to varying degrees – side-line the dialectical nature of the very self-consciousness it seeks to elaborate. As such, both of these influential readings and the philosophical traditions to which they have contributed can be considered guilty of surreptitiously reifying parts of Hegel’s text. For Kojève, this reification comes through an isolated reading of ‘Lordship and Bondage’ that serves to detach it from the *Phenomenology* as a whole. For Butler, her attempts to foreground the presence of the body through the condition of the Bondsman leave her reading open to presenting reification itself as integral to the Sublation of this philosophical moment. Departing from their interpretations of Hegel’s section ‘Lordship and Bondage’, I then proceed to consider how Hegel regards the self and its recognitive ontology within a dialectically produced political context. I emphasise the intersubjective character of the self, a rootedness in shared discursivity that necessarily underpins the individual. This contention serves to oppose the prevalent structures of privatisation with enclosure’s formulation of the individual and instead reasserts that this individual is that which is, at its most fundamental level, constituted within and as a part of political space. This is to contend that without such conditions, the self would not be possible as an intelligible entity.

My chapter begins with the section ‘Becoming Master and Slave’ wherein I shall present the two readings of ‘Lordship and Bondage’, contending that this chapter has been regarded with an undue centrality – one that has conditioned such readings to actively disavow or tacitly omit the role of dialectical mediation. I shall then elucidate my dialectical reading of the self and highlight the numerous ways in which Hegel has been mischaracterised by various reifying readings within my section

‘Unbecoming Master and Slave’. Finally, I proceed to develop the implications of a dialectical reading of the self in contrast with the underlying ontological framework of identity enclosure within my final section ‘Reified Thought as the Pursuit of Essences’. In this final section, I shall elucidate how many contemporary rejections of identity essentialism gesture towards a rejection of practices that forward closed and definitional notions of identity. However, despite this persistent gesticulation, contemporary politics of enclosure remain largely concerned with a fundamentally essentialist notion of subjectivity. To understand the self dialectically is, on these terms, to understand how the self appears within and is constituted by recognition.

## BECOMING MASTER AND SLAVE: THE CENTRALITY OF ‘LORDSHIP AND BONDAGE’ IN READINGS OF THE HEGELIAN SUBJECT

Occurring about midway through Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (the fourth of eight sections), ‘Lordship and Bondage’ has been taken up by many as **the** chapter to read if you seek to understand Hegel’s concept of recognition. As a point within the system, it has produced a tradition which premises a reading of Hegel’s work on identity and history on the content of this chapter alone. The influence of this tradition is not restricted to any particular philosophical school, but has come to shape the reception of Hegel in many contexts. It has been regarded as a philosophical moment about the centrality of which “there can be no quarrel”.<sup>210</sup> The preferential treatment which this chapter has received is understandable when one considers it in opposition to<sup>211</sup> the rest of the *Phenomenology*. Compared to the previous chapter ‘Consciousness’ and to the later sections – such as ‘Spirit’ and ‘Absolute’ – the ‘Self-Consciousness’ chapter, wherein Lordship and Bondage can be found, seems to be more concrete. The supposed solidity of this chapter gives the impression of a disconnection between it and the suggestibly more abstract content of the other chapters. As we shall see, this attitude is reflected in how it has been traditionally read. By this I mean to say that its central example is taken to speak of a historical moment, applying what could be regarded as the more ‘abstract’<sup>212</sup> elements of the previous section to what has been

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<sup>210</sup> George Armstrong Kelly, ‘Notes on Hegel’s “Lordship and Bondage”’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 19.4 (1966), 780–802 (p. 781).

<sup>211</sup> Rather than ‘within the context of’.

<sup>212</sup> Here not used directly in a Hegelian sense.

interpreted as a concrete moment of history: the struggle between Lord and Bondsman. As Lordship and Bondage appears at the beginning of this section, it has thus been regarded as the point at which Hegel is fully beginning to elucidate his theory of selfhood. ‘Consciousness’ on this view is thus reduced to the role of setting the scene, or regarded as an abstract epistemological base – though the implications of this epistemology are often ignored.<sup>213</sup> Those readings premised on favouring ‘Lordship and Bondage’ due to an apparent ‘crystallisation’ of the Hegelian structure are guilty of abstracting this philosophical moment from the broader dialectical structure of the text. Such readings are therefore already premised on ‘reified thought’.

This reading is best exemplified by Alexandre Kojève, whose reading of Hegelian philosophy not only served to introduce Hegel to French philosophical circles, but which has served no small role in establishing the ‘master/slave dialectic’ as central to the work of many later thinkers.<sup>214</sup> Though I maintain, within my own discussion of the text, the use of the terms Lord and Bondsman, Kojève is amongst many who translate these as “*Maître*” and “*Esclave*”,<sup>215</sup> ‘master’ and ‘slave’, thus giving this philosophical moment the moniker of the ‘master/slave dialectic’. Though ‘master’ and ‘slave’ are not definitionally incorrect, the wider connotations of these terms have often been transposed into readings of Hegel, despite the original terms ‘*Herrschaft*’ and ‘*Knechtschaft*’<sup>216</sup> bearing less pronounced connotations. As such this vocabulary should be regarded with some suspicion.

Kojève betrays the foundation from which he reads the *Phenomenology* within his “Summary of the First Six Chapters”. He reads Hegel’s structure as centred around the notion of recognition, claiming that recognition is the key to Hegel’s fundamental project, that it constitutes an integral thread that binds its various facets together. I agree with this aspect of Kojève’s reading, though contend that Kojève’s conceptualisation of Hegelian recognition is inadequately formulated due to its elaboration independently of Hegel’s foundational ontology. Hegel lays out his onto-epistemological framework in the early sections of the *Phenomenology*, particularly within his book on ‘Consciousness’. However, within

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<sup>213</sup> As I made clear in my previous chapter, I regard the epistemological bases – as well as the ontological and phenomenological bases – to be crucial to any conception of the self or of subject production.

<sup>214</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. by L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 158–59.

<sup>215</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de l’Esprit Professées de 1923 à 1939 à l’École Des Hautes-Études* (Gallimard, 1947), p. 170.

<sup>216</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie Des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988), p. 120.

his “*Resumé des Six Premiers Chapitres de la Phénoménologie de L’Esprit*“, Kojève explicitly refuses, despite the chapter’s title, to give such a “*resumé*” to Hegel’s chapter on “Sense Certainty”, an integral part of the “Consciousness” chapter. Indeed, we must raise the question of how complete such a “summary” of Hegel’s thought can be when Kojève remains almost entirely silent on three of the chapters, half of those he claims to be summarising. Through his explicit “*Je ne répéterai pas*”,<sup>217</sup> Kojève openly omits those preceding chapters of Hegel’s work, leaving their content behind and, in so doing, demonstrating his lack of regard for those parts of the Hegelian project contained within. As I shall develop in the following section, ‘Unbecoming Master and Slave’, those parts Kojève elects to exclude are those concerned with ‘dialectical thinking’, with recognition as the foundational ontology of consciousness and identity.

I contend that Kojève characterises the Hegelian project in terms of a misconstrued conception of recognition that has an entirely distinct ontological basis to that which Hegel appears to advance within his text. Kojève disregards the earlier sections of the *Phenomenology*, and advances an interpretation premised solely on an isolated reading of ‘Lordship and Bondage’. He reduces the *Phenomenology* to presenting four crucial premises, the last (and perhaps we can thus say favoured) of which is the tension between the Hegelian master and slave.<sup>218</sup> To present the ‘master/slave dialectic’ as the final premise of the *Phenomenology* is to understand this as a concluding and culminating moment within the Hegelian picture. However, it should be noted that Hegel makes no indication that ‘Lordship and Bondage’ should be regarded as either pivotal or as the crux of any particular aspect of the *Phenomenology*, let alone as a thesis central to the text’s entire project.<sup>219</sup> Therefore, his notion of recognition and thus his understanding of the notion of the individual subject at play within the Hegelian project as a whole is demonstrably extracted from a single chapter of the work.

Kojève reveals his non-dialectical conception of the self through his characterisation of recognition as concerned with “putting [one’s] life in danger...in a light for pure *prestige*”.<sup>220</sup> He is here commenting on the nature of the primordial encounter between self and other that prefaces the

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<sup>217</sup> Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de L’Esprit Professées de 1993 à 1939 à l’École Des Hautes-Études*, p. 166.

<sup>218</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. by Allan Bloom, trans. by James H. Nichols (New York: Basic Books Inc, 1969), p. 43.

<sup>219</sup> One could reasonably ask why, if ‘Lordship and Bondage’ was intended to be a conclusion of the philosophical development, was it placed midway through the text.

<sup>220</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 41.



sedimentation into the dynamic of Lord and Bondsman. Hegel characterises this in terms of a struggle to the death which is aborted before either side can be annihilated: for the stronger party identifies their desire to be recognised by the other and the weaker party submits out of fear of death. The French term “*prestige*”<sup>221</sup> lacks the connotation of illusion present within its English variant,<sup>222</sup> defined explicitly as that which “inspires admiration by its splendour, its merit”<sup>223</sup> (my translation). As such, Kojèvean recognition becomes concerned with the pursuit of pure social esteem above all else.

Yet the intersubjective quality of this prestige is restricted to antagonistic struggle. For Kojève, the ‘master/slave dialectic’ is a philosophical moment that is overcome by the Bondsman’s revolt and the destruction of the masters. As such, intersubjective space is consistently characterised within Kojève’s work as a space of struggle for esteem. This configures the self as only connected to others in so far as these others recognise the ability of this self to resist any attempt to dominate them. The self is established in spite of the other and only in so far as one is able to stand apart from and above this other. Prestige for Kojève is thus earned through constant skirmish with and defeat of the other – through overcoming the would-be Lord. This culminates in his revolutionary reading, curiously similar in its form to certain schools of Marxism,<sup>224</sup> according to which the masters must be ‘overthrown’. By this, Kojève does not mean, as appears to be Hegel’s reading, that their position is overcome (sublated), but literally that the subjectivities of the would-be masters should be slain,<sup>225</sup> thus paving the way to a new social organisation in which only those who were once slaves remain to become citizens.<sup>226</sup> Kojève’s prestige is only ever to be obtained through brutal, bloody struggle against an external, oppressive force of the domineering other as embodied within the figure of the master, and nothing less than this.<sup>227</sup> As such, this notion of prestige effectively characterises the slaves as potential warriors who risk their lives to topple the

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<sup>221</sup> Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de l’Esprit Proférées de 1993 à 1939 à l’École Des Hautes-Études*, p. 169.

<sup>222</sup> OED Online, ‘Prestige, n.’ (Oxford University Press, 2017)  
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150864?redirectedFrom=prestige&>> [accessed 23 April 2017].

<sup>223</sup> LaRousse, ‘Prestige’, *LaRousse Dictionnaire*  
<<http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/prestige/63781?q=prestige#63066>> [accessed 3 October 2017].

<sup>224</sup> Particularly Leninism, with Kojève’s emphasis on “bloody fights”, see: Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 41.

<sup>225</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 51.

<sup>226</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 52.

<sup>227</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 69.

masters,<sup>228</sup> and configures the space between seemingly pre-extant subjectivities as an antagonistic space of struggle and death. The masters serve a purely limiting role, repressing the bondsmen who, once freed, can carry onward the banner of history. The individual strives only to remain connected to others in so far as they are lauded for their isolation. Prestige thereby produces an account of recognition as something that is prised from the other through asserting one's independence, an independence that is gained only through subduing the other.

Kojève's reading of Hegelian recognition is centralised around the bellicose dynamic between the Lord and the Bondsman. He presents the tension between Lord and Bondsman as concerned with the possibility of different and conflicting desires, drawing implicit attention to the notions of conflict and change through his bracketed use of the word '*futurs*'.<sup>229</sup> However, the notion of desire is the individuated want of a singular ego. This desire appears to ground the individual in their own selfhood.<sup>230</sup> The tension he here presents between the master and the slave relies upon the notion of two discrete individuals – it does not avow the role intersubjective mediation plays within Hegel's generation of the individual self at the fundamental level. Instead, Kojève seems to speak of the two figures involved in this recognitive encounter (and the ensuing disparity) as if they somehow pre-existed this and, so doing, presents recognition as a shallow tool for building the self upon an already assumed foundation. In so assuming the pre-existence of selves before their intersubjective encounter within Lordship and Bondage, Kojève actively omits dialectical constitution from his notion of the self. The dialectic is seen within the Lord-Bondsman relationship *qua* Lord and Bondsman, not between them *qua* subjects and as such the dialectical relation is seen only as a suppression of individual freedom.

To so view two selves as isolated in this manner is to maintain the imperfect dialectical moment that underpins the condition of 'Lordship and Bondage'. As such, Kojève's reading presents a perfect elucidation of the very notions of subjectivity that are at play within this incomplete moment. However, his failure is in his willingness to generalise this framework to the entire phenomenology, a generalisation that prevents his reading from ever developing beyond the misrecognition of the 'master/slave dialectic'. Rather than seeing why and how Hegel contends that the Lord and the Bondsman must be sublated,

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<sup>228</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 69.

<sup>229</sup> Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit Professées de 1993 à 1939 à l'École Des Hautes-Études*, p. 171.

<sup>230</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 37.

Kojève abstracts this moment from its place within the schema and thus his reading is strictly confined to this philosophical moment that is furthermore abstracted from history.

Fundamentally, Kojève's reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' abstracts it from the rest of the text, and thereby isolates this moment from its context within the dialectical structure. Within the overarching schema of the *Phenomenology*, 'Lordship and Bondage' represents a moment of dialectical development that must be overcome. I contend that the overcoming of the imperfect recognition so characterised by this philosophical moment is primarily achieved through the recognition on the part of both the Lord and the Bondsman that their subjectivities are not distinct.

As such, through his abstraction of Lordship and Bondage from the wider project of the *Phenomenology*, and through his particular exclusion of Hegel's base ontology, Kojève presents a heartily reified reading of this philosophical moment. Through omitting the dialectical structure of the self, Kojève preserves the logic underpinning the 'master/slave dialectic', presenting a reading of the *Phenomenology* that effectively ends with this misrecognition. As the Lord and Bondsman are never reconciled, there is no sublation of their antagonism and thus no development into mutual recognition. As such, Kojève's recognition is a highly individualistic and isolating formulation that relies upon an abstraction of consciousness from its dialectical context.

We can note the similarities between Kojève's account of Hegelian recognition and the formulation of the relationship between subjectivity and political space as presented by identity enclosure. In both cases, we have a gladiatorial politics of representation *par excellence*, wherein the individual must engage in antagonistic confrontation with others in order to maintain or garner social esteem. Kojève centralises prestige as the pursuit of this and foregrounds the need within recognition to have one's actions validated and affirmed by the other, with this pursuit of validation echoing the abstractive gestures made by the politics of enclosure in its pursuit of securing those marginalised selves for which it advocates. However, the Kojévian formula, much like that of identity enclosure, formulates this validity as that which must be extracted from an unwilling subject through antagonistic struggle. That which is to be validated by social esteem – for identity enclosure it is the legitimacy or intelligibility of an identity category, for Kojève it is the subject's freedom – belongs to a subject that precedes this validation. Just as identity enclosure formulates its own subject as a subjective-object that stands wholeheartedly outside of the political, Kojève's subject enters the arena of politics very much already

itself. As such, both produce a political picture whereby the very element they seek to affirm through the political is completely untethered from it. Kojève's freedom and the identities of contemporary enclosure begin and remain wholly abstract. Within a dialectical picture of subjectivity, and within Hegel's own project more broadly, movement from the abstract to the concrete is a crucial part of dialectical progression. However, both of these perspectives share the inability to achieve the requisite mediation with the present condition required to transform it. Neither wishes the transformation of the present, they wish only for its destruction so that another can be brought about. However, attempting to destroy the present condition, rather than to pursue transformative mediation, renders any movement beyond that very condition impossible as it relies upon a repetition of the very abstractive and antagonistic logics that sustain that condition. Through maintaining non-dialectical conceptions of the self, Kojève and identity enclosure reify the self and its possible relationships, leaving its conception of the political deeply impoverished.

Having demonstrated how Kojève's reading of Hegel aligns itself with the pathologies of identity enclosure in so far as both reject a mediated approach to the political,<sup>231</sup> we turn now to a consideration of mediation. My point of departure for this analysis is Judith Butler's reading of Lordship and Bondage, of particular interest due to her centring of embodiment – with this consideration implicating spatiality and appearance, both of which Kojève fails to theorise. Framing Lordship and Bondage in this way, enables us to consider questions of attachment to one's lived context that go beyond the abstracted, warlike competitions for prestige that Kojève leaves us with.

Writing on Kojève,<sup>232</sup> Butler reaffirms the centralised position Kojève gives to 'Lordship and Bondage',<sup>233</sup> and notes not only the limitations of his reading,<sup>234</sup> but also his Marxist influences.<sup>235</sup> She writes that "Rather than *revealing* the mutually constitutive dimensions of the subject and substance as ontological *presuppositions* of their encounter, Kojève asserts consciousness as *creating* its relation to the

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<sup>231</sup> This is to suggest that the pathologies of identity enclosure can be at least partially understood as a replication of the logics within Lordship and Bondage.

<sup>232</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), chap. Kojève: Desire and Historical Agency.

<sup>233</sup> For Kojève, the *Phenomenology* is said to stop with Chapter 4, see: Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 64.

<sup>234</sup> In so far as his reading stops short of Hegel's own passages on reconciliation, see: Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>235</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 64.

world through its transformative action.”<sup>236</sup> This is to note a crucial point of rupture between Hegel and Kojève, whom I’ve noted as often erroneously presenting his own views as those of Hegel.<sup>237</sup> Butler’s contention is that, by so stressing the aspects Kojève does, he presents only a partial account of the *Phenomenology* and in doing so “...deprives his position of an embodied understanding...”<sup>238</sup>

Butler’s own series of engagements with Lordship and Bondage centres around the question of the role (or indeed the notable absence) of the body and embodiment within Hegel. This can be originally noted within *The Psychic Life of Power*, where she astutely notes the rarity with which bodies are mentioned within the *Phenomenology*.<sup>239</sup> This sentiment is echoed within the chapter “You Be My Body For Me” co-authored with Catherine Malabou, who more specifically notes the complete absence of the body within ‘Lordship and Bondage’ itself.<sup>240</sup> Up to this point, Hegel has spoken of consciousness, of experience, and of the transformation towards self-consciousness as encapsulated in the self-other relation. This prompts the question Butler seeks to answer: where is the body within Hegel? More specifically, we could ask how is the body figured in the encounter which precipitates ‘Lordship and Bondage’, how does the body interplace or intercept the meeting of consciousnesses or indeed how does it facilitate this meeting?

At the beginning of her chapter “Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection”,<sup>241</sup> Butler perceptively makes note of the way in which many readings of Lordship and Bondage have been seen to secure “a liberationist narrative for various progressive political visions”,<sup>242</sup> before then going on to speak about the limits of such liberation. Drawing on Foucault, she points to the way in which we may think of Hegel’s recognition as prefiguring Foucault’s “*assujettissement*”, the formation of the subject, through regulation and integration within its relations to others rather than through straightforward liberation,<sup>243</sup> which

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<sup>236</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, pp. 69–70.

<sup>237</sup> As Butler notes at the outset of her chapter, “Kojève’s lectures on Hegel are both commentaries and original works of philosophy.” See: Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 63.

<sup>238</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 70.

<sup>239</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 34.

<sup>240</sup> Catherine Malabou and Judith Butler, ‘You Be My Body For Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity’, in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 611–40 (p. 612).

<sup>241</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, chap. Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection.

<sup>242</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, p. 31.

<sup>243</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, p. 32.

would prefigure the influence of the other as purely distortive or limiting.<sup>244</sup> The very structure of dialectical recognition requires a relationality, a sense of inclusion in as far as one is always already within a relation. But conversely, that the relation can be one of exclusion, of othering, characterises perhaps the notion of misrecognition.

The dilemma of liberationist narratives, of freedom from constraint as the pursuit of politics, is best exemplified in Butler's reading of the Lord. Between these two aforementioned sources, as well as within her text *Subjects of Desire*, Butler speaks explicitly of the Lord as a figure striving for disembodiment. She speaks of the Lord "proceeding to embody his [sic.] denial [of his own body]"<sup>245</sup> in trying to posit his own identity as "essentially beyond the body".<sup>246</sup> Conversely, the Bondsman is understood as the labouring figure, the worker who creates the material conditions necessary for the Lord's retreat.<sup>247</sup> Though she speaks of the encounter between the two as silent, Butler puts the words of an address within the mouth of the Lord, who, turning to the Bondsman, demands "you be my body for me".<sup>248</sup> Butler is clear that for the Lord the body is regarded as a limitation from which they must flee if they are to realise themselves as an abstract, universal entity.<sup>249</sup> Of course, this view "assumes" – or tacitly asserts – that freedom is that which exists only beyond the body,<sup>250</sup> as that which lies beyond a material condition. The Lord's disembodied freedom is a liberation from mediation (here abstractly considered), conceptualised solely in terms of limitation.

Butler reads the conditions of the Lord and the Bondsman in terms of their attitudes towards their own embodiment, with the former striving for a total disembodiment maintained by the latter being forced to take on the mantle of the Lord's embodiment. In terms of bodily existence, the Lord is thus thought of as desperately trying to attain abstract universality at the expense of the body. The Lord tries to achieve this denial or suppression of their body (the very suppression of which causes the body to return as that which must be repressed) through shielding themselves from the material reality with the Bondsman. The Bondsman becomes reduced to the body, to an instrument of the very material work

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<sup>244</sup> This shall be explored further in the next chapter, see the section: Michel Foucault – Resisting the Determination of the Subject.

<sup>245</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 53.

<sup>246</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 53.

<sup>247</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, p. 35.

<sup>248</sup> Malabou and Butler, p. 632.

<sup>249</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 53.

<sup>250</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 52.

which the Lord must deny if they are to remain Lord. Yet this condition is impossible, and the interlacement of the Bondsman cannot efface the material from the Lord. For Butler, as well as for Kojève, it is this exposure to materiality which prompts the Bondsman's experience of labour and thus their discovery of their own nature, as well as precipitating the encounter with their own finitude. The Bondsman's labour notes the transience of shapes – and thus the impermanence of their own body – their temporal existence that their labour can undo. Where Butler departs from Kojève is in his assertion that the master does not change and must thus be destroyed in a Marxist-style revolution. Instead, Butler notes that the very labour which precipitates the Bondsman's self-discovery also passes through the phase of recognising that this labour is not truly his own but an effect of the Lord, before it is then fully understood that the Lord's own labour is an effect of the Bondsman's. The Lord and the Bondsman are not divorced in this sense and the change in one prompts a change in the other.

We can thus begin to see how both Kojève's and identity enclosure's support for strictly liberationist visions of politics rely upon an impoverished notion of political power. Neither conceptualise power as generative or constitutive of the self, and are therefore only able to view power in terms of coercion and restraint. This, perhaps somewhat understandably, prompts the desire to flee from external structures of power and to reground the self in a pre-political, pre-discursive ground. Identity enclosure has a particular concern with the imbalances of power within society, both historical and contemporary, and the weariness experienced by advocates for political change at the persistent resistance to social transformation often becomes a desire to simply escape the disparate condition. However, the difficulty of this lies both within the consequent inability of such a liberationist politics to appropriately attend to the very unsatisfactory conditions that prompted the original flight and within their inability to move beyond the very logics of separation that underpin these conditions. Just as Kojève's Hegel becomes incarcerated by the 'master/slave dialectic', supporters of identity enclosure engage in a disavowal of their own conditions that forecloses the possibility for their movement to inspire or motivate socio-political change salient to its goals and as such undermine their would-be transformative politic.

Though Butler does not explicitly avow her motivations for asking the question of the body within Hegel, I think a clear motivation for this is to be found in her own extensive work on the body as a discursive site of political performativity. Locating the role of the body within Hegel would precipitate additional comparative work. However, for my project, I am appropriating Butler's framework of bodily

attachment to explicitly discuss the notions of mediation and space within the Hegelian project. Given the material quality of the body, any placement of embodiment within Hegel implies a similar theoretical treatment of the material condition, as well as mediation, in general. As such, we can understand the liberationist aspirations of the Lord not only in terms of the desire to leave behind their own body but to escape from the mediated condition entirely. Through their self-abstraction, the Lord attempts to transpose themselves beyond the world, to escape into a wholly transcendent freedom beyond the constraints of the material. To think of this materiality in terms of political power, the Lord wishes to assume direct control of power through exempting themselves from the very conditions in which this power operates. They seek to exert influence over that from which they are themselves exempt – stepping outside to rule from beyond, with this mirroring the kind of sovereign security enclosure seeks.

Butler seeks, contra Kojève, to reassert that the *Phenomenology* presents this position as an impossibility, as a happy illusion. Despite their aspirations to the contrary, the Lord cannot escape their own body and, to understand embodiment as one with the material condition, neither can they escape the relational space by which they are constituted.<sup>251</sup> The Lord's illusion entails a constant denial of the very relationality that enables his subjectivity to occupy its seemingly-transcendent position: his connection with the bondsman. The Lord is constituted by a disavowal that is subsequently denied. Accordingly, this illusion is far from untroubled, but is a mere fantasy that is, as Butler notes, constantly threatened by the Lord's realisation that objects of his consumption, the very material condition of his pleasure and enjoyment, are in themselves transient.<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, I contend that in order to sustain his illusion, the Lord must consistently attempt to overcome spatiality itself, and that the impossibility of this pursuit, despite their domination over the Bondsman, constantly threatens the Lord's abstracted notion of subjectivity. This is to assert that the Lord as a subject cannot be divided from the intersubjective space he shares with the Bondsman, the very space that constitutes him as a subject. The Lord seeks to occupy a transcendent position through undermining the very mechanisms of positioning, effectively assuming a position beyond positionality, a paradoxical positionless position.

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<sup>251</sup> An influential treatment as to how relations of exclusion nevertheless reassert relationality is provided by Agamben, see: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics Series), trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 2nd edn (Stanford, CA, United States: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>252</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 53.



However, Butler's reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' remains at least partially one sided. Though she notes, as Kojève does not, that the Lord's happy illusion at his own abstractedness is not an untroubled illusion, but is a fantasy spurred by the Lord's realisation that the objects of his consumption, the very material condition of his pleasure and enjoyment, are in themselves transient,<sup>253</sup> she does not pass similar comment on the state of the Bondsman. Despite her avowal of the need to move beyond the logic of the 'master/slave dialectic', and her insightful critiques of Kojève's total failure to understand this, Butler appears to favour the condition of the Bondsman over that of the Lord. In her reading, the Bondsman is given the role of the driving force: primarily holding this role as it is their 'discovery' of the material that enables them to transcend the abstracted freedom of the Lord. However, we must be cautious here not to affirm the condition of the Bondsman as somehow better or more complete than that of the Lord, lest we reopen ourselves to the possibility of a Kojévian divide between the two – which would undermine our attempts to reassert a dialectical selfhood within Hegel. Butler is aware of this in so far as she notes that there can be neither complete detachment from nor complete attachment to the body within Hegel.<sup>254</sup> Yet, she at once characterises the Bondsman's situation in terms of property,<sup>255</sup> depicts the 'flight from fear' in terms of fleeing the thinglike character of objects,<sup>256</sup> and her very treatment of the Lord's situation as in some sense illusory without overtly raising similar doubts as to the ontological condition of the Bondsman.<sup>257</sup> This partially reverses Kojève's formulation, which places the Lord as the driving force, the "catalyseur"<sup>258</sup> for overcoming the dialectic of oppression. But it also at least in part mirrors Kojève's claim that it is the Bondsman's work which transforms the world,<sup>259</sup> that progress towards freedom is his,<sup>260</sup> in the sense that only the Bondsman "can realise a progression."<sup>261</sup>

By so focusing on the precarity of the Lord's position and its illusory quality without affirming that the same is the case for the Bondsman, Butler's reading leaves itself open to the possibility of reifying

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<sup>253</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 53.

<sup>254</sup> Malabou and Butler, pp. 636–37.

<sup>255</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, p. 40.

<sup>256</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, p. 43.

<sup>257</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p. 53.

<sup>258</sup> Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit Professées de 1993 à 1939 à l'École Des Hautes-Études*, p. 175.

<sup>259</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 48.

<sup>260</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 50.

<sup>261</sup> Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit Professées de 1993 à 1939 à l'École Des Hautes-Études*, p. 177.

the dialectical subject and as such overturning the many ways in which her reading deftly corrects Kojève's. The incorporation of materiality in the dialectical movement that transcends 'Lordship and Bondage' must not uncritically reproduce the materiality experienced by the Bondsman due to the very status of the Bondsman existing as the inverse of the Lord. If the Lord is understood as the pursuit of a totally abstracted existence, their position, no matter how illusory, is only sustained through the Bondsman's transformation, again no matter how illusory, into nothing but the material, reified logic of the here-and-now. The Bondsman becomes subsumed into a wholly mechanical framework, becoming an isolated fragment of a world of transient shapes that their labour power – split from them so that it might serve to prop up the illusion of the Lord – is able to unmake and reform. The Bondsman is not liberated by this materiality, but entombed within it, incarcerated by a material condition that is thought to almost wholly transcend them. Whereas the Lord dreams of being no-body, of being unbound by the limits of the material, the Bondsman is made nothing more than a mere material entity – no longer mediated within a condition, but reducible to and determined by the social machinery in which it finds itself. The Bondsman's position is close, if not identical, to that of the reified self.

Through her attempts to seek the body within Hegel, Butler makes possible a reading of Hegel that ossifies his notion of self into an object. That the objectification resultant from the Bondsman's perspective is thought to be the driving force or catalyst behind the transcendence of the 'master/slave dialectic' reproduces this absolute materiality and as such repeats a reified notion of the self. If we consider the Bondsman's position in terms of their reified reduction into a mere, isolated part of their political condition, we can see that any politics derived from their position is fundamentally a politic dominated by the logic of the here-and-now.

We can thus consider the pathologies of identity enclosure as a product of their proliferations of the internal logic of separation that underpins the very condition of 'Lordship and Bondage'. Within the confines of this logic, there are two responses to the evident shortcomings of the present political condition. Either, one adopts the politic of the Bondsman, which, in their reified position, can see nothing beyond their present circumstance and thus can do little other than perpetuate and sustain it, or one adopts the politic of the Lord and abstracts away from the present condition such that one refuses to look at one's present condition. Neither is satisfactory, though the choice for enclosure is simple: it is the

choice between the politic of the Bondsman, which quickly proves to be no politic at all, and as such precipitates their embrace of the abstract politic of the Lord.

## UNBECOMING MASTER AND SLAVE: A RETURN TO THE DIALECTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I read the sublation of Lordship and Bondage with regard to Hegel's own comments on the inherent extremity within the very status of Lord and Bondsman. The Lord and Bondsman are described as "the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes",<sup>262</sup> that they are opposed to one another "as extremes",<sup>263</sup> and that "their reflection into a unity has not yet been achieved".<sup>264</sup> None of Butler's claims are thus to be construed as wrongly asserted (in same sense as Kojève's), but they tell only part of the story.<sup>265</sup> As threads within Hegel's narrative, these are undoubtedly important elements, but the complete tale cannot be known exclusively through them, for this would be to ignore Hegel's point that these states are indeed opposing extremes, but that they are extremes of the same thing: the self. It is only through the integration (through Sublation) of these extremes – and thus the transcendence of this philosophical moment – that the self emerges in a more complete, integrated form. If, as Butler asserts, the Lord's abstraction from their own body is that which must not be avowed, that refusing to avow it leaves part of the picture unseen, then on her own reading, it is the illusory status of the Bondsman's condition which remains similarly unacknowledged.

We must recall the project of the *Phenomenology* is not so much concerned with providing a literal historical timeline of development, but instead an expression of his schematic of consciousness within a narrative.<sup>266</sup> So viewing Hegel's writing as a parable, rather than attempting to twist it to fit into a purely historical moment (an end to which it is clearly unfit), we must ask: are we to aspire to the condition of the Lord? Hegel's response is a resounding no. Of course, it is tempting to read this dialectic

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<sup>262</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, 1st edn (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1979). §185

<sup>263</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §185

<sup>264</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §189

<sup>265</sup> The dialectical is itself concerned with the unification and integration of multiple narratives, using these to elucidate a picture of the whole.

<sup>266</sup> The point concerning the *Phenomenology* as a schematic of consciousness (or experience) is partially elucidated by Russon, see: John Russon, 'The Project of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*', in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 47–67.

as a simple hierarchy; the Lord as master and the Bondsman as slave, one is simply 'better off' than the other. To so relabel Lord and Bondsman as Master and Slave betrays a semantic reformulation, bringing with it wholly different connotations of meaning – placing us in mind of that which is not wholly relevant to the terms in which Hegel is himself speaking. One can only consider the Lord to be in a better place if one adopts the Lord's perspective, or internalises it as the Bondsman has. Hegel's bondsman is in their condition due to surrender. The disparity between the Bondsman and their Lord can only come about through the active assent of both parties. In this sense, the Bondsman's condition is predicated on their acceptance of the master's rationale. Conversely, Hegel is clear that these states are both to be regarded as extremes, as moments to be overcome. This is not only because, as Kojève may say, the Bondsman's consciousness is awakened in such a way that they simply can endure no more and throw off the oblivious master, but instead because neither position satisfies consciousness with the recognition for which it thirsts. So unrecognised, consciousness remains unfulfilled and incomplete. Both conditions are 'unreal' in the sense that the Lord's complete detachment and the Bondsman's complete attachment are a kind of phantasy.<sup>267</sup>

Both the Lord and the Bondsman are aspects of the Hegelian self. The Lord is the universal, abstracted element which in some sense transcends the material condition and the Bondsman is the aspect which is reduced to a merely material being. The Lord is not embedded within the world, yet flees from it so as to preserve an underdeveloped notion of themselves. Hegel's point is that the self is a material entity, an embodied being and that this body cannot be overcome or escaped from in the sense of seeking complete detachment, not that one would want to if one were to recognise the abstracted nature of any 'benefit' such an escape could bring. The Lord, being so deluded by the constraints of the position of their own subjectivity cannot see this. Yet the Bondsman has it no better. Rather than embedded, the Bondsman is entombed within the material. This is to say that the Bondsman appears (both to the Lord and to themselves) as a purely mechanical entity, a physical shape which works on other shapes with a diminished self-consciousness. The Bondsman is trapped at the initial stage of the encounter, the point at which they as the Other are not regarded as a person, but solely as "ordinary objects".<sup>268</sup> Both Lord and Bondsman are incomplete in terms of their self-consciousness. Neither of these

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<sup>267</sup> See: E. Bott Spillius and others, *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (Routledge, 2011).

<sup>268</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §186

positions are satisfactory, for neither is a complete self and each can only remain in the point of extremity through the externalisation of the other part of themselves onto the Other.

It is furthermore unclear to ask the question as to where the body is within Hegel if we are unsure as to what we mean by the term body. Butler's own work on this highlights the explicit difficulty associated with assuming the body naturalistically, or considering it to be some kind of pre-discursive ground.<sup>269</sup> The search for the body must thus not presume too much as to the nature of the body which is sought, though this does not preclude us from speaking in specific terms as the body *qua* object. This is to say that it is only appropriate to revisit Hegel's understanding of objects within the preceding chapters of the *Phenomenology* before then approaching the question of the relation between the self and embodiment. The question of the body within Hegel must be informed by Hegel's notion of objects, but then prompts a further question, particularly about the kind of object we may wish to think of bodies as being. This then invites the further question as to what, if any, distinguishing qualities we may wish to give to bodies and not to other kinds of object and so too to consider the question of the body within the mechanism of recognition.

The mutuality of individuality and thus the co-dependence of individuals is at the root of the Hegelian notion of both 'raw' consciousness and developed self-consciousness. At their core, both of these are conceived of as relational, predicated upon a form of interaction.<sup>270</sup> Both of these become individuated by and in response to the other. Yet it is not so simple as a meeting of two distinct individuals: in the encounter with the other the self meets itself.<sup>271</sup> In this sense, for Hegel, not only are self and other are not mutually exclusive, but co-dependent: each implying one another, but furthermore the other is another self. You are another me. Ordinarily, we may think of self and other as logically exclusive categories, in much the same way that, classically, subject and object (and the derivative concepts of subjectivity and objectivity) are divided. Yet this opposition, and the contention that follows from it,

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<sup>269</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, chap. Foucault, Herculine and the politics of sexual discontinuity.

<sup>270</sup> Within *Lordship and Bondage*, Hegel speaks of the self-other relation. However, one can think of this recognition also in terms of a self-relation: the self which recognises itself. This is the very condition of self-consciousness. However, the encounter with the other which precipitates this within Hegel's *Phenomenology* can also be considered as a form of self-relation in as far as both self and 'other' are the same self.

<sup>271</sup> Importantly, for Hegel, individuality is not at the beginning of his dialectical picture, but comes at the end.

demonstrates their interrelated nature: there can be no self without other, or other without self. The other is separate from the self in one sense, otherwise we could not call it the other, yet in another sense, it is the same as us.<sup>272</sup> This contemporaneous distinction and unity is developed from Hegel's account of the recognition of objects. Recognition is a form of perception and is therefore fundamentally phenomenological: concerned with the conditions of appearance of objects and others.

Hegel presents two opposing views on the nature of objects as they are recognised by the consciousness. The former view describes the object as "a universal medium of many subsistent 'matters'".<sup>273</sup> On this view, the object has no sense of independence or self-reflective unity, but is instead a "passivity"<sup>274</sup> which is termed "being-for-another".<sup>275</sup> The object is regarded in terms of its "essence":<sup>276</sup> "unconditioned universality".<sup>277</sup> By speaking of essence here, Hegel is establishing an underlying condition of unity, a state beneath individuation. Essence is thus not an individual essence, but is a matter of the conditions of appearance for the object that initially appears to us in a pre-individuated form. This notion of universality precedes any such individuation, which denotes the Hegelian perspective as holistic: any object is fundamentally defined and shaped<sup>278</sup> by the phenomenological environment which constitutes it. This perspective also notes that any individuated object is not 'naturally' so; the manner of individuation is not deterministically given or phenomenologically normative,<sup>279</sup> but is instead the outputs of a mediation with consciousness. More fundamentally, on this view there is no object in as far as the very use of the term object implies an individuated entity, distinguished from that which it is not.

The latter perspective is that which understands the object as "One reflected into itself",<sup>280</sup> in other words as an independent unity, what Hegel names "being-for-self"<sup>281</sup> or *an sich*. This is the individuated object, that which is regarded as distinct from its environment. Whilst the first perspective

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<sup>272</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §102

<sup>273</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>274</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>275</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>276</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>277</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>278</sup> In as far as it is given definition or shape.

<sup>279</sup> In the sense that it does not proceed from normative conceptions of what it means to be a particular, individuated entity. This is discussed in more detail at the end of Chapter 1 and in the final section of this Chapter.

<sup>280</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>281</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

acknowledges the underlying universality,<sup>282</sup> this perspective is the everyday common sense view of a world of individual objects, a world which can be divided into parts. This indicates that this approach does not seek to nonsensically dismiss the notion of specific objects, or seek to simply absorb them into what might be regarded as a vague notion of universal. This is not to say that individual objects do not exist, but that their existence *qua* individuated objects is due to a process of phenomenological mediation. But importantly, Hegel understands this individuation to be an abstraction: it is abstracted from its circumstance. When an object is considered separately from other things, it is considered *an sich* and is thus divorced from the concrete actuality of its situation. As such, to give the *an sich* ontological primacy is to prefigure how we interpret our experiences, running contrary to phenomenological reflection. This primacy is indicative of an atomised form of thinking to consider an object as something wholly or *de facto* distinct, without realising that the distinction arises from our conscious apprehension and is not independent of our perspective of the object. On a Hegelian reading, this is an abstracted perspective that attempts to think outside of one's own mediated experiences. We do not live in a world populated by individual objects; individuation and objectification occur phenomenologically within a process of recognition, these are processes mediated with consciousness. As such, the *an sich* is relational.

Hegel's finer point is that these two views should not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but as moments which pass into one another.<sup>283</sup> The object's external diversity and internal distinctiveness cannot be truly distinguished, thus we should regard them as one and the same.<sup>284</sup> An object is thus at once seamless with its environment<sup>285</sup> and a distinct part of it. What is established is the view that takes the distinct object as part of a much larger pattern which interpolates it and gives it the underpinnings of its identity. For Hegel, the process of perception is a fundamental part of recognition, that through being so perceived, the object is constituted in a particular way. Yet, this recognition of an object continually oscillates between the individuated and non-individuated perspectives, between the for-another and for-itself and thus it must be understood that this recognition is a perpetual process. This ongoing movement between recognising the universal and the individuated particular, which is to say

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<sup>282</sup> The former view understands the object to be an expression of unconditioned universality.

<sup>283</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §135

<sup>284</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §125-§127

<sup>285</sup> This is a difficult point to phrase and betrays some of the underlying assumptions within our linguistic structure. The very term object and the grammatical structures into which this must enter implies individuation.

the phenomenological environment as a whole and as a series of parts, is a negotiation between the phenomenological experience of the consciousness which constitutes it.<sup>286</sup>

The blending of the object as a distinct entity yet nonetheless simultaneously identical to the phenomenological environment is further demonstrated within Hegel's contention that the object is fundamentally changed through its perception by a consciousness. Our conscious experiences are not passively receiving the sense impressions of objects within the world but are far more proactively engaged in an ongoing interpretation which is constitutive of objects. This is set forth within Hegel's section on sense-certainty within which he maps out an account of direct sensory knowledge.<sup>287</sup> Within this formulation, sensory knowledge is said to place the object directly before the consciousness in "its perfect entirety",<sup>288</sup> thus giving the senses the reputation for providing the truest knowledge. Ultimately, Hegel overturns this, arguing that sense-certainty is not of particulars but of the universals which constitute them.<sup>289</sup> Consciousness is not a receptor of immediate experience, but a mediator of this experience and the objects to which it can be said to pertain.

This mediation is a process of recognition, applying to objects of the world. As a process of recognition, it does not merely serve as a coming to awareness of some external property or thing. This is surely a part of this process, but to claim that this is all that recognition does would be to ignore its active, formative aspect. Conscious apprehension is the site and source of individuation: the individuation is within perception. Yet recognition does not solely concern the individuation of an object, but how it is individuated, how its individual identity is considered discrete from the wider environment. As such, recognition concerns the very constitution of an identity – it is the process of both asking and answering the question as to what an identity is. This provides the basis for understanding personhood and identity as the outputs of a cognitive process.

Hegel's approach to the perception of objects underlies his notion of the self. Though Hegel does not equate subject with object – subjects are not objects in several important respects – in so far as his account does allow for some objectification of the subject his account of objects greatly differs from the form of objectification present in, for instance, Lukacs' account of reification. What Hegel provides us

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<sup>286</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §117

<sup>287</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §90-93

<sup>288</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §90

<sup>289</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §109



with is an account of objects that rejects the ossification and paralysis implied by alternative accounts of objectivity – understanding objectivity not as independent of subjectivity, but instead understanding each as implied within the other. Subjects are open to objectification through the process of recognition, with the reflective move that instigates self-consciousness requiring a treatment of oneself precisely as an object of perception. But the subject can never become identical with an objectified state, as we have seen in the figure of the bondsman, who – despite the best efforts of the Lord – can never fully be entombed in the physical.<sup>290</sup> This is to say that the self cannot be thought of as ‘given’ in an individuated form, but instead must be understood as mediated through conscious apprehension: through recognition. Even when objectified (for example, treating the self *qua* body), the self is both at once distinct and integrated within the phenomenological environment. The individuality of the self is part of this phenomenological process of recognition, able to at once understand the subject as distinct and integrated. It is not the case that our individuation is waiting to be recognised, that our desire for recognition is the output of a mere drive for – to use Kojève’s term – prestige. Instead, the individuation of the subject is brought about through the recognitive process itself: the self is always a moment of mediation. As individuals we are mediated not only through the other but also through ourselves. The self is self-relation, and this self to which we are related is represented both by the other and by ourselves, both of whom are the same self. Just as objects gain their independent reality through this process, it is only through being recognised as a self-conscious entity that one becomes such an entity. This is what the self provides the other. Yet at the same time the very self who granted such recognition depends upon the one recognised for their own recognition. Recognition is thus a reciprocal relation, a constant, dynamic movement between individuals, whose very individuality is dependent upon this very measure. The individual subject is as much a product of the recognitive process as they are an instigator.

When we then consider the question of the body for Hegel, we are to keep in mind his contentions both that individuated objects gain this individuation from their mediation through consciousness and that the object is an expression of an underlying universal. This serves to undermine the efficacy of speaking here about the body as a naturalised or given entity, instead requiring us to turn

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<sup>290</sup> Just as the Lord can never fully escape the condition of their own mediation.

to established discourses which discuss how the body is constructed and reconstructed.<sup>291</sup> Yet furthermore, we reach a point of analogy between self and body, in which the two are both considered to be bounded only by the mediation of consciousness, which individuates that which is part of a universal.

Self-consciousness is thus not understood to be something that an individual either possesses or achieves alone. As recognition requires the other and the other requires a plural condition, there must be a plural condition before the self-conscious individual arises.<sup>292</sup> The individual does not pre-exist this plurality, but arises within it. An individual cannot therefore be split from this plurality. Thus, the individuated self-consciousness is always in a mediated state, coterminous with the other.<sup>293</sup> An individual self-consciousness must be regarded as a moment within the plural, always acknowledged as one amongst many. As the individual is fundamentally an expression of a plural condition, individuality is thus to be regarded as concrete universality, as a moment of living rather than a solidly delineated entity.<sup>294</sup> For Hegel, the universal is that which transcends the particular yet which realises itself through the medium of the concrete instances of the historical condition. Through the claim that the individual is concrete universality, Hegel is affirming that the individual is more than the ego construction of the self. The individual becomes partially identified with the universal and thus is not reducible to this atomised self concept. Self-consciousness is thus not completely insular, but exists beyond itself in as far as it exists for another self-consciousness.<sup>295</sup> Individuality and the self are thus a moment within a much larger movement.<sup>296</sup> Recognition is thus, so described by Costas Douzinas, “both a phenomenology of identity and a theory of knowledge.”<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> See: Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter on the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (Routledge, 2011); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Paul B Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013).

<sup>292</sup> Though this basic plurality must be understood in relation to the activity of plurality, as I shall explore further in Chapter 4.

<sup>293</sup> Karen Robertson, ‘The Agora Philosophical Forum: “Insight and Attitude: Hegel, Morality and Law”’, 2015.

<sup>294</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §99

<sup>295</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §179

<sup>296</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §169

<sup>297</sup> Costas Douzinas, ‘Identity, Recognition, Rights or What Can Hegel Teach Us about Human Rights?’, *Journal of Law and Society*, 29.3 (2002), 379–405 (p. 384).

Kojève actively omits Hegel's section 'Consciousness' from his "*Résumé*"<sup>298</sup> and it is only through such an omission that his conclusion can be reached. To frame the struggle to the death in terms of pure prestige is to wrongly assert that the individual pre-exists this relation. It frames the question in terms of social esteem, rather than acknowledging the fundamental attitude towards another's personhood recognition is meant to encapsulate. Furthermore, the notion that the Lord's only role within this philosophical moment is to provide the condition through which the Bondsman experiences his awakening relies on the separation of the two. Yet Hegel's point is not that the Lord is little more than an instrument which must be overcome (for Kojève, destroyed), but that both the Lord and the Bondsman are extremes which must be transcended. Hegel is clear that both are required to overcome this disparity, that the Lord must be changed along with the Bondsman.<sup>299</sup> This is the Sublation at the core of Hegel's dialectical synthesis. What Kojève ignores is that both positions rely on each other. I speak here not of each as Lord or as Bondsman,<sup>300</sup> but in as far as both Lord and Bondsman are self-consciousnesses.

The section Lordship and Bondage has been taken up by so many readers of Hegel due to its being more readily applicable to a concrete historical condition. But we must not read it exclusively in this way if we are to grasp fully the nuance of Hegel's thought. Hegel is not speaking of classes, of plural Lords and Bondsmen, but of a disparity between two self-consciousnesses. Whilst it is clear that we are intended to read this passage in light of real historical conditions, Hegel is not providing a reading of history here, but of a moment in the evolution of consciousness. Kojève's reading premises itself on a historical condition, upon reading this moment of Hegel's thought in light of a conflict between classes. If we apply this reading to Hegel's text – remembering that Hegel is speaking of a disparity between two 'individuals', rather than two sides – it is clear that the destruction of the Lord at the hands of the Bondsman is no solution. One seeks the recognition, not the destruction of the other.<sup>301</sup> This is reinforced by Butler's comments concerning the interiority of *Lordship and Bondage*, in which she regards the

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<sup>298</sup> Kojève, *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel : Leçons Sur La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit Professées de 1993 à 1939 à l'École Des Hautes-Études*, chap. Résumé des Six Premiers Chapitres de la Phénoménologie de L'Esprit.

<sup>299</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §195-§196

<sup>300</sup> Of course, these states are explicitly interrelated.

<sup>301</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §180

tension as not merely reflective of a certain historical/material condition, but also of a psychic condition within an individual.<sup>302</sup>

Whereas Kojève reads Hegel with an inappropriate notion of the self, Butler more aptly frames the moment of Lordship and Bondage in terms of attachment and detachment. She claims that for Hegel the body is that which is “evacuated, loaned out, and lived elsewhere”,<sup>303</sup> yet here we need not speak exclusively of the body, but instead of self-consciousness. This appears to be Hegel’s point, for he does not speak of the body within this chapter. Butler notes that there can be neither complete detachment from nor complete attachment to the body within Hegel.<sup>304</sup> Yet if we read the body here in terms of the material condition, we have the structure of mediation presented to us. By seeing myself ‘over there’, “outside myself”, I become delocalised,<sup>305</sup> both as a self-consciousness and as a material, bodily entity. As Butler puts it, this “tells me something new about...my relation to space in particular.”<sup>306</sup> The self becomes a movement both within the material condition and recognitive relationship.<sup>307</sup> When speaking of recognition within *Precarious Life*, Butler states that relation of recognition “means that we are not separate identities...but are already involved in a reciprocal exchange” and that this exchange “dislocates us from...our subject-positions”.<sup>308</sup> Here, the subject position is the very same used within Kojève, it is a ‘common sense’ notion of the self, which takes this self to be given or normative. Hegel’s project fundamentally displaces the self from this position, moves it outside itself (*außer sich*) such that it is lived and experienced relationally.

The preceding considerations have entailed a ‘taking seriously’ the preceding chapters of the Phenomenology but I could not adequately claim to have fully contextualised the dialectical moment of Lordship and Bondage within the Phenomenology as a whole without a consideration as to the later chapters. From my perspective, the centrally relevant notion of the latter half of the Phenomenology is that of totality, solidifying the Hegelian perspective as one that stresses an overarching ontological unity. This unity is often feared to eclipse the possibilities of difference, excluding alterity and novelty in

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<sup>302</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, p. 42.

<sup>303</sup> Malabou and Butler, p. 633.

<sup>304</sup> Malabou and Butler, pp. 636–37.

<sup>305</sup> Malabou and Butler, p. 625.

<sup>306</sup> Malabou and Butler, p. 625.

<sup>307</sup> In as far as either of these are distinct from one another, though I am not here positing such a distinction.

<sup>308</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, p. 44.

exchange for a notion of internal differentiation within a total whole.<sup>309</sup> It is important to explore the exclusion of alterity implied by this notion of totality within the context of this thesis given the importance in subsequent chapters of Arendt's conception of the political, which centres the notion of plurality. Therefore, we must consider tension between Hegel and Arendt as the former thinker appears to pull us in a singular direction where the disclosedness of persons is reducible to his unitary dialectical system whereas the latter upholds a lack of determining limits upon disclosure as a central condition for the possibility of politics. The question then becomes how do totality and plurality relate to one another?

Within the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's account of plurality rests upon an underlying unity, this is perhaps most clearly expressed when - over the course of his chapter on Religion - he voices the concern that "Spirit as an individual Self is not yet equally the universal Self, the Self of everyone."<sup>310</sup> This is the concern that the concept of 'person'<sup>311</sup> has not yet achieved a singular unity, but is instead apparent solely as a multitude of perceptible individuals. The implication is therefore that plurality articulates an internal difference contained within a universal concept. With respect to difference, this is internally generated from this overarching concept - there are different individual people but this difference is itself already accounted for<sup>312</sup> within an overarching totality. The total concept of person - once grasped through absolute knowing - would then be understood as exhaustive of the plurality contained within it. On this view, totality is a universal structure that has complete determining power of that which is within it - and this precludes any genuine novelty beyond itself.

At this juncture, it would be prudent to return to Hegel's specific interest in the interplay between particularity and universality, which we have previously seen play out in the dialectic between the Lord and Bondsman. As is made clear from this dialectical moment, pure, or abstract, universality epitomises the condition of the Lord: a condition to which we are not intended to aspire. For Hegel, universality matters only in so far as it is connected to the concrete - resulting in a universality that, as Butler contends,

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<sup>309</sup> Two of the figures who share this fear are Foucault and Arendt - both of whom are key interlocutors for this project.

<sup>310</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §762

<sup>311</sup> Findlay expresses this in terms of the concept of 'men', I herein substitute person as a corrective against the specifically gendered implications of his term, see: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. p. 586

<sup>312</sup> My use of this term here specifically anticipates the considerations in chapter three as to what it means to 'turn the self into an account', see: Kelly Oliver - *Recognition Against Testimony*.

is properly understood as hegemonic:<sup>33</sup> as irrevocably immersed within its own concrete moments, lest it remain abstract.<sup>34</sup> Here, I once again suggest that universality cannot be understood as over and above particularity, that the constitutive connection between these implies a two-way connection, rather than a linear causal relationship. Precisely because we do not possess an unmediated access to a fixed universal, and because any articulation of universality both informs and is informed by the particularity of our historical condition, it is difficult to articulate precisely what a reduction of plurality to singular totality could mean.

This opens us to the question of novelty within the Hegelian structure, and again it is salient to consider his account of dialectical progression in the context of his account of religion. Hegel describes religion as a summation of dialectical progression wherein each phase is understood as its own totality - as a node within the progression - but where each successive phase is understood to carry with it the sum of the content of those previous to it.<sup>35</sup> The dialectic operates to sublate through the retention of all that has been previously articulated, using this as an informed basis from which a new stage of development can flourish. But importantly, each phase emphasises its own novelty. Hegel describes each successive stage of Spirit as possessing a “main point”, which is “in which ‘shape’ it knows its essence” - with each dialectical stage contributing a new primary shape.<sup>36</sup> These shapes are the primary forms of the stage in question, the shape assumed by spirit within this phase. So, the dialectical progression of spirit is understood to proceed according to sublation which retains the conditioning influence of previous stages. However, whether these previous stages condition - in the sense of constituting the conditions of possibility for - future stages, or whether these are fully determinant of these stages - in the sense of straightforward causal determination - is yet to be resolved.

It is certainly possible to furnish a reading of the Hegelian structure that understands this as a straightforwardly linear process, wherein the impersonal gears of the dialectic produce a determinant march of history - a mere elaboration of a transcendent universal. Surely it is the tradition of these readings that leads to the concern highlighted above - the fear that Hegel reduces everything into a unity

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Ernesto Laclau, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso Books, 2000), p. 163.

<sup>34</sup> Butler, Žižek, and Laclau, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §681

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. §681

that admits no alterity. The precise nature of this fear is that the dialectic thereby operates as a kind of total cage, constraining the possibility of human activity to its own concepts. Conversely, in my reading of the *Phenomenology*, I stress that Hegel's dialectic is understood as a process - a process that remains historically immanent. The *Phenomenology* introduces a distinction between a universal totality and particular totalities, understanding the latter as providing plural conceptual contexts. Totality within Hegel can therefore denote a conceptual unity that retains a sense of partiality and particularity. But this alone does not overcome the concern with totality, as Hegel's view towards these particular totalities is to understand these as successive stages of development - arranging these plural contexts into a temporally determined line wherein one such totality blossoms into another.<sup>317</sup>

But, implicit within this notion of historical development itself there lies the germ of a reading of Hegel that does not endorse a notion of totality as an overarching cage. On this reading, we come to understand totality as articulating the conditions and contexts out of which novelty can grow. On this reading, we stress the hegemonic nature of universality, that Hegel's account of universality cannot remain abstract. Following this hegemonic reading of the universal, any notion of universal totality is also constitutively implicated in particular totalities - the subsequent stages of which serve to transform, often quite fundamentally, the content of those previous to them, whilst retaining this content through sublation. If we understand totality, in addition to universality, as also hegemonic, we can read particular totalities as hegemonic arrangements that constitute the conditions of our subjectivity and activity, but which can also be superseded. In this way, totality comes instead to refer to a condition of subjectivity and activity that cannot be ignored or merely denied (at least not without the risk of alienation) but which can be radically challenged.

This is to suggest that through stressing history precisely as historical in the sense of temporally unfolding and necessarily entailing an undetermined future into which we can move,<sup>318</sup> we no longer come to view the notion of universal totality as a determining cage that excludes all possibility of alterity. Indeed, that particular totalities are able to give way to successive stages of totality that supersede their own limits implies not only the possibility of but the necessity of alterity - if perhaps not radical alterity.

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<sup>317</sup> As we saw in his concept of Religion.

<sup>318</sup> I explore this notion at the end of Chapter 3 (see Patchen Markell - Recognition and Existential Temporality) and Chapter 5 (see: Cybernetic Perdition: The Logic of Position and the Eternal Subject).

Instead, we have an account that can incorporate alterity through the perpetual existential threat of the future, the unwritten temporal space within which the potential for our concepts to radically transform remains possible. It seems to me that this is a break from Hegel that is necessary if we are to consider seriously his own reflections on historicity, for to do otherwise would be to presume that Hegel's account could transcend the very foundations onto which it is built. In this sense, we can read part of Hegel's project as aspirational - at aiming towards a totality that is perpetually within the future, ever yet-to-arrive.

On this framing, we can draw from Hegel the language of recognition and his account of objectivity that furnishes us with the tools to critically oppose crude forms of reification, without subscribing to a completely closed, determinant system. Instead, we view Hegel's account as foregrounding the importance of our constitutive conditions - conditions that serve as a necessary beginning for our activity but which do not fully determine their ends. On this account, plurality and alterity become apparent within our reading of totality precisely through the revelation that any given articulation of it entails a substantial lack.

We can further consider this concern in terms of a particular framing of Absolute Knowing where this is understood to constitute a kind of final endpoint of knowledge - a conclusive doctrine for the Hegelian project which, once achieved, would be eternal and unchanging. In his comparative analysis *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity*, Gregor Moder rejects this reading of Absolute Knowing as a kind of positive doctrine, arguing instead that it is better understood formalistically. In Moder's formulation, Absolute Knowledge is understood as the conceptualisation of the paradox implicit in trying to simultaneously trying to think through the incompleteness of the world without resulting in a purely arbitrary openness.<sup>319</sup> He explains this grammatically, consistently comparing Absolute Knowing to the grammatical function of a full stop which he describes as "the gesture of making a decision, the gesture which is at the same time the ultimate and the inaugural gesture, the end of the sentence (as an irreversible sequence of words in time) and its new beginning (as a symbolic, atemporal piece of signification)."<sup>320</sup> For Moder, putting this kind of full stop means saying something,<sup>321</sup> a gesture that

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<sup>319</sup> Gregor Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity*, Diaeresis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017), pp. 80–81.

<sup>320</sup> Moder, p. 81.

<sup>321</sup> Moder, p. 79.



acknowledges the partiality of any articulation. To refuse to place the full stop, then, is to refuse to say anything. His suggestion is that this is what it means to articulate a complete position (in the sense of a bounded articulation), but that this inevitably runs the risk of being mistaken for a dogmatic positioning.<sup>322</sup> But he understands this risk as implicit within the act of meaningful articulation. Absolute Knowledge is akin to a punctuation mark that itself has no content, but serve the formal role of bounding ones articulation, of reflecting the reader back to the sentence it has bounded, “producing the effect of the meaning that was in the sentence all along.”<sup>323</sup> This is to suggest that Absolute Knowing is not a dogmatic, eternal conclusion to the Hegelian process, it is not an inevitable positive state of being, but it is instead an empty point, the “fundamental irreconcilability in the heart of truth itself”.<sup>324</sup> This culminates in Moder’s claim that: “At the end of the process [of Hegel’s philosophy], knowledge and truth are no more united than they were at any other stage of its development” that “absolute knowledge...does not bring about the mythical ultimate understanding.”<sup>325</sup> The notion of Absolute Knowledge as an end is therefore a productive telos, rather than a kind of ontological finalism,<sup>326</sup> for “*the goal, once reached, still implies the tension of the combat.*”<sup>327</sup> To emphasise this notion of process and historical movement is to therefore understand totality itself as necessarily incomplete. This is precisely what Moder means when he argues that “it is the category of the subject that suspends the idea of the substance as a well-rounded totality, as an all-encompassing unity, and enables us to think it as not-whole and as in transition.”<sup>328</sup>

For this reason, the nomenclature of totality is misleading in no small part due to its proximity to totalisation or, in political discourse, totalitarianism. This is not to conflate concerns with totality with the charge of totalitarianism, but is instead to contend that we may more usefully think of totality within Hegel in terms of a ‘wholeness’. But, this Hegelian ‘wholeness’ should not be understood as straightforwardly all-encompassing and determining. Within Hegel, the whole is fractured, always

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<sup>322</sup> Moder, p. 79.

<sup>323</sup> Moder, p. 13.

<sup>324</sup> Moder, p. 13.

<sup>325</sup> Moder, p. 76.

<sup>326</sup> Moder, p. 131.

<sup>327</sup> Moder, p. 132.

<sup>328</sup> Moder, p. 66.

necessarily incomplete. This fractured whole is a unity that remains open to change and contestation, which is precisely what is at stake within Arendt's notions of both the political and plurality.<sup>329</sup>

The totality that is often read to arrive at the end of Hegel's process, is a totality implied throughout the process itself - we cannot properly read the end as distinct from the process. But this ending is not to be taken as a final end. It is instead a turning point, it is an end only in so far as it also constitutes an opening up of space for further thought. The fractured whole is in constant process, constituted through its own negativity. Yes, on a Hegelian account this negativity is understood to be always already within the totality - just as it is within the subject itself - and in this sense a concern may remain that 'true' alterity is never permitted within a dialectical system. But I contend that this is not a concern when considering the relationship between totality and plurality. Whilst plurality is affirming of difference and is threatened by any reduction to pure sameness,<sup>330</sup> plurality also requires a constitutive commonality. Plurality is a condition of togetherness, precisely of a commonality that respects difference. If we read Hegel's account of negativity as his inclusion of alterity - an alterity that is not different through its independence but retains its own alterity in spite of and indeed through its agonistic relationality - then alterity is not foreclosed on this reading of Hegel. A radical alterity, or a pure difference that did not possess this relational aspect, would itself constitute a threat to the possibility of actualised plurality. This is to suggest that we can usefully appropriate dialectical tools from Hegel without committing ourselves to a vision of totality that constrains human freedom, renders us entirely determinant, or that excludes all possibility of meaningful alterity.

Based upon this reading of Hegel, I contend that his notion of the individual self provides a foundation to identity which constitutes a radical break from the alternative accounts of the self as *de facto* individuated and thus breaks from the formulations present within identity enclosure. This perspective of given individuation assumes that the individual is naturalised and normative, and is thus uninterested in asking how this individuation comes about and is maintained. On this approach, the self is a disconnected entity, who has no grounding in a plural condition and thus no mutuality. This is an

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<sup>329</sup> As explored further in chapter 4, Loidolt argues that plurality within Arendt is a condition that must be actualised, and Arendt understands the opening of the human world (the creation of the *polis* as a space) as a gathering together - albeit not a gathering that has a determinant form (which is what denotes the kind of gathering implied in the *fascis* of fascism).

<sup>330</sup> As explored in chapter 4, see: *Recognising Action: The Public Sphere and the Performative Arena*.

abstract devoid of concrete presence. It is a basic, ego centric account of the self which fails to fully encapsulate the embeddedness of this self, and its dependence on the other. To consider again the phenomenology of objects, this only acknowledges one of the two states – that of individuation – whilst ignoring the notion of being-for-another. This construction must be recognised as so one-sided, and the foundation upon which it is built must be understood as philosophically reductive. Instead, what must be affirmed is the plural condition as the foundation for the individual.

The manner of this condition and specificity of both its shape and form are varied in their structure. In this sense, we should not regard the particular and concrete instances of the plural condition as some kind of naturalistic phenomenon. The point is not to make some appeal or call to return to a supposed space beyond discursive construction, but instead to recognise the embeddedness of the individual as recognitive construct within the equally constructed plural condition. Furthermore, this is not to dismiss or diminish the importance of the individual. Conversely, individual and plural are mutually reliant, each requiring the other to be substantiated. This point reinforces the importance of the individual through demonstrating that ignoring the individual's mutuality prevents comprehensive understanding of this self. In this sense, this approach seeks to better affirm the individual. Only in recognising the mutual foundations of individuality can this self's true nature come to light. Without open acknowledgement of mutuality, much of the individual remains isolated and broken away from context. The individual thus remains an abstracted entity, a term which here retains the Hegelian connotations of incompleteness and fracture.

The philosophical moment of Lordship and Bondage concerns, as I have noted, a parabolic account of a preliminary encounter between two self-consciousnesses and the disparity of recognition which results. Whilst this chapter expands upon 'Consciousness' to more fully present the mutual grounds of individuality, it does not concern itself with a concrete, historical or political situation. As such an abstract, the parable limits what it can tell us about recognition to fundamental points concerning its relational nature and penchant for disparity. Lordship and Bondage cannot, however, illustrate mutual recognition, for this is a much later development within the Hegelian system. The interest of my project concerns the application of this Hegelian sense of self within a concrete political environment.

## REIFIED THOUGHT AS THE PURSUIT OF ESSENCES: IDENTITY ESSENTIALISM AS A REJECTION OF DIALECTICAL THINKING

On Wednesday 31st of January 2018, controversial feminist activist Rose McGowan spoke at a publicity event at Barnes and Noble in New York. The event was promoting her autobiography, *Brave*,<sup>331</sup> which had been published the previous day and provided a detailed and harrowing account of her experiences with sexual assault and rape within the film industry. Whilst McGowan was taking audience questions, the proceedings were interrupted by an attendee – Andi Dier – who verbally reproached McGowan. The attack was avowedly motivated<sup>332</sup> by several comments McGowan had made contrasting her own experiences with those of trans women during her interview with RuPaul on his *What's the Tee?* Podcast.<sup>333</sup> Dier – herself a trans woman – demanded that McGowan address these comments in light of both Dier's own personal experiences of transphobia as well as several anecdotal examples of societal transphobia and transphobic violence.<sup>334</sup> Following a brief exchange, Dier was escorted from the building. The exchange left McGowan visibly shaken,<sup>335</sup> and was followed by what has uncharitably been referred to as a “meltdown”<sup>336</sup> during which she “unleashes on a transgender protestor”<sup>337</sup> and “breaks down when confronted about trans rights”.<sup>338</sup> Despite the subsequent flurry of allegations against Dier, accusing her

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<sup>331</sup> Rose McGowan, *Brave* (London: HarperCollins, 2018).

<sup>332</sup> See: Cassie Brighter, ‘A Call to All Trans Activists to Publicly Disavow Andi Dier over Her Verbal Attack of Rose McGowan’, *Medium.Com*, 2 March 2018 <<https://medium.com/@cassiebrighter/a-call-to-all-trans-activists-to-publicly-disavow-andi-dier-over-her-verbal-attack-if-rose-mcgowan-ado225140e91>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

<sup>333</sup> RuPaul, Michelle Visage, and Rose McGowan, *RuPaul - What's The Tee?: Episode 107 - Rose McGowan*, RuPaul - What's The Tee?, 2017 <<http://www.rupaulpodcast.com/episodes/2017/7/23/episode-107-rose-mcgowan>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

<sup>334</sup> Ilana Kaplan, ‘Rose McGowan Shouts at Transgender Woman during Her Barnes and Noble Book Event’, *The Independent*, 2 February 2018 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/rose-mcgowan-transgender-woman-shouts-barnes-noble-book-event-a8191431.html>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

<sup>335</sup> Though there is video footage of this, I have deliberately omitted reference to it here as this footage has been consistently used to mock, degrade, and attack McGowan even several weeks after the event.

<sup>336</sup> Kaplan.

<sup>337</sup> Jennifer Smith, ‘Rose McGowan Unleashes on Transgender Protester in On-Stage Meltdown before Claiming She'd Been Raped by an Oscar-Winning Actor When She Was 15 - and Then Cancels All Public Appearances’, *The Daily Mail*, 2 March 2018 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5347777/Rose-McGowans-stage-meltdown-Barnes-Noble.html>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

<sup>338</sup> Alexa Harrison, ‘Rose McGowan Breaks Down When Confronted About Trans Rights: “I Didn't Agree to Your Cis F—Ing World”’, *Variety*, 2 January 2018 <<http://variety.com/2018/scene/vpage/rose-mcgowan-meltdown-barnes-and-noble-book-signing-1202684004/>>.

of being a sexual predator of underage women and girls,<sup>339</sup> much of the media attention on this incident has focused on McGowan's privilege as a cis, white woman and her use of this privilege to silence a representative of a marginalised community.<sup>340</sup> As a result of both her privilege and her 'use' of this to oppose and undermine the views of a 'more marginalised' subjectivity – McGowan has been accused of being anti-trans and of being a bigoted person.

Of critical interest to me are the grounds upon which McGowan is being accused of transphobia and the ways in which this is being used to invalidate not only her perspective but also her experiences as a cis woman and rape survivor. McGowan is widely accused of having an "anti-trans bias"<sup>341</sup> due to alleged essentialism, with her comments during the aforementioned interview on RuPaul's podcast considered evidence enough of such views. The accusations particularly concern her differentiation of her own experiences with gender and gender-based discrimination as a female bodied person from the experiences of trans people. During the interview, McGowan addresses her "trans friends", saying:

You girls, women, have never asked me what it's like to be a woman. You've never once asked me what it's like to grow up as a woman. What's it like to get a period? What's it like when you grow breasts and people are suddenly screaming at you on the streets—what's it like when your world gets loud? What's it like?

Because they assume because they felt like a woman on the inside... that's not developing as a woman. That's not growing as a woman, that's not living in this world as a woman. And a lot of the stuff I hear trans complaining about I'm like, yeah—welcome to the world. This is our world.<sup>342</sup>

McGowan's comments here introduce a distinction between her own experiences of patriarchal oppression (particularly sexual violence) as a cis woman with the experience of trans women. Centrally, McGowan notes a lack of communication across this division, and despite implicitly calling for this

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<sup>339</sup> Ana Valens, 'Rose McGowan, Andi Dier, and Believing Survivors Even When It's Inconvenient', *The Daily Dot*, 2 August 2018 <<https://www.dailydot.com/irl/andi-dier-rose-mcgowan-metoo/>> [accessed 15 February 2018]; Brighter.

<sup>340</sup> In this sense, the optics have focused on the cis/trans power dynamic, rather than the dynamic between sexual assault survivor and (alleged) abuser.

<sup>341</sup> Evan Urquhart, "'What Have You Done for Women?'"', *Slate*, 2 June 2018 <<https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/02/rose-mcgowans-anti-trans-bias-weakens-her-feminism.html>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

<sup>342</sup> RuPaul, Visage, and McGowan.

communication,<sup>343</sup> her comments have been read as a mobilisation of a trans-exclusionary feminism. In particular, due to her discussion of her body and her experience of it, McGowan has been particularly accused of biological essentialism wherein some conception of the female body becomes a definitive essence. For these comments, she has been accused of “textbook TERFism”<sup>344</sup> and, by Dier herself of saying that “trans women are not like regular women”.<sup>345</sup> The implication of this is that McGowan’s position reaffirms cis-centrism, that she ‘others’ trans women and thus promotes an exclusionary feminism. The mere mentioning of a difference – importantly not a difference McGowan is upholding abstractly as a foundation of womanhood, but a point of difference rooted within the diverse applications of patriarchal logics in the production of sexed and gendered bodies – is taken as an altogether divisive and exclusionary essentialism.

Immediately, we can see how McGowan’s treatment in the court of enclosed opinion provides another example of language policing, as discussed in the previous chapter. The accusation of essentialism is made and McGowan has been found guilty – rightly or wrongly, it appears not to matter. The result is an immediate delegitimization of ‘her feminism’ – however this is to be understood *qua* possession – on the grounds that it is wholly regressive. Due to the rootedness of her feminism in her own experience, this serves as a delegitimization of her very experience of the world. More profoundly than this, McGowan herself is thus treated as a bigoted person, with some supposed core of her subject thereby understood to be regressive and harmful. So-branded, there is a clear sense in which McGowan’s agency is violated, not only in the superficial sense that her future public appearances have been cancelled (partially as others have been unwilling to host her and partially because she has been made to feel unable to express herself publicly) but further in the sense that her ability to define her own experience has been revoked. Though otherwise viewed as among enclosure’s inalienable rights, there is a clear sense in which McGowan is denied the otherwise inalienable right to define her own experiences due to the ways in

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<sup>343</sup> A call that becomes more explicit in her call to Dier that “you and I are the same”, when trying to diffuse her interjection.

<sup>344</sup> This acronym stands for trans-exclusionary radical feminism/feminist. Despite the profound discontinuities between contemporary transphobic feminism and radical feminism, this term has entered popular parlance, though is not always consistently applied. Ashley J. Cooper, ‘An Open Letter to Rose McGowan’, *Medium.Com*, 2 March 2018 <<https://medium.com/@ashleyjaycooper/an-open-letter-to-rose-mcgowan-247d4bf4e28d>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

<sup>345</sup> Josh Jackman, ‘Rose McGowan Gets into a Public Shouting Row after She’s Accused of Being Anti-Trans’, *Pink News*, 2 February 2018 <<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/02/02/rose-mcgowan-gets-into-a-public-screaming-row-after-shes-accused-of-being-anti-trans/>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

which the definitions she gives them defy those rendered permissible within the context of contemporary identity orthodoxy. The noting of internal fissures – different experiences of power – within identity categories produces a lack of coherence anathema to enclosure’s pursuit of security, as such these are understood as failing to lend support to its socio-political cartography, along with its abstract universality. McGowan’s views are not discussed in terms of their limitations or their partiality – terms which rightly apply to any individuated perspective – but are instead dismissed as simply incorrect in a factic sense, or, and this is of fundamental importance, as expressive of some essential bigotry. She has subsequently been othered (hypocritical as a praxis, given that othering was central among the charges brought to McGowan) and branded *persona non grata* within most contemporary identity discourses. This status has been maintained by the reactionary attacks and dismissals she has received from several media outlets. Often these are prefaced with an acknowledgement of her position as rape survivor, however this is never used to contextualise her position. Instead, this is often used to make the claim that McGowan is not comporting herself as a rape survivor should.<sup>346</sup> As such, there are multiple ways in which McGowan is seen to defy the orthodoxic and orthopraxic dimensions of identity enclosure, each of which coalesce to justify her harsh exclusion from the parameters of acceptable opinion.

Of particular interest to me here are the ways in which enclosure’s two pathologies – its penchant for ossification into orthodoxy and its abstract conceptualisation of subjectivity – directly oppose a dialectical conceptualisation of self. I am here concerned with how essentialism functions within the discourses of identity enclosure, its shortcomings, and how these not only embody a thoroughly reified account of self but how this rejection of a dialectical notion of self underpins enclosure’s major pathologies. Essentialism’s discursive role effectively embodies both of the pathologies discussed in Chapter 1, as essentialism is considered grounds enough for silencing another – through their defiance of accepted identity praxeis – and because widespread essentialism reveals much about the notion of subjectivity within identity enclosure. Whilst I maintain a critical distinction between essentialist and dialectical approaches to questions of political identity, I contend that this distinction only appears to be present within contemporary identity discourses. Due to the narrow way in which these discourses

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<sup>346</sup> See: Raquel Rosario Sanchez, ‘Rose McGowan Is Not a Perfect Rape Victim; No Woman Is’, *Feminist Current*, 14 February 2018 <<http://www.feministcurrent.com/2018/02/14/rose-mcgowan-not-perfect-rape-victim-no-woman/>> [accessed 15 February 2018].

conceptualise essentialism, only specific forms of essentialist thinking are identifiable and thus open either to challenge or interrogation. However, the manner in which essentialism is conceptualised leads not only to many forms of essentialism going unnoticed but also to the false labelling – and thus dismissal – of non-essentialist identity practices which come to be falsely viewed as essentialist.

Essentialism holds a crucial place as the bugbear of contemporary identity discourses. Though there are some (often very marginal) camps that openly commit themselves to various forms of identity essentialism, this is generally considered to be very poor form. Within the vast majority of mainstream identity discourse, ‘essentialist’ is understood as synonymous with ‘regressive’ and is often used as a pejorative. As we have seen, merely the charge of essentialism is often enough to invalidate not only one’s views and perspectives (no matter how nuanced or rooted in the very subjective experience enclosure claims to defend these may be), but also is enough to mark one’s very subjectivity as bigoted – a move which is itself an ironic act of essentialisation. Due in part to its deviance from identity orthopraxy, essentialism acts as a discursive stoppage in so far as to become identified with essentialism results in a termination of one’s ability to freely participate within these discourses. To be guilty of essentialism is to declare one’s allegiance to the opposing side of the absolutist divide between identity progressives and identity oppressors. Contemporary discourse summarily views essentialism as that which is only ever practiced by those who seek to maintain oppression. I agree with this to the extent that the pursuit of essences inevitably serves as a recapitulation of the logic of the here-and-now, and as such distils the disparities of contemporary power structures and thus the systemic injustices they render possible. However, due to the absolute division placed between oppressed and oppressors within identity enclosure, this conceptualisation of essentialism as a tool of the oppressors combined with enclosure’s self-conception as the true opposition to this oppression allows contemporary enclosure to automatically consider itself exempt from essentialism. Consequently, enclosure’s own slippage into essentialism goes unnoticed.

Additionally, contemporary enclosure largely understands essentialism solely in terms of biologism or biological essentialism to the point where the terms become synonymous. At its most fundamental level, biologism is the positing of some innate, fixed, biological component that directly determines a particular set of characteristics in a given person. As concerning identity, this frequently manifests as an attempt to trace back the origins of one’s identity to one’s physical biology. Any view that



attempts to, for example, argue that one's 'authentic' gender is dependent upon one's biological sex (thereby conflating sex and gender),<sup>347</sup> that one's sexuality is entirely determined by specific genetic ingredients, or that one's race is a matter of one's 'bloodline'<sup>348</sup> is premised upon this reduction to biology. Such views proceed from a narrowly conceived biological basis towards an understanding that such a basis constitutes a prescribed destiny for the individual. This particular essentialism has been of critical interest to many feminist scholars,<sup>349</sup> particularly those concerned with the articulation of identity as socially constructed. Though academic feminism has often approached questions of identity essentialism with rigour and nuance, there is, as maintained by Charlotte Witt, a penchant amongst such engagements for the broad reduction of essentialism to biologism.<sup>350</sup> This is due to biologism having attained a central focus amongst 'constructivist' critique. Biological essentialism has received this focused critical attention due to the predominant support for biologism within the socio-political narratives of subject and identity that both underpin and sustain oppressive configurations of power.<sup>351</sup> Whilst foreclosure of critical interrogation is a ramification of all essentialist thinking – due to the way in which essence provides a once-and-for-all answer to definitional questions of ontology – biologism is the most ubiquitous form of essentialist thinking, which appeals to scientific discourses for a supra-discursive validity. Through this appeal, biological essentialism couches itself in scientific language and this allows it to masquerade as a naturalised facticity. Criticisms of biologism have thus had to formulate themselves as criticisms of scientific uses of biological discourse, and this has entailed critique of the numerous ways scientific discourses are granted special epistemological status.

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<sup>347</sup> Examples of this can be found in the engagements of controversial, 'anti-trans' philosopher, Kathleen Stock, see: Stock, Kathleen, 'Can You Change Your Gender?', *Medium*, 2019 <[https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/can-you-change-your-gender-7b0c469e0b4b?source=-----10-----](https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/can-you-change-your-gender-7b0c469e0b4b?source=-----10----->)> [accessed 21 July 2020]; Stock, Kathleen, 'Of Course Sex Materially Exists', *Medium*, 2020 <[https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/of-course-sex-materially-exists-6a8640bbc21f?source=-----2-----](https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/of-course-sex-materially-exists-6a8640bbc21f?source=-----2----->)> [accessed 21 July 2020]; Stock, Kathleen, 'Are Academics Freely Able to Criticise the Idea of "Gender Identity" in UK Universities?', *Medium*, 2019 <<https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/are-academics-freely-able-to-criticise-the-idea-of-gender-identity-in-uk-universities-67b97c6e04be>> [accessed 21 July 2020].

<sup>348</sup> The racial frameworks of this are examined in *Racecraft*, see: Fields and Fields.

<sup>349</sup> For example, the notion of 'the woman' as the subject of feminism is of central critical concern for Butler in *Gender Trouble*, see: Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>350</sup> See: Charlotte Witt, 'Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory', *Philosophical Topics*, 23.2 (1995), 321–44 (p. 324).

<sup>351</sup> Indeed, we could understand this biologism as expressive of what Foucault termed the biopolitical, see: Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* (France: Seuil, 2004).

Whilst both feminist and postcolonial theory remain staunchly critical of essentialism and note the numerous ways in which the professed essences of particular subject positions are – without exception – formed within the totalising frameworks of power and oppression – there have been notable attempts to harness various forms of essentialism as critical tools. Among the most influential of these projects is Spivak's use of 'strategic essentialism', a term which describes a critical politic that attempts to decentre those hegemonic identities at the core of present power structures through the articulation of a positive alterity. When employed as such, strategic essentialism operates as a deconstructive tool that at once reasserts and subverts the relations between the aforementioned hegemonic identities and the excluded subaltern identities. Due to its explicit concern with notions of inclusion and exclusion with reference to hegemonic structures, it is clear that Spivak's strategic essentialism is at least partially concerned with questions of the various ways in which particular subjectivities are included or excluded from the discursive. This culminates in Spivak's own contention that subaltern identities are constituted as silenced, unable to speak due to the political conditions that enable meaningful speech only being available for those subjects already situated within the hegemony.<sup>352</sup>

Strategic essentialism is the attempt to use essentialist argumentation and rhetoric as a counter position to dominant socio-political narratives. When used successfully, it demonstrates that despite its inherent structural limitations and consequences, essentialism is not *de facto* solely a tool of oppression in a straightforward sense but can be used as a source of destabilisation. However, due to its structural configuration, essentialism tends towards fixity and to the establishment of closed definitions and the foundation of normative and orthopraxic constraints on identities. Strategic essentialism cannot be held as a foundational or conclusory political praxis, its very strategy lies in its nature as one among many deconstructive tools. Its purpose is to elucidate a disparity of power through making the conditions of political power explicit. As such, strategic essentialism is a repetition of these conditions such that they can become conspicuous and open to critique, but does not itself conduct this critique or overcome these conditions. As Spivak notes, her attempt to harness essentialism and use it strategically as part of a deconstructive politic has been widely misunderstood and taken as a legitimisation of essentialism altogether. Consequently, Spivak has disavowed the term.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

<sup>353</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 260.

This transformation of strategic essentialism into a blanket permissibility of essentialism is – in part – exemplary of the changes academic engagements frequently undergo when they come to be inherited by and inform political activism. Much like this, the academic focus on biologism has been taken up in an intensified manner. Due to this, contemporary identity enclosure can only conceive of essentialism as an appeal to the biological. Whilst this enables it to – in my view quite correctly – interrogate and dismiss reductive and non-discursive conceptions of biology that actively seek to naturalise socio-politically produced identities into fixed and quantifiable components of bodies, this often develops into a totalised dismissal of the biological. Through seeking to keep with post-structuralist engagements with questions of identity that maintain a critical approach to those simplistic narratives that obscure the discursive constitution of the body (and thus reify the biological into destiny), identity enclosure conceptualises of the body itself and the biological discourses that constitute it as foundationally essentialist. This rejection often specifically targets the notions of biological sex, even if these are articulated and used in a strictly non-essentialist or non-fixed way. As such, the mere description of a body as male or female can be taken to essentialise gender (in so far as such discourses themselves frequently conflate gender with biological sex) in terms of biology – specifically genitalia. For McGowan, this makes it possible for her comments to be read as a mobilisation of essentialism for no other reason than her mentioning of the female body.

In particular, McGowan's invocation of menstruation as a site of distinction between cis and trans women is understandably viewed as a recapitulation of biological essentialism due to the numerous historical (and, unfortunately, present) attempts to ground an essential femininity and womanhood on the reproductive capacity of the female body and about the sociological role of motherhood this is seen to engender.<sup>354</sup> Identity enclosure shares the motivations of many queer feminist responses to traditional, radical feminist positions that ground the experience of women within their reproductive capacity – with particular concern for the numerous ways in which this is used as a critical site of exploitation. This was

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<sup>354</sup> Evidence for this can be seen within the fraught debate over the use of the term 'menstruators', see: Naomi Firsht, 'I Am Not a Walking Cervix or a Menstruator. I Am a W-O-M-A-N', *The Times*, 31 October 2018 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/i-am-not-a-walking-cervix-or-a-menstruator-i-am-a-woman-7q2rdp55p>> [accessed 24 August 2020]; Murphy, Meghan, 'Are We Women or Are We Menstruators?', *Feminist Current*, 7 September 2016 <<https://www.feministcurrent.com/2016/09/07/are-we-women-or-are-we-menstruators/>> [accessed 24 August 2020].

central to the project of radical feminism, in particular as it is presented by Firestone,<sup>355</sup> who explores what it would mean for female bodied people to ‘seize the means of reproduction’, though this does not reduce womanhood to fertility. However, the mentioning of menstruation – or any other biological particularity – does not necessarily repeat an essentialist history, and we should be cautious about the potential harms such a straightforward erasure of biological difference might engender.<sup>356</sup> Given the history of the body being mobilised as an ahistorical container for absolute biological truth, and feminist resistance to these narratives, it is understandable that marginalised communities (such as trans women) may be wary of appeals to ‘biological difference’ – particularly given how such differences are often used rhetorically to erase trans identities.<sup>357</sup>

We must understand this history in terms of how it inherits and attempts to resist an essentialist picture of the biological. Within such a picture, the body is conceptualised in terms of a factic entity, an objective presence that is then discoverable and about which fixed truths can be established through biological investigation. When operating under this reductive understanding of biology as a science in the sense of a discipline that seeks to uncover and verify the truth of our reality and codify this into knowledge, essentialism becomes a clear concern. This conception of scientific investigation premises its practice on the pursuit of a singular and fixed truth that exists independently of the methodology through which this conclusion is reached. Such a conception of science is definitionally essentialist in so far as it seeks to uncover and study the essences of particular phenomena.<sup>358</sup> For human biology, these essences concern the fundamental nature of the human body. However, through so conceiving of itself as the site of universal inquiry, this notion of science ignores the numerous ways in which its own practice is historically and culturally situated and thus is largely – if not entirely – unable to articulate and challenge

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<sup>355</sup> See: Firestone.

<sup>356</sup> Many of these disparities have been mapped out by Caroline Criado Perez, see: Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019).

<sup>357</sup> For further examples, see: Kathleen Stock and others, ‘Doing Better in Arguments about Sex, Gender, and Trans Rights’, *Medium*, 2019 <<https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/doing-better-in-arguments-about-sex-and-gender-3bec3fc4bdb6>> [accessed 21 July 2020]; Stock, Kathleen, ‘This Is Not a Drill’, *Medium*, 2020 <<https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/i-am-a-professor-of-philosophy-employed-at-a-british-university-in-a-philosophy-department-a038ac89aado>> [accessed 21 July 2020].

<sup>358</sup> Despite these numerous critiques made of science and scientific practice, these positions should not be regarded as *de facto* ‘anti-science’. Like concerns with essentialism, its associated metaphysical structures, and the numerous ways in which these influence and prefigure scientific investigation have been raised within the philosophy of science. See: James Ladyman and Don Ross, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalised* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the various ways in which this situatedness is expressed within both its practices and its conclusions. This is the subject of a Foucauldian elaboration of regimes of truth, through which he articulates the interconnectedness of epistemology and socio-political power.<sup>359</sup> Foucault contends that the body cannot be understood as a given, factic entity but must be understood as political,<sup>360</sup> which is to say as a production of power and discourse. The body becomes a discursive site, the “locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity)”.<sup>361</sup> The result is the deconstructive fragmentation of a conception of the body as unified through laying bare the historical and philosophical mechanisms through which this body becomes, and thus subsequently appears as, unified. Despite Foucault’s criticisms of the numerous ways in which ideological conceptions of the body become naturalised by prevalent regimes of power, this does not culminate in a prohibition against discussions of the body. Though Foucault complicates many of the established attitudes towards embodiment, his criticisms are concerned with the development of a non-essentialist account of the body – a task which has been upheld and repeated within subsequent contributions to feminist philosophy.<sup>362</sup>

Consequently, a rejection of biological essentialism does not entail a prohibition against all reference to the body. Indeed, identity enclosure’s prohibition against the body is one of its major points of rupture from antecedent feminist projects, particularly those conducted in conjunction with Foucauldian critique.<sup>363</sup> To return to McGowan’s comments, it is evident that it is the mere invocation of the body that is seen to constitute her as a proponent of essentialism. To endorse the kind of gender biologism that McGowan is accused of is to contend that gender should be properly understood as derivative of a closed biological foundation. Whilst McGowan’s comments do affirm the body as central to her own experiences, her point appears to be that in her own experience, gender-based-oppression is interlinked with sex-based-oppression. McGowan appears to assert that neither can be understood independently of the other, not because ultimately gender is reducible to sex, but instead due to the

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<sup>359</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. by Tavistock (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>360</sup> Margaret A. McLaren, ‘Foucault and the Subject of Feminism’, *Social Theory and Practice*, 23.1 (1997), 109–28 (p. 114).

<sup>361</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. & trans. by Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Ithaca, 1997), p. 148.

<sup>362</sup> The numerous developments of Foucault’s work have formed additional points of tension and disagreement due to the varied ways in which such developments seek to move beyond Foucault’s work. See: Daniel Punday, ‘Foucault’s Body Tropes’, *New Literary History*, 31.3 (2000), 509–28.

<sup>363</sup> McLaren, p. 109.

frequency with which gender and sex are rendered interchangeable by the prevalent social frameworks through which these are understood. McGowan does not so much endorse but instead notes that present conditions of power structurally bind sex and gender together such that the two are often mistaken for one another and such that they cannot be comprehensively discussed in isolation. As we have previously discussed, this conflation between gender and sex is often maintained by identity enclosure itself, albeit the recourse is to gender identity and a determining process of subjective identification over any biological determinism. Of further importance, McGowan never invalidates the ways in which transphobia is concurrently a matter of both gender and sex-based-discrimination. What she does highlight is how her own experience of having her biology used against her as a cis woman is not identical and thus not reducible to similar experiences of trans women. Far from an essentialist understanding of the body, McGowan's emphasis on the sociality of her own bodily experience appears to ground it in a political discourse. In the offending interview, she specifically addresses how the way in which she has been screamed at on the streets, how her social actions have been received and how others have responded to her, have been grounded in her experiences of her own body, particularly the development and sexualisation of her breasts. At no point is female biology presented as a 'more authentic' ground of gender. Instead, McGowan's comments criticise pervasive social understandings of sex and gender, those that underpin the hegemonic systems of power, which are the concern of academic and popular critique alike. This concern with sociality is further demonstrated by McGowan's continuous criticisms of "society" in *Brave*.<sup>364</sup> Through excluding McGowan's concerns on the grounds of essentialism, enclosure effectively mobilises its own orthodoxy to obscure the very political reality to which it purports to attend. As a result, enclosure once again undermines the efficacy with which it can constitute a political movement that responds to oppressive political conditions. Enclosure attempts to purify itself of essentialism through banishing whatever it conceives of as essentialist – though it is structurally unable to critically distinguish between essentialism and that which defies predominant understandings.

Enclosure's microcosmic concern with biologism establishes narrow constraints on its understanding of essence. So narrowly bound within these parameters, enclosure's anti-essentialist commitments are highly limited and as such are unable to accurately recognise and subsequently unpick

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<sup>364</sup> Of course, it is not wholly clear how she understands society, as *Brave* is not an academic or critical text. See: McGowan.

the many forms of essentialism that run through contemporary identity discourses. There have been many criticisms of identity politics that conceptualise it as a fundamentally essentialist movement and thus call for our transition to another kind of political praxis. However, as I have previously contended within this thesis, I do not think that we are able to attend to the many shortcomings of the contemporary political condition and the numerous ways in which these are sustained through the use of identity categories, without conceptualising it in terms of an identity politics. Furthermore, it is unclear how proposed alternatives are not in some sense politics of identity, nor is it clear how premising one's rejection of essentialism on a conception of identity politics that incorporates essentialist views at its core can be taken to indicate adequate critical attention to essentialism itself.

Despite its widespread rejection of essentialism, identity enclosure's inability to conceptualise of essence as anything other than the invocation of biology results in its repetition of essentialism's underlying ontology. The pathological way in which enclosure conceptualises subjectivity as a privatised, abstracted subjective-object – whence all identifications derive their authority – is itself a repetition of essentialism. The underlying ontology of essentialism is retained in so far as populist subjectivity remains conceived of as a form of object, the qualities of which are fixed – even if the subject's comprehension of them may be initially incorrect. Due to this fixity, each individual subject possesses an individualised essence, an invariable nature which serves as the abstractive origin of their identity. In so far as identity is then often simplified – if not conflated outright – with normative stereotypes (the invocation of which is itself often a form of essentialist thought), this framework serves to naturalise these stereotypical performances of identity, enforcing a regressive orthopraxy that is nevertheless justified through appeal to essential qualities. As noted in chapter one, through so placing its foundation within an abstract subjectivity enclosure enshrines the subject as external to (and ultimately unbound from) the material, political, and discursive conditions in which this subject lives. Identity enclosure is still able to ground its ontology in essence provided that this is never named such, and further providing that the proposed essence does not defy its orthodox prohibition against the body.

However, enclosure's notion of subjectivity cannot be fully articulated in terms of classical essentialism due to the way in which it attempts to reposition essence as a solely subjective phenomenon. It is this reorientation that both problematises attempts to conflate enclosure with essentialism and that further obscures the essentialist elements of enclosure's framework. Consequently, enclosure cannot be

directly subsumed into traditional formulations of essentialism. Much like enclosure's reifying tendencies, essentialism provides a useful preliminary framework for conceptualising enclosure's pathologies and yet these pathologies cannot be reduced to merely a matter of reification or essentialism. That enclosure's essentialist commitments are so concealed leads to the widespread belief that enclosure has successfully overcome essentialist thinking, thereby enabling its practitioners to ignore its underlying contradictions.

Enclosure departs from a classical essentialism in that it rejects attempts at certain kinds of universal definition. Traditional conceptions of essentialist epistemology seek to answer questions of metaphysical identity through the essential/accidental distinction. As we have previously noted, enclosure actively undermines the possibility of public narratives – avowedly in the case of those that oppose its own orthodoxy and covertly in the case of those that support it. The result is the reorganisation of essence against universality. For enclosure there can be no universal essence – in the sense of a closed, positive definition – for any identity, yet the individual subject is maintained as a fixity, ossified into a part of its wider framework. As such, the prohibition against essence is staunchly observed at the macro-level of identity and therefore closed definitions of identity categories are forbidden. However, at the micro-level, the point at which individual identifications are made, essence is not only permissible but required. The fixity of the subject, abstracted beyond the concrete political condition within which this subject lives and moves, is inculcated as an empty essence, as the unchanging grounds of one's authentic identifications. Subjectivity, so reified into an object, becomes a phantom essence, serving a rhetorical role identical to that of essence within traditional essentialism yet omitting any concrete, positive commitments. Identity enclosure thereby constitutes itself as an essentialist politic that retains the rhetorical and ontological underpinnings of essentialism whilst continually rejecting the articulation of a positive essence. As such, it is not particular qualities or descriptors that become fixed, objectified essences, but the very notion of subjectivity itself. We can thereby understand essentialism in terms of its contribution to the first pathology outlined within chapter one, and fully recognise how its project lends itself to ossification into orthodoxic systems of thought and orthopraxic frameworks of practice, as well as essentialism's contributions to the second pathology regarding the privatisation of subjectivity.

Though enclosure considers itself to have fully escaped the shortcomings of essentialism, it has merely supplanted one form of essentialism with another. Considering its originary desire to overcome



the conditions that enable the exclusionary narratives of oppression, this move must be understood not merely as non-productive, but as productive of a politic that actively increases the distance between enclosure and the realisation of its goals: as a step in the wrong direction. Though it appears to be an improvement on classical essentialism, the essence of enclosure retains its original ontology whilst exchanging its justificatory framework for a far more nefarious rhetoric. Whereas classical essentialism openly commits its project to the pursuit of fixed, closed definitions, enclosure's phantom essentialism presents its essence as itself a rejection of essence. The result is the widespread endorsement of essentialism without the ability to either recognise or straightforwardly challenge its underlying ontology.

To conceptualise the problem of essentialism solely in terms of its penchant for coalescing into socio-political narratives that then exclude particular subjectivities is, despite its partial salience, a simplification of the implications of an essentialist framework. Essentialism is not merely of critical interest due to its use of closed definitions, but because of its underlying ontology. The pursuit of essences seeks an ahistorical object of knowledge, a once-and-for-all, definitive reply to the question of the identity of identities. Through seeking this form of answer, essentialism prefigures its own response as an objective fixity yet remains oblivious to the ways in which its purported essences are expressive of a specific historical circumstance. As such, essentialism allows aspects of the present arrangement of power to masquerade as a universal. Through this projection of present material conditions, alterity is effectively effaced, and essentialism thus embodies the logic of the here-and-now. As such, it is pertinent to understand essentialism as a modality of reified thought. Due to the nature of essence as a universally definitive descriptor, essentialist epistemology is incompatible with notions of dialectical thinking, which regard concepts as malleable through their transformed use over time. Essentialism thus serves to obstruct discourse through its epistemological and ontological frameworks.

Rejecting identity essentialism to its philosophical core entails not only opposition to superficial definitions of identity categories but furthermore necessitates a rejection of identity as a definitional practice entirely. Essentialism is more than a philosophically impoverished rhetoric but is furthermore a form of implicit ontology that when applied to identity-concepts requires us to both simplify and objectify the socio-political phenomena that comprise identities such that we no longer view these as meaningfully constitutive of these categories. A rejection of essentialism and support for discursivity requires a rejection of its conceptualisation of being as wholly stable. This requires a

conceptualisation of the ontology of the subject as continually undergoing articulation, as perpetually asserted and reasserted through its identificatory practices. The inherent instability of the subject and its socio-political identifications are central to the dialectical conception of the self and subject, as the self is perpetually renegotiating itself with others and is thereby continually generated and transformed.

## TOWARDS RECOGNITION

Throughout this chapter, I have articulated the underlying ontology of the dialectical conception of the self. Fundamentally, this rests upon intersubjective exchange, upon the self as a form of movement that is mutually constituted through its engagement and relationships to the other. Much like the indeterminacy of its body, the perimeters of the self are never precisely outlined. The self is always lived beyond its own body – within the other, who is in turn lived within the self. On this picture, the individual is no longer articulated as a closed entity and any boundary applied to this self cannot be naturalistically premised. The result is in the self as a process that unfolds within and as a part of its material condition, but it is never reducible to that condition.

Grounding the self as such, it becomes increasingly untenable to support any form of essentialist configuration of the individual and its nature – for this would be to defy the very historical constitution of the self. Having demonstrated the essentialism prevalent within contemporary identity discourses and its incompatibility with a dialectical understanding of the self and subject, I must develop my framework in order to better conceptualise how this dialectical subjectivity can be meaningfully discussed within the contemporary political context. Hitherto, my treatment of intersubjectivity has remained on the abstract levels of underlying ontology and epistemology. In order for it to be articulated fully, it must be elucidated with respect to concrete socio-political circumstances. The next chapter shall thus concern Hegel's conception of this process as recognition. In particular, I shall discuss the numerous ways in which this framework has been criticised and rejected by contemporary scholarship with a mind to both better conceptualise it and to address its shortcomings.

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### 3: REJECTING RECOGNITION: RESPONDING TO CRITIQUES OF THE RECOGNITIVE TRADITION

Within this chapter, I shall consider three opponents to recognition: Michel Foucault, Kelly Oliver, and Patchen Markell. In my examination of their respective arguments I shall not only demonstrate the limitations of their criticism as they pertain to my elucidation of recognition, but I shall further use these significant points of departure to further distinguish my account. Specifically, I shall demonstrate both how I have already begun to address these concerns throughout my treatment of identity enclosure, and I shall further develop my considerations herein with respect to the ethical dimension of each opponent's critiques.

Foucault's criticisms rest on a concern with recognition as a form of pre-empting the structure of the self. Through his disparaging remarks on the dialectic, Foucault raises the concern that Hegel's framework postulates a universal structure of the subject. This becomes an ethical question for Foucault in so far as his philosophical perspective established the subject in terms of its subjection, which is to say in terms of its domination. Tracing the development of his treatment of this, I position my account of recognition alongside Foucault's *assujettissement* in order to demonstrate the continuity between these two perspectives.

Kelly Oliver's concern with recognition mirrors Foucault's in so far as she too views it as a way of pre-determining the nature of the subject. Oliver contends that recognition is unable to provide an adequate conception of political injustice, and that it covertly supports a straightforwardly assimilationist model of political inclusion. Conversely, she advocates for 'witnessing', which seeks to affirm the part of the individual that is beyond understanding. However, Oliver's reasoning does result in a conflation between accountability and violence.

Finally, Markell also considers recognition unable to explain contemporary campaigns for social justice arguing that in its 'traditional' form recognition is itself a medium of injustice. For Markell, recognition is wholly detachable from Hegelian philosophy – and he even goes as far as to contend that Hegel is a critic, rather than a proponent, of this 'traditional' recognition. He then proceeds to argue in

favour of 'acknowledgement' instead of recognition, the former of which stresses the plural and existential dimensions of human action. In so doing, however, he stresses the temporality of human existence whilst actively disparaging its spatiality.

*Prima facie*, the link between Foucault's, Oliver's and Markell's concerns can be summarised through ventriloquizing their various responses to a James Scott quote, cited at the opening of one of Markell's chapters: "The utopian, immanent, and continually frustrated goal of the modern state is to reduce the chaotic, disorderly, constantly changing social reality beneath it to something more closely resembling the administrative grid of its observations."<sup>365</sup> Though Scott's concern here is specifically with state infrastructure, the point has wider applicability to ossified structures of power. Structures of power create a potent demand on individuals that they present themselves as legible,<sup>366</sup> thereby seeking to collapse the individual into an object, something stable and fixed that can be defined. In Foucauldian terms, this is the instrumentalization of individuals, it is through subjection of individuals by disciplinary power that they might be mobilised as a resource. For Oliver, this is rendering an other as comprehensible, it is a failure to bear witness to their individuality. For Markell, this is a proliferation of naturalised agency, an undermining of the very conditions of our political lives.

## MICHEL FOUCAULT – RESISTING THE DETERMINATION OF THE SUBJECT

As a paragon of poststructuralist thinking, Michel Foucault positions himself staunchly against the Hegelian dialectical tradition. Citing the inherent violence of normative regimes, Foucault squarely situates himself and his thought in opposition to normative accounts of history and politics, premising his own engagements upon the pursuit of a non-violent freedom. It is through his pursuit of this freedom that Foucault's work comes to concern itself with the explication of power, though, as he states in his 1982 essay 'The Subject and Power', the "goal" of his corpus was to seek "a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."<sup>367</sup> These plural modes through which power comes to produce the subject are collectively referred to as *assujettissement* throughout his scholarship

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<sup>365</sup> Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 152.

<sup>366</sup> Markell, p. 31.

<sup>367</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, 8.4 (1982), 777–95 (p. 777).

– and it is precisely this plurality that evidences Foucault’s resistance to both the dialectic and recognition. Through his denigration of and resistance to the ‘Hegelian paradigm’ (however configured), Foucault rejects the narrow process of subjectification he sees at play within recognition’s account of the subject. Within this section, I consider the basis of Foucault’s rejection of dialectical recognition with respect to his treatment of it as a form of rationalisation to which Foucault objects on the grounds of its latent transcendentalism. For Foucault, this transcendental reason both constitutes itself as a form of metaphysical violence and further acts as a perpetuation of the inherent violence of normativity. Reading this alongside his resistance to the various forms of physical and discursive violence perpetuated both by the dialectic and comparable forms of power (sovereign, disciplinary, or bio), I trace the development of Foucault’s explication of power and the subjects it produces as it moves from a model rooted in antagonism to one of agonism. My contention is that as Foucault begins to draw distance between himself and a fundamental (perhaps naturalised) antagonism, his analytics of the subject comes into increasingly closer proximity with the very dialectical recognition he has so persistently rebuked.

As Foucault never gives a formalised rejection of the dialectic, his criticisms are dispersed throughout his corpus and often take the form of direct positionings of his own work as contrary to the general tradition that is represented by Hegel. This is to say that many of his criticisms are implicit, and are to be read out of the general trajectory of his work – which is to say Foucault’s orientation away from notions such as reconciliation and continuity that can be thought to define the Hegelian tradition, towards a singularising and – at least initially – antagonistic picture. This is to say that considering Foucault as an opponent to dialectical recognition requires a comparative reading across his body of work. Throughout the section, I will trace two such parallel lines of development. In particular, these lines will map changes in attitude between Foucault’s ‘earlier’ voice within *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* and the ‘later’ Foucault of the subsequent volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, ‘The Subject and Power’, and *The Technologies of the Self*. When distinguishing between these two distinct Foucauldian voices, I shall use the terms earlier and later as shorthand – though this should not be taken to indicate a binary split between these voices, despite their distinctive qualities.<sup>368</sup> The first line will concern the relationship of power and violence, with particular interest in earlier Foucault’s

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<sup>368</sup> Though, as Foucault’s own conception of history might suggest, Foucault may not object to discontinuity.

conflation of these and his eventual separation of these terms. This is a development carefully mapped within Beatrice Hanssen's *Critique of Violence*.<sup>369</sup> Following her work, my specific interest with the concept of violence is to distinguish (as, at least in part, Hanssen does not)<sup>370</sup> between the phases of Foucault wherein this relationship is formulated as antagonistic, with those that speak instead of agonism. The second line concerns my own reading of the Foucauldian treatment of the notion of subjection, with my central assertion being that Foucault's notion of *assujettissement* as the production of subjects undergoes a transformation that goes hand in hand with his developing explication of power in relation to violence. Whereas the earlier Foucauldian voice is primarily occupied with power as an arena wherein hostile forces engage in violent struggle, which casts the subjects it produces in a negative light, the later Foucault appears to shift his attitude to consider the subject in more neutral terms. This is to say that the very state of being a subject for Foucault moves from one primarily concerned with pacifying subjection to one that aligns itself more closely with the account of dialectical mediation I have been hitherto exploring within this thesis. Though distinct, these developing lines converge as they come to consider the interrelation between systems of power and individual agency.

Foucault's resistance to the dialectic is rooted in the interplay of three distinct-yet-interrelated concepts: normativity, violence, and reason. For Foucault, these three concepts exist relationally with one another, for normativity is both itself constitutive of and sustained by dialectical and epistemic violence, with these norms codified within a framework of universal reason. This is the light in which he considers the dialectic, as a foundationalist, normative structure that merely serves as a logical obfuscation of the always open and hazardous reality of conflict.<sup>371</sup> He regards the dialectic, both in its Hegelian and Marxist forms,<sup>372</sup> as the *par excellence* account of *Geschichtsphilosophie* – the philosophy of history. The concern with this philosophy of history is rooted within its universalist aims, with its focus on a totalised framework expressed as a grand narrative. The charge here is that the dialectic (and its recognitive production of subjects) partakes in a transcendental form of reason that assures the constitution of a

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<sup>369</sup> Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>370</sup> This is merely to note that, in part due to the breadth of her own project, Hanssen's distinction between antagonism and agonism when speaking of Foucault is not always clear. At the very least, Hanssen makes no definitive claims about these terms in relation to Foucault.

<sup>371</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', quoted in Hanssen, p. 140.

<sup>372</sup> In so far as these are distinguished within his work.

universal subject across history (*“la dialectique assure la constitution, à travers l’histoire, d’un sujet universel”*).<sup>373</sup> Foucault’s concerns with this are explicitly temporal, for he sees dialectical history as a betrayal of our ‘phenomenological’ experience of time as ‘evenemential’ – which is to say our direct experience of the singularity of events.<sup>374</sup> Though Foucault never explicitly thematises time within his work,<sup>375</sup> Foucault’s commitments as a historian, particularly expressed in the pride of place given to history as a discipline, culminate in Foucault’s conceptualisation of history as, in Agostino Cera’s words, “the knowledge of time”.<sup>376</sup> Cera traces two “distinct but complementary” conceptions of time. The first of these is the aforementioned evenemential time, characterised as primordial, indeterminate, and as incarnating “the *real time of history*”.<sup>377</sup> The second of these is epistemic time, which is to be understood as time that is at once an object of knowledge, as a form of historical consciousness wherein the “rhythm marked within the historical singularities” emerges in the practice of deciphering epistemic regimes.<sup>378</sup>

Cera continues to explicate Foucault’s conception of time specifically in terms of the role it plays in a “fundamental revision”<sup>379</sup> of the subject – a movement he characterises in its death as a *cogito* and its rebirth in the form of the ethical subject.<sup>380</sup> According to Foucault, what this universalistic impulse amounts to is a hegemonic subsumption of history into an imposed framework that presumes the meaning of the singular events it transposes into one another. The dialectic thereby constitutes itself as a totalising framework in so far as it constrains history within meaning – thereby constituting a typical example of *Geschichtsphilosophie* that imbues time and history with meaning it does not ‘truly’ possess.<sup>381</sup> Not only does the dialectic sustain a notion of continuity to which he objects<sup>382</sup> but it produces a universalist-normative account of meaning that, in Foucault’s eyes, serves to prefigure the interpretive activity of the historian. There are several points where Foucault overtly slips into conflating totalising

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<sup>373</sup> Michel Foucault, *Il Faut Défendre La Société. Cours Au Collège de France.1976* (France: Seuil, 1997), p. 50.

<sup>374</sup> Agostino Cera, ‘Historical Heterochronies: Evenemential Time and Epistemic Time in Michel Foucault’, in *The Concept of Time in Early Twentieth-Century Philosophy: A Philosophical Thematic Atlas*, ed. by Flavia Santoianni, Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics (Berlin: Springer, 2015), XXIV.

<sup>375</sup> Cera, XXIV, p. 175.

<sup>376</sup> Cera, XXIV, p. 176.

<sup>377</sup> Cera’s italics, see: Cera, XXIV, p. 178.

<sup>378</sup> Cera, XXIV, p. 178.

<sup>379</sup> Cera, XXIV, p. 180.

<sup>380</sup> Cera, XXIV, p. 180.

<sup>381</sup> Cera, XXIV, p. 177.

<sup>382</sup> Here Cera notes the influence of Nietzsche’s *wirliche Historie*, see: Cera, XXIV, p. 176.

with totalitarianism, into charging universalism with the impulse of brutal domination synonymously attributed to fascism, thereby directly equating such frameworks with the most restrictive regimes of power and domination readily available to the political imagination.

Foucault thereby distrusts the dialectic for making the subject determinant – for its assertion of a single schematic of the subject as the universal form of *assujétissement*. For Foucault, this operation is comparable to that of the disciplinary regime, which comes to form a closed system through practices of exclusion rooted in its assertion of normativity. Politically, the mechanism by which its normative grounds become universalised is through the disciplinary regime's use of discursive violence, through a coercive violation of individual agency in the form of pacification. For Foucault, this is fundamentally tied to the process of rationalisation, particularly a rationalisation to a framework of universal reason and it is the extension of this framework into the universal, an over-rationalisation, that Foucault sees as hand in hand with excesses of political power.<sup>383</sup> As such, the dialectic sustains its normative narrative through the use of coercive violence and amounts to a kind of Derridean metaphysical violence in so far as the dialectic's ontological basis acts to obscure the raw experience of history as diverse and singular – supplanting these for a history of meaning. Through its obfuscation of diversity and plurality, Foucault reads dialectical recognition as endemic of an enlightenment despotism, which is to say that it commits violence against the particular, singularity of individuals, both in the sense of enabling this violence and requiring this violence in order to propagate itself as a structure of power.

Importantly, this tripartite concern with normativity, violence, and rationalisation underpins Foucault's formulation of power as presented within *Discipline and Punish*. This is to say that the 'earlier' Foucault's resistance to the dialectic can be characterised in terms of his resistance to his earlier commitments to power as struggle or war. Particularly in his account of punishment, Foucault is quick to assert that the subjection of the individual, as a bodily object of power,<sup>384</sup> serves as part of a wider system of individualisation that is required in order for society to maintain its desired, absolute right over individuals.<sup>385</sup> Established here is the individual's relationship with society – in the form of a lattice of

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<sup>383</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of "Political Reason"' (Stanford, California, 1979), p. 225.

<sup>384</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 136.

<sup>385</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 90.



power relations – as one of opposition<sup>386</sup> that takes the form of fundamental struggle. The individual becomes locked into a perpetual battle against uninterrupted processes of coercion,<sup>387</sup> a battleground wherein discipline’s “small acts of cunning” proliferate in their “malevolence”.<sup>388</sup> In particular, this ‘malevolence’<sup>389</sup> is specifically due to the transformation of everything into an account, which is to say that it is concerned with both the rationalisation and particularly the instrumentalisation<sup>390</sup> of the individual into the form of a subject. Subjection *qua* being a subject here comes to be synonymous with the integration of the individual – particularly as a body<sup>391</sup> – into the social machinery. Through the individualising mechanisms of discipline (and later, pastoral power), Hanssen argues that Foucault comes to define power in terms of “struggle, perpetual war, force, or domination”, specifically in terms of an “arena of multiple force fields” that are concerned with “strategic instrumentality”.<sup>392</sup> This conflation with war goes deeper, forming a definitive explication of power in terms of *pouvoir/guerre*, which is made explicit by Hanssen’s contention that “Foucault reconceptualised the technologies of power in military terms”<sup>393</sup> as strategies and tactics. Drawing specifically on Nietzsche, Foucault gives an account of power that was “to be conceived in terms of relation of force...in strategy, struggle, conflict, and war.”<sup>394</sup> This is nowhere more explicit than within Foucault’s contention that tactics (which are themselves part of a politics-war relation)<sup>395</sup> are “no doubt the highest form of disciplinary practice.”<sup>396</sup> For this Foucault, not only is power identical with violence, but this violence is within the form of the subject as subjection (*assujettir*) itself.

Within the early Foucault, *assujettissement* is specifically understood as the rendering of an individual as a passive subject. Throughout *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault’s treatment of disciplinary and pastoral power is articulated in terms of how these forces both constitute and are expressions of regimes of power. These regimes propagate and stabilise themselves through the

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<sup>386</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 90.

<sup>387</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 137.

<sup>388</sup> Both quotes are from Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 139.

<sup>389</sup> It is notable that this term is in scare quotes within Foucault’s text.

<sup>390</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 138.

<sup>391</sup> With this forming the roots of his notion of biopower.

<sup>392</sup> All quotes from Hanssen, p. 31.

<sup>393</sup> Hanssen, p. 114.

<sup>394</sup> Hanssen, p. 112.

<sup>395</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 168.

<sup>396</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 168.

pacification of the individual, through their subjection to various disciplinary mechanisms and practices. As a process of pacification, such mechanisms come to impugn the agency of the individual, and the interdiction against freedom so constituted by disciplinary power is understood by Foucault as a form of discursive violence. The violence of disciplinary regimes is rooted within their invasion of personal freedoms, through the numerous ways in which such regimes operate as strictures that close off and limit the political field of human possibility. This is reflected within disciplinary power's desire to eliminate ambiguity<sup>397</sup> – which is to say its motivation to secure a fixed, immovable grid of intelligibility – and further in Foucault's consideration of the bodily technology of exercise as a movement towards “a subjection that has never reached its limit.”<sup>398</sup>

It is on these grounds that Foucauldian politics comes to be described as a politics of emancipation, conceptualising the relationship between the individual and power as antagonistic. In this spirit Foucault characterises, in the opening pages of his section on punishment, any individual offence against the domination of a regime of power as “opposing an individual to the entire social body.”<sup>399</sup> Though Foucault avowedly denounces the politics of liberation,<sup>400</sup> and thus does not conceptualise his project of emancipation as seeking an escape from power itself, antagonism as a definitive quality of power relationships appears to run to the core of this Foucault. Within this context, Foucault explicates power in terms of struggle – presenting political activity as a Nietzschean contest between individuals and their ‘will to truth’. Within this Foucault, the eventmentality of history becomes emphasised within the particularity of the individual and their struggle to resist the domination of others (which in itself is not wholly distinct from dominating those others in turn). Both *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality* vol. 1 speak of a forceful economy of *assujettissement* that pacifies bodies through disciplinary mechanisms of subjection.<sup>401</sup> Fundamentally, regimes of power, with their universal aspirations commit disciplinary violence against individuals in order to sustain themselves.<sup>402</sup> It is within this context that Foucault comes to consider *assujettissement* itself as violating and violent, as the destruction or rupture of an individual's particularity through their transformation into a subject. Under the cover of peace,

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<sup>397</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 145.

<sup>398</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 162.

<sup>399</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 90.

<sup>400</sup> We have discussed this in more detail in a previous chapter.

<sup>401</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 138.

<sup>402</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 164.

particularly the peace of liberalism and its normative structures,<sup>403</sup> raged a fundamental state of war that, despite the proximity into which it draws Foucault and Hobbes, Foucault continually refused to treat as a transcendent, and thus normative, ground.<sup>404</sup> Though these bellicose undertones run throughout the aforementioned texts, they culminate in a vision of politics that roots political activity within the analogy of war expressed no more clearly than within *Il faut défendre la société* (1976), wherein Foucault comes to suggest that war should “be considered as a primary and fundamental state of things”.<sup>405</sup> The field of power becomes co-terminate with a battleground – the staging for conflicts between individuals.

Despite Foucault’s resistance to both normativity and the politics of liberation, elements of both remain at the root of his work during this period. This is nowhere better exemplified with this sedimentation of perpetual and fundamental violence into his conception of power as war. Within the *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, Foucault’s articulation of the technologies of sex serves to blur (if not outright abolish) the distinction between politics and war, wherein there was not only always the possibility that one could become the other, but furthermore that war was always implicit within power, inscribed within the political itself. Foucault tries to distinguish this notion of underlying warfare from the universalistic account provided by Hobbes – charging his state of nature with an ‘idealism’ that abstracted Hobbes’ war of all against all from historical warfare.<sup>406</sup> Conceptualising this as the reason why Hobbes obscures the violence within civil society itself, Foucault shifts to an analysis of power-as-warfare that thereby considers (or, perhaps more accurately presumes) that beneath the semblance of peace rages a deep level of warfare. Not only does this treatment of warfare appear to be – despite Foucault’s assertions to the contrary – highly normative, in so far as he supplants whatever universalism he sees within the dialectic for a narrative of perpetual battle, but Foucault further betrays his own critique of Hobbes in so far as he turns to analyse the structure of the belligerent subject, rather than historical accounts of war.<sup>407</sup> Here there is enough of a rupture between Foucault’s present practice and his historicising commitments, and in his consideration of the subject as fundamentally belligerent that there remains a curiously normative

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<sup>403</sup> Again, Foucault attributes these with an immanent trajectory towards totalitarianism, see: Hanssen, p. 145.

<sup>404</sup> Hanssen, p. 136.

<sup>405</sup> Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rainbow, trans. by Robert Hurley, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984* (New York: New York Press, 1994), I, p. 60.

<sup>406</sup> Hanssen, p. 126.

<sup>407</sup> Hanssen, p. 128.

tone. It becomes unclear on what grounds this Foucault's treatment of war as a fundamental condition or foundational, explanatory framework, can escape the accusations of universalism and generalisation, and thereby the accusations of metaphysical violence, that they levy against the dialectic.

This framework of fundamental war comes to structure all intersubjective relationships as antagonistic, and as such comes to provide something of a foundation to the relationship between the individual and external power. Upon this framework, power takes on an almost wholly invasive and restrictive quality – constituting the individual as a locus of contestation against the pacifying force of subjection. According to this framing of the constitutive relationships of the subject, the very notion of being subjected becomes viewable as a form of violence, in so far as the plural processes of subjection are definitively pacifying. The transition from the 'bare' individual to the subject as a subjugated being is a transformation through discursive violence. In so far as Foucault's project aims towards the realisation of freedom, his resistance to normativity becomes a resistance (though perhaps not an avowed one) to subjection itself, and thus orients his work as opposed to power-as-war such that a critique of the former can be envisioned to free the individual. The formulation of this contest is again repeated by Foucault's focal shift towards the technologies of the self. If disciplinary power is best understood as passive *assujettissement*, a form of subject creation that invades from the outside, we can contrast the technologies of the self as a form of active *assujettissement*. These technologies are practices through which individuals can constitute themselves as subjects, specifically ethical subjects within the context of this Foucault. Though we can here note a transition away from the status of the subject as itself negative, what remains is a disparity between the active and passive forms of this subject. The technologies of the self are established as techniques through which an individual can come to resist forms of external power, particularly those of governmentality and pastoral power. So, whilst we have active and passive dimensions to *assujettissement*, these are bifurcated in so far as they stand in direct competition with one another. On this staging of their relationship with the pacifying force of external power, the individual subject becomes embroiled within a project of continual resistance – and the relationship between this project and the power it seeks to resist is fundamentally antagonistic. Active and passive processes of *assujettissement* thereby appear to produce two distinct forms of the subject, between which the individual is locked in a perpetual 'tug of war'. This not only remains within the

paradigm of perpetual struggle, but continues to attribute to the pacifying force of external power an invasive, corrupting, and violent role.

But just as we can read within Foucault's corpus a transition from a conceptualisation of power as fundamentally war, as a contest between individual wills to truth, towards a conceptualisation of power as the (pre)condition for freedom – we can read the changes in Foucault's work as moving towards a dialectical position. This line can be traced specifically through following his treatment of the subject, particularly with the many dimensions acquired by his concept of *assujettissement*.

Yet, alongside the bifurcation of *assujettissement*, Foucault's account of power undergoes a specific reformulation – particularly in terms of the power/resistance relation. Between the completion of the first and second volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault revises his conception of power in his essay 'The Subject and Power', whereby he recontextualises his concern with power in terms of the subject, going as far as stating that "it is not power but the subject which is the general theme of my research".<sup>408</sup> Breaking from his previous considerations, wherein power is continually discussed in terms of its violating and restrictive role, Foucault comes to impose a distinction between power and violence.<sup>409</sup> Power no longer acts directly upon another person and thus cannot be collapsed into the vision of subjection we are shown in *Discipline and Punish*, but indirectly through impacting upon the field of possible action.<sup>410</sup> Rather than acting as a pacifying *assujettissement*, over and against which the individual is called to actively subjectify themselves, freedom itself becomes inscribed within power – as Foucault states that "Power is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are free".<sup>411</sup> Power is thereby no longer spoken of as that which penetratively violates the subject, but the spatial imagery now depicts power's influence as around and not on the individual. Power thus comes to influence another as a subject, as a locus of actions, but not as an individual, which is to say as a body. Conversely, violence becomes definitively distinct from power through its direct action upon the body, and is understood both as an exclusive closure of possibility and as a fundamentally pacifying force.<sup>412</sup> Whereas

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<sup>408</sup> Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', p. 778.

<sup>409</sup> This distinction is close to a similar distinction introduced by Arendt in *Crises of the Republic*, written a decade before, see: Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic: Lying in Politics, Civil Disobedience, On Violence, Thoughts on Politics and Revolution* (USA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1972), chap. On Violence.

<sup>410</sup> Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', p. 789.

<sup>411</sup> Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', p. 790.

<sup>412</sup> Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', p. 789.

previously Foucault grounded his account of power upon a notion of violent force, displaced from fundamental war into the peaceful semblance of politics, he now contends that violence does not “constitute the principle or the basic nature of power.”<sup>413</sup>

Within this paper, power becomes grounded in freedom due to its mutually constitutive relationship with resistance. This is Foucault’s point when he states that freedom is “the condition for the exercise of power” and also “its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted”.<sup>414</sup> Though at points Foucault appears to maintain an antagonism between power and freedom (such as that which will remain implicitly throughout his articulations of the technologies of the self),<sup>415</sup> Foucault does contend that “The relationship between power and freedom’s refusal to submit” should be understood in terms of “an agonism – of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle.”<sup>416</sup> Though the notion of struggle is retained, there is a noticeable shift between the antagonistic struggle implicated within a framing of power as indistinguishable from war and the framing of power as mutually constitutive with freedom. Indeed, it is precisely through this co-extensive relationship between power and freedom-as-resistance that Foucault demonstrates his inability to conduct a definitive break with the dialectic – as on his account power and resistance are constituted dialectically. To attribute the dialectic here is to say that power and resistance are implicated within one another – that their very constitution is one of a dependence upon their inter-relation. As John Grant phrases it, Foucault reformulates the power/resistance relationship into “one of reciprocity, antagonism and production”<sup>417</sup> simultaneously. Though I would challenge Grant’s use of antagonism, contending instead that the relationship here is definitively agonistic, I concur with Grant’s wider contention that Foucault’s formulation can be translated into dialectical language without this translation distorting his point.

This kind of dialectical translation is also conducted by Hanssen in her reading of Foucault’s developing power/violence relation, wherein she explicitly claims that his explication “followed the consecutive dialectical moments that punctuated Hegel’s master-bondsman dialectic”, a comparison that

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<sup>413</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 789.

<sup>414</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 790.

<sup>415</sup> For example his concern with institutionalised morality being at odds with the individual, see: Michel Foucault, ‘Technologies of the Self’, *Foucault.Info*, 1988, p. 22

<<http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesofself.en.html>> [accessed 4 January 2016].

<sup>416</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 790.

<sup>417</sup> John Grant, ‘Foucault and the Logic of Dialectics’, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 9.2 (2010), 220–38 (p. 228).

she contends is “Almost step by step”.<sup>418</sup> Specifically, her claim is that Foucault’s transition between a state of total struggle to the institutionalised, momentary stabilisation of a relationship between the dominated and the dominator within power matches the establishing moves for Hegel’s Lordship and Bondage. This is to say that Foucault’s historical commitments aside, his developing account of power assumes the form of a proto-Hegelian narrative. This approximation of Foucauldian power into a Hegelian paradigm is useful for my considerations, not only due to the clear proximity into which it draws these things but furthermore because it allows me to map into Foucault a movement comparable to one I have traced within Hegel. Specifically, this movement is between a condition fundamentally characterised by antagonism to one of agonism – which is to say a development from a characterisation of intersubjective relationships as hostile, to one which both appreciates and respects their manifold tensions but that nevertheless refuses to reify these tensions into the foundations of a schematic. Thereby, my suggestion here becomes that Foucault’s project comes into proximity with a framework of intersubjectivity as communicative. Though Foucault does not reduce power to communication,<sup>419</sup> the distinction introduced between power and violence constitutes a deliberate theoretical move away from power as war and struggle whereby intersubjectivity is (*à la* Lordship and Bondage) bellicose towards a notion of exchange that can take the form of contest and competition, but is never reduced to either of these.

Not only do power and resistance thus come to dialectically constitute one another, each requiring the other in order to function – and we must of course remember that the ‘how’ of power is fundamental for Foucault<sup>420</sup> – but Foucault explicitly uses the term recognition during his explication of this. One of the two indispensable elements of power is that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly **recognised** and maintained to the very end as a person who acts.”<sup>421</sup> His use of this term here is consistent with his later use of recognition as a mode of subjection (*assujettissement*) in the *History of Sexuality* vol. 2, wherein he states that different modes of ethical conduct concern “the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and **recognises** himself as obliged to put it

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<sup>418</sup> Hanssen, p. 156.

<sup>419</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 786.

<sup>420</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, pp. 785–86.

<sup>421</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 789.

into practice.”<sup>422</sup> These two uses of recognition – though not explicitly used in the Hegelian sense – bring it into proximity, in the first case, with power and, in the second, with *assujettissement*. The context in which recognition is mentioned in conjunction to *assujettissement* is at the beginning of Foucault’s consideration of the ethical subject – which is to say at the point where his project begins to focus upon the active modality of *assujettissement*. However, its first use, within ‘The Subject and Power’ aligns recognition with power as the interstice of the dialectically constituted relationship of domination and resistance. This is to say that *assujettissement* can be understood with reference to a process of recognition, which is to say that it operates as a pacifying influence upon another as an agent (and is thus at least partially restrictive) but that it is also part of the very active form of subject formation for which Foucault advocates with his considerations of the technologies of the self.<sup>423</sup>

That the term recognition itself appears to do much of the same work as Foucault’s *assujettissement* (even if they are not entirely interchangeable), when combined with the ease with which Foucault’s power/resistance relationship can be seamlessly translated into dialectical language opens the space for a reading of Foucault that overcomes his self-avowed break from Hegel. If Foucault’s concern with recognition is rooted in the normative closure enacted by dialectical reason, and specifically by the implicit violence within this, then this concern becomes either problematised or dismissed by Foucault’s modification of his account of power. If we read recognition as a Hegelian expression that is more or less coextensive with Foucault’s *assujettissement* – a comparison that becomes less dramatic if we consider the latent dialectic within Foucault – then Foucault’s endorsement of an active *assujettissement* indicates that there is space for a similar acceptance for at least some account of recognition. This maps a more general development in Foucault, a movement from the negative view of the subject as the passive product of disciplinary power towards a more positive view of the subject as an aesthetic project of self-production. My suggestion then, is that perhaps Foucault’s concern with the false universalism of the dialectic and its recognitive subject is less rooted within its violent normativity, but within a deeper concern with the very notion of subjectivity altogether – one that is expressed in the tension between his

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<sup>422</sup> Emphasis mine, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (New York: Vintage, 1990), II, p. 27.

<sup>423</sup> Particularly in so far as these technologies are concerned with the hermeneutics of the self, see: Foucault, ‘Technologies of the Self’, p. 19.



avowed interest in political freedom and his use of the term subjection, which itself suggests some incompatibility between the two.

Therefore, Foucauldian *assujettissement* refuses to make the subject determinant, which is to say that it neither prescribes a narrow formulation of the subject, nor does it imbue this subject with a specific form but instead names a collection of ways by which subjects are produced through an interplay of power and resistance. The same is true of recognition, the process of which is concerned with the formulation and articulation of a transitive subject within a specifically historical context. In both cases, the subject is a mutable site of contestation, never a settled product and always open to further elaboration – the nature of which takes place as an agonistic interplay between self and other (in the Hegelian sense) or power and resistance (in Foucauldian terms).

Furthermore, Foucault's attempt to escape normativity fails, at least in the sense that there remains an implicit, normative schematic for *assujettissement* within his power/resistance dialectic. This formulates *assujettissement* as a mediation between power and its inevitable points of resistance, which is itself a translation of the productive role given to negativity within dialectical transformation. This is to suggest that the kind of normative structure I am articulating within my account of recognitive identity is not at odds with Foucault's persistent resistance to normativity, for it is neither a deterministic, nor a naturalised, normativity that imbues the subject with a pre-established, positive form, but which premises itself upon a vision of the subject as a site of perpetual contest. This form of contestation amounts to, in Foucauldian terms, the potential reversibility of power relations, particularly through the form of identity politics for which Foucault appears to advocate with his technologies of the self.<sup>424</sup> Indeed, that Foucault formulates the self-occupation of these technologies as fundamentally linked to one's political activity<sup>425</sup> gestures towards a picture that is distinct from the one sketched by his earlier accounts of subjection. Therefore, my claim is that the demonstrably dialectical nature of the power/resistance relation comes to articulate the cultivation of the self, the constitution of the self as an ethical subject,<sup>426</sup> as a project of *assujettissement* that relies upon a fundamentally Hegelian form of mediation between the active and passive modes of this process.

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<sup>424</sup> Hanssen, p. 75.

<sup>425</sup> See: Foucault, "Technologies of the Self", p. 26.

<sup>426</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (New York: Vintage, 1990), III, p. 67.

This is not to suggest that there is no rift between Foucault and Hegel, nor is it to suggest that Foucault's project should be reductively considered as a mere repetition of some form of Hegelianism. My intention here has been restricted to demonstrating that despite the widespread contention that Foucault and Hegel constitute radically different and irreconcilable forms of philosophy there remain thematic points of continuity and even agreement between the two traditions these individuals have come to represent. This is particularly evident in their respective treatments of the subject, wherein the developments in Foucauldian thought I have traced throughout this section bring the breadth of his concerns with power into increasingly greater continuity with the explication of dialectical recognition I am advancing over the course of this thesis as a whole.

## KELLY OLIVER – RECOGNITION AGAINST TESTIMONY

Within her text *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* and the preceding paper 'Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics', Kelly Oliver puts forth her critique of recognition – which she regards as having produced a tradition wherein “its meaning is assumed but not defined or analysed”.<sup>427</sup> Her charges against recognition are many, but can be broadly condensed into two central points: firstly, that recognition is an intellectualisation of intersubjective relationships through the kind of account of the self it requires and secondly, that recognition itself rests upon a notion of the subject as produced by fundamental violence. It is not a distortion of Oliver's text to suggest that these form twin foundations to her concerns. For Oliver, these concerns render recognition unsalvageable, and thereby she seeks to replace it with her alternative account of witnessing. We can thereby read her account of witnessing as her prescribed antidote to the philosophical maladies she sees running throughout recognition. Her texts establish a dichotomy between the recognitive tradition, which Oliver attributes to figures such as Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, and Judith Butler, and her own account of witnessing. This dichotomy is introduced early within her work, and establishes witnessing as a critical counter-position to recognition. Within these recognitive thinkers, Oliver sees the looming spectre of Hegel, the figure she centrally charges with having established the twin foundations of intellectualism and violence. Through conducting an apparent break

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<sup>427</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 4.

with Hegelian recognition (and its numerous shadows), Oliver attempts to affirm a vision of the subject that is freed from the constraints of his framework, allowing us to go beyond recognition.

This section is concerned with the presentation and examination of Oliver's concerns with recognition, as well as her attempts at reparation through the deployment of witnessing. Though I share both her concerns with intellectualisation and her desire to maintain a critical distinction between dialogism and violence, ultimately, I call into question the applicability of her criticisms in so far as these apply to my reading of recognition. Whilst I broadly agree with her insightful critique of the recognitive tradition, I question her placement of Hegel at the head of this tradition. Instead, I seek to demonstrate how her framework of witnessing should be regarded as implicit within the very dialectical framework I am advancing within this thesis. This is both to make a relatively superficial claim that Oliver neither fully breaks herself from Hegel and nor does she need to, but to further contend that what we gain from Oliver's account of witnessing is already implicit within recognition. Despite Oliver's apparent desire to both define and analyse a term the use of which is often assumed, my reading calls into question the terms upon which she claims this lack of analysis – contending that she too readily accepts a continual recognitive tradition across several thinkers, namely Hegel, Taylor, and Honneth. In reading this section, it will therefore be readily apparent that Oliver's conception of recognition greatly differs from the dialectical account developed within this thesis. In particular, the foundational ontology she attributes to recognition itself is, in my view, almost entirely inconsistent with Hegel's text – despite Oliver's overt accusation that this position is neo-Hegelian in nature. Despite the numerous differences I will explore herein, it is useful to attend to Oliver's criticisms due to the salience with which they dissect the recognitive tradition as it has developed post-Hegel. This is to say that whilst I consider Oliver's views on Hegel and, (perhaps to a lesser degree) post-structuralism to be spurious, her work does bring into focus a tradition of recognitive thought against which my own account is positioned.

The first of Oliver's concerns with recognition is centred upon the notion of intellectualisation, whereby one recognises another through a form of intellectual judgement. Fundamentally, she regards this as participating in a process of objectification, wherein the one who is recognised becomes fixed in place as an object of judgement. These recognitive judgements then come to produce a restrictive notion of accountability, wherein a singular account of another's identity is formulated. Though Oliver does not explicate it in these terms, we can think of the difference between witnessing and recognition in terms of

how the former foregrounds response-ability, whereas the latter is primarily focused on account-ability. For Oliver, this at once becomes concerned with a deeper question of epistemology, for she regards the kind of truth pursued and generally at work within this framework of judgement as abstract in so far as it fails to attend its object. This is to say that not only does recognition treat the other as an object, but it reduces its notion of objection such that it become unable to attend to the object with which it claims to be concerned. For Oliver, recognition's framework prefigures the kind of truth it can hear, it is a truth that cannot hear the truth of testimony. This concern is present at the opening of her considerations. Her analysis begins with the Yale Holocaust testimonies, where she cites a distinction between the interview practices of the historians who "were listening to hear confirmation of what they already knew" and the psychoanalysts who were "listening to hear something new, something beyond comprehension."<sup>428</sup> From the very first page of her text, Oliver's concern is with the interstice of truth and accountability, particularly in terms of how these are at once both communicable and incommunicable. In continuity (knowingly or otherwise) with Foucault, Oliver premises her concerns with recognition on its seemingly inherent rationalisation precisely in terms of how others become rationalised, which is to say accounted for.

For Oliver, recognition is primarily an intellectual practice. She thereby reads into recognition itself many paradoxes which not only serve to abstract the intellect from perception,<sup>429</sup> but which also sustain a dichotomy between the subject and the object.<sup>430</sup> Oliver primarily bases this reading on the work of Charles Taylor, for whom "recognition is a type of respect that is conferred or withheld depending on the worth of the individual", and this worth is determined by "not an ethical but an intellectual judgement".<sup>431</sup> On this formulation, recognition takes on an economic dimension, in so far as recognition itself becomes a good that can be bestowed upon or denied to others. Accordingly, an individual's relationship with another acquires a mercantile overture, in so far as the other is perpetually framed as the objected of evaluative appraisal, as subjected to the judgement of another, who then bestows or denies recognition in accordance with that judgement. If we consider the campaigns of identity politics for social

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<sup>428</sup> Both quotes: Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 1.

<sup>429</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 2.

<sup>430</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 3.

<sup>431</sup> Both quotes: Kelly Oliver, 'Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics', *Philosophy Today*, 44.1 (2000), 31–42 (p. 33).

justice in these terms, we are only able to explain these campaigns in terms of the pursuit of this recognitive capital, and political movements such as civil rights become viewed as enterprises wherein those without recognitive wealth petition those who do possess it for a stake. Taylor's recognition produces a model of social justice that exclusively advocates for the assimilation of marginalised people into extant societal matrices, it is a model of participation and inclusion, but its success comes despite difference. Difference can never be valued in and of itself, but only in so far as its 'threat' can be pacified, which is to say how these can be made into a kind of sameness. As such, for Oliver, recognition is crucially unable to deal with difference.

To consider this in light of several of the examples I have drawn from contemporary identity politics thus far throughout the thesis, we can readily see how Taylor's recognition would be completely unsatisfying to many contemporary identity movements. Many of these movements commit themselves to opposing hegemonic structures of identity and (regardless as to their own success in this) this commitment requires a hard rejection of the presumption that underpins Taylor's recognitive framework: that the dominant structure needs no critique, that it merely needs to be more open and inclusive. Of course, this position catastrophically ignores how identity is deeply engrained with political structures, and how these structures of dominance require marginalisation and hegemony to persist.

Oliver highlights the presumptive dominance of Taylor's position, whereby it is only the value of others that is called into question, with the self always established as a judge.<sup>432</sup> As such, despite Taylor's attempts to read struggles for social justice in terms of a series of recognitive demands, the presumption that it is only ever the other that demands recognition belies an intellectual division between the subject and object. This division repeats colonial dynamics, particularly in so far as his appraisals concern 'other' cultures, whose worth becomes valued in so far as they can be seen to have use for us.<sup>433</sup> The same evaluative judgement is never turned upon the self, nor, for Taylor, is it conceivable that the self might seek the recognition of the other. Or, at least, the self that does seek this recognition is already formed as an individual self and it is on the basis of this individuality that their petition for recognition is staked. The result for Oliver is that, despite Taylor's apparent commitment to the self as dialogic, Taylor never

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<sup>432</sup> Oliver, 'Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics', p. 33.

<sup>433</sup> Indeed, this notion underlies a persistent political problematic, see: Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?* (UK: Duke University Press, 2019).

fully considers how the subject and its values are produced within dialogue – for his interlocutors are already fully formed. She further accuses Honneth of the same transgression.<sup>434</sup> Thus, for Oliver, the economy of recognition is abstracted from its subjects, and is intellectual in so far as it is conceived of as a form of judgement that merely concerns this subject's appeal for membership within a political order. Taylor's position squarely supports hegemonic structures of power, and fundamentally appears to believe in the beneficence of these structures, despite their exclusions.<sup>435</sup> His position becomes an endorsement for cultural imperialism in so far as he never seeks to dismantle the sovereign power of signification claimed by dominant culture over those it has marginalised.<sup>436</sup>

This intellectualisation is summarised by Oliver as a framing of the identity projects around the pursuit of empirical facts about the person in question. It is here that we see Oliver's concern with recognition explicitly in terms of its constitution as a practice of accounting for others – of giving an account of subjects. Taylor's recognition seeks to affirm the fundamental humanity of the other, through acquainting the self with the particular qualities of this other such that they can be recognised – which is to say valued through another's appraising judgement – as a particular individual. Oliver contends that this frame presumes a pre-existent individual, and thereby denies the dialogic foundations that Taylor claims. However, Oliver's objection to Taylor goes beyond a mere accusation that recognition implies an individualistic ontology of the self. Just as the historian listened for the confirmation of previously-known facts, recognition not only attends to what the person is in terms of seeing to learn about them, it prefigures what they are or what they can be. We have already seen traces of this within the subject/object and self/other dichotomies that appear to underpin Taylor's account of recognition. Through its preoccupation with empirical truth, recognition becomes blind to the deeper truths that constitute another's subject position, that constitute the lived experience of history. This is Oliver's concern in her consideration of the Yale Holocaust Testimonies – that in listening with the sole intention of corroborating empirical accounts of the past, the listeners were unable to understand the lived truth of history – they were unable to bear witness.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Oliver, 'Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics', p. 35.

<sup>435</sup> Oliver, 'Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics', p. 34.

<sup>436</sup> This is noted in Oliver's treatment of a quote by Patricia Williams, see: Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, p. 72.

<sup>437</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 17.

As a practice of intellectual judgement, recognition is concerned with the comprehension of the other as an object, which is to say that it is concerned with the articulation of a fixed account of the individual. Recognition seeks to confirm the facticity of another's identity, but the terms upon which these facts are constituted, which is to say the very conditions of knowledge themselves, go unexamined. Through so constituting recognition as an intellectual practice and thereby abstracting it from lived experience, Taylor's account provides an economistic vision of identity that fundamentally leaves its subjective dimensions untouched and which is crucially unable to call into question the values that constitute the position from which the judge determines who is worthy of being recognised.

This is to say that Oliver's criticism of recognition's inherent rationalisation relies on attributing to recognition an underlying ontology of the kind I have already criticised within this thesis. Through taking Taylor and Honneth's visions of pre-extant individuals and characterising all recognitive relationships in terms of an alienating and objectifying vision that affirms the subject/object dichotomy, Oliver very clearly regards recognition as a form of reification. As I have demonstrated in my First Chapter, this vision of recognition itself constitutes a significant break from Hegel's project and is wholly incompatible with my account of the dialectical self.

Rationalisation is problematised by Oliver in terms that parallel – if they do not exactly replicate – Foucault's criticisms of normativity. As discussed in the preceding section, Foucault regards power and knowledge as intertwined and co-productive. His concern is with the inherent violence of normativity, especially through the mechanisms of power that are brought into place to sustain the norms. Oliver's concern mirrors this, in so far as she is continuously wary of recognition's desire to render subjects comprehensible. She continually positions witnessing in terms of seeing something beyond comprehension,<sup>438</sup> for witnessing overcomes the constraints of recognition through refusing to posit the self as something fixed that needs to be discovered. This is precisely why she subtitles her project with "Beyond Recognition". Oliver's resistance to comprehension should not be taken as a rejection of meaning, or a resistance to any treatment of identity altogether, but specifically as a rejection of a closed, underlying ontology she reads into the recognitive tradition. Though the framing of this ontology and

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<sup>438</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 1.

her specific criticisms of it do not share the form (or, crucially, the depth) of Foucault's archaeology, the two projects share a similar trajectory.

Yet, despite her clear proximity to Foucault's work, Oliver distances herself from Foucault and other post-structuralists due to their general configurations of the subject, particularly in so far as these thinkers ground the subject in violence. This reworking allows us to read the dichotomy between recognising and witnessing in terms of a dichotomy between violence and dialogism. As I have noted, Oliver has an explicit concern with preserving a vision of the individual that is grounded in dialogic exchange and mutuality, and this is dichotomised with violence in so far as she treats anything that erodes this dialogic ground as a form of violence. This is her own repetition of an argument that has extended throughout various schools of philosophy – which posits that the erosion of dialogue constitutes a destruction of the individual,<sup>439</sup> for dialogism and violence are mutually exclusive and incompatible.<sup>440</sup> As such, it is not only the post-structuralists she accuses of endorsing violence, but any who betray this dialogic foundation. Somewhat perversely, Oliver attributes a major locus of this betrayal to Hegelian philosophy, which is to say that it is a sin she perceives both within his work and in any work influenced by him. Oliver thereby accuses Hegel, Honneth, Butler, and Kristeva of regarding the subject as the result of a hostile conflict.<sup>441</sup> Despite the veracity of Oliver's critique of Taylor and Honneth, wherein she demonstrates the shortcomings of their recognition and the tradition their work inspires, her work makes a major misstep by viewing Hegel as the origin of Taylor's recognition. Though Taylor undoubtedly draws upon Hegel when presenting his own account of recognition,<sup>442</sup> the attribution of Taylor's position to Hegel himself (and thereby to any others who have drawn on Hegel – though not through Taylor) requires a false equivocation. Through her reading, Oliver presents a canon of recognition that ignores the numerous ways in which Taylor (as well as Honneth) ventriloquise Hegel, which is to say that she ignores the work to which Hegel's philosophy is being put.<sup>443</sup> Instead, both thinkers appear to be viewed as if they speak directly with Hegel's voice. This is to contend that whatever traction Oliver's critiques may have

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<sup>439</sup> Importantly, this brings Oliver into contact with the division between politics (or power) and violence that runs throughout Hannah Arendt's political philosophy. We shall explore this in greater detail in the following chapter.

<sup>440</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 5.

<sup>441</sup> Oliver, 'Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics', pp. 31–32.

<sup>442</sup> See: Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>443</sup> The manifold distinction between Taylor's recognition and that of Hegel will be explored in further detail in the following section.



with the visions of recognition presented by Taylor and Honneth,<sup>444</sup> her criticisms fail to find purchase on recognition as I understand it, especially in so far as they concern Hegel.

Underpinning Oliver's critique of Hegel and the post-structuralists as apologists for violence is a philosophical commitment that "we cannot conceive of subjectivity as both fundamentally antagonistic and fundamentally dialogic"<sup>445</sup> at once. Oliver's notion of dialogism is explicated with reference to her understanding of witnessing as a fundamental character for intersubjective relationships, particularly in so far as witnessing centralises and affirms a rich sense of individual response-ability. She particularly accuses Taylor, Honneth, and Butler of this, though extends her diagnosis of their inability to conceptualise this response-ability to their respective uses of Hegel, the influence of whom Oliver accuses of having made "it difficult to distinguish between domination and enslavement that are inherent in the process of becoming a subject and oppression that is not necessary."<sup>446</sup> Hegel and the post-structuralists are accused of presenting the foundations of the self as fundamentally war-like.

Oliver's commitment to distinguishing between fundamental antagonism and fundamental dialogism (a distinction I support in my own reading) imbues her work with a strong motivation against structures of oppression and domination. It is on these grounds that she rejects recognition as she regards this as a direct inheritance of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic. Given the overt domination within this relationship, recognition can at best serve as a kind of apologism for oppression or, at worst, as either a justification or an endorsement. If the master/slave dialectic is the origin and basic structure for all recognition, then the foundation of the subject is violent. Here, we can note Oliver's resistance to Butler's "original trauma of subject formation"<sup>447</sup> (and furthermore to the earlier Foucault's *assujettissement*)<sup>448</sup> in terms of how they repeat the framing of the subject she reads into Lordship and Bondage: the incorporation of domination and violation into the core of the subject's formation and condition. For Oliver, to regard the foundation of subjectivity as constituted by violent antagonism, or to view the political field as populated with warring others (a view she attributes to post-structuralism more

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<sup>444</sup> This thesis is structured in such a way that it cannot adequately address these criticisms, and I thereby do not seek to provide any extended analysis of their work herein.

<sup>445</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 5.

<sup>446</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 4.

<sup>447</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 66.

<sup>448</sup> As regards Foucault, it appears as if Oliver fails to quite grasp his use of the term subject. As we have discussed, the earlier Foucault views the subject's condition as subjected, and hence seeks to affirm the individual. Oliver is clearly using the term subject in her own work in a distinct way to Foucault.

broadly)<sup>449</sup> is not only to justify violence, but it is furthermore to violate the dialogic foundations of the individual. These views culminate in Oliver's contention that oppression destroys subjectivity and it is on this ground that she rejects recognition as perpetuating domination through the influence of the master/slave dialectic.

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, readings of Hegel's section Lordship and Bondage frequently partake in and contribute to a tradition of reading Hegel that abstracts this philosophical moment from its wider context within the *Phenomenology*. It is clear from Oliver's reading that her own treatment of it is no exception, as she demonstrably attributes to Hegel a view of the subject as fundamentally rooted within a matrix of master and slave, of dominator and dominated. For Oliver, Hegelian recognition straightforwardly is the dynamic presented within the master/slave dialectic (for this is where all recognition returns us)<sup>450</sup> and it is in this claim that she makes her greatest misstep. She fails to read the relationship of Lordship and Bondage in its context, and thereby not only comes to view it as the origin of the Hegelian subject (a position that flatly ignores all the earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*) but also regards this imbalance as something that Hegel endorses (which is to read the *Phenomenology* as if it ends with this section). We have already explored in greater detail how Hegel's schematic presents the imbalance and oppression of Lordship and Bondage specifically in terms of its incompleteness, how it is definitively a moment that must be surpassed. The dynamic of Lordship and Bondage is one that is constructed upon oppression and division, which diminished and limits both the Bondsman and the Lord. But neither of these figures are naturalised into their positions, and the violence committed at this moment is neither the origin of the subject, nor is it to be retained as both a perpetual and primordial ground of subjectivity. This is to say that any account of recognition that bases itself upon Lordship and Bondage does not reflect the expansive dynamics of Hegel's own use of the term. This creates a gulf between Hegel and Oliver's readings of Taylor and Honneth, but furthermore creates a deeper division between the kind of recognition so ardently critiqued by Oliver and my own conception.

Though Oliver does affirm that the master/slave dialectic is only one philosophical stage, she outright dismisses subsequent stages on the sole grounds that they are superseded by reason.<sup>451</sup> This is

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<sup>449</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 5.

<sup>450</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 9.

<sup>451</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 28.

the key ground upon which she distinguishes Hegel from Frantz Fanon, for the latter seeks to overcome domination through love.<sup>452</sup> For Oliver, this is enough to view Hegel as totally complicit in the intellectualisation of the other, a move that completely fails to appreciate the very specifically Hegelian usage of the term reason. For Hegel, reason is not to be regarded as an abstraction from the conditions of one's life, and as such, does not neatly fall into the pattern of judgement Taylor seeks to establish.

Yet Oliver does not attack Hegel on the grounds of violence alone, but further contends that Hegel's work depicts a recognition that is fundamentally intellectualised. Her contentions concerning this are made most explicitly in her discussion of vision. Oliver conceptualises vision and the ability to be seen as fundamentally to the process of witnessing. Vision takes on a fundamentally intersubjective quality for Oliver, wherein she conceptualises it in terms of an individual's response-ability to relationships and exchanges of social energy.<sup>453</sup> Vision as conceptualised in terms of witnessing is an openness, as a point of connection between two individuals that bears witness to this other, that does not attempt to determine them, to recognise them on any pre-figured terms. For Oliver, this bridging vision is precisely what Hegel makes impossible in his account of recognition.<sup>454</sup> Though she does not deny any process of vision between the master and slave, she characterises this vision as fundamentally alienating, as a vision that is premised precisely on the transformation of the other into an object to be recognised.

It is clear that Oliver's reading of Hegel differs substantially from that which has been advanced in previous chapters of this thesis. Not only does her use of Hegel partake in a tradition that I view as guilty of having abstracted Lordship and Bondage (the result of which is her impoverished reading as discussed here) but she further appears to suppress any and all of the dialectical and historical commitments explicit within Hegel's project. In light of my reading of the dialectical self, it is clear that not only is the objectification Oliver persistently reads into recognition unnecessary, but it is fundamentally incompatible with the very notion of the subject with which I am working.

Underlying Oliver's resistance to comprehension lies a nascent form of naturalism. Though she is keen to affirm the dialogic grounds of the individual subject, Oliver frames witnessing as a form of vision. Critically, this vision is distinct from the alienating process of recognition as it does not turn the

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<sup>452</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 42.

<sup>453</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 14.

<sup>454</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 15.

other into an object of judgement. The rejection of judgement itself is crucial in this account precisely because it is not a reworking of the terms in which the practice of judgement is conceived. Instead, Oliver takes Taylor's account of judgement as definitive, and critiques the process of comprehending another as narrow. Though Oliver does not overtly claim that recognition is distortive of those it recognises, this claim lies implicit within her explication of recognition as a narrowing and a collapse of identity. Through her rejection of comprehension as regards others, Oliver can be read to conduct a separation from both my reading of Hegel and my account of recognition, but one that further betrays the dialogic foundations she so adamantly defends. We should recall that it is the betrayal of these foundations that fuels her suspicions of post-structuralist thinking. It is crucial to my discursive conception of the self that identity remains the output of a form of judgement, that identity is a way of rendering the subject comprehensible and intelligible to others. Though practices of categorisation do often collapse into non-dialectical, essentialist uses (as we have seen across the breadth of examples taken from contemporary identity politics), the affirmation of the communicable self is central to my framework. Through denying comprehension of others, through premising so much of her account on persistent gesturing to some vague 'beyond', Oliver excises a fundamental framework of communicability from intersubjective relationships. It is unclear how Oliver's account of response-ability can claim the explanatory power Oliver wishes if it dispenses with judgement altogether. The result of these shortcomings appear to be that, in spite of her persistent attempts to affirm the fundamental dialogism of the self, Oliver's account effectively ends up collapsing into a naïve phenomenology, whereby our intention is to view another 'as they are' rather than how we understand them. Though she does not naturalise the other into empirical facts, Oliver still seems to affirm the purity of this unmediated other that has not been distorted by comprehension.

It is clear that Oliver's rejection of comprehension is not an attempt to escape the signification of the self, or to escape meaning more broadly. In her treatment of Fanon, Oliver is clear that signification is important, even going as far as to say "In overcoming oppression not recognition but meaning making is at stake."<sup>455</sup> Though this comment is not fully explicated throughout the course of her text, it does introduce a curious distinction between recognition and meaning, which is to say between the production

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<sup>455</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, p. 29.

of meaning through witnessing and the comprehension of another through recognition. As with several of Oliver's distinctions, it is unclear how able this is to do her desired critical work. Recognition on dialectical terms is overtly concerned with the ability of individuals to participate within public meaning, which is not to be passively signified, but to actively create, sustain, and change such meanings. Furthermore, this is importantly not at odds with Hegel's project either – especially given his accounts of community and spirit.

It is clear that Oliver's criticisms are targeting a very different account of recognition to my own and though the terms upon which she extends this criticism are in places questionable, her works further establishes the distinction between my account and the recognitive tradition as presented by Taylor and Honneth.

## PATCHEN MARKELL – RECOGNITION AND EXISTENTIAL TEMPORALITY

Following Foucault and Oliver, Patchen Markell's text *Bound by Recognition* conducts an incisive critique of 'the politics of recognition'. Through this project, Markell seeks to replace the limiting framework of recognition with his concept of acknowledgement – which attends to the existential dimensions of human experience. Much like Oliver, Markell specifically ties this politic to the works of Taylor; however, unlike Oliver, Markell's treatment of Hegel is definitively as a critic of this recognitive tradition. This is to say that there is a divide between Markell's Hegel and this tradition such that Hegel is not considered to be a proponent of what Markell calls recognition. He thereby allows Taylor, and other contributors to this tradition (such as Honneth) to claim recognition as their own term, though reads into their work a significant break from Hegel's project. This effectively serves to decentre the recognitive tradition, which is typically formulated with Hegel at its heart,<sup>456</sup> a move that creates further room for questioning whether criticisms of recognition always necessarily target Hegel. Whereas I have chosen to retain the moniker of recognition in this thesis, thereby developing my project with a distinct nominalism from Markell's, there remain numerous points of commonality between our projects in so far as we are concerned with distinguishing between Hegel's work and the traditions it has inspired.

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<sup>456</sup> Indeed, this is precisely the formulation we have already seen in Oliver's reading.

I read Markell's critique of recognition as particularly salient in terms of how it explicates this tradition in such a way as to draw it into proximity with my concerns with identity enclosure. Markell frames the politics of recognition as a pathological 'development' from identity as process towards identity as possession, thereby drawing his critique of recognition into a close relation with my treatment of reification, which is further underpinned by his presentation of recognition as mired in a naïve framework of facticity. This facticity frames the politics of recognition such that it becomes pre-occupied with understanding others correctly or accurately. For Markell, this rests upon a particular vision of individuality, specifically in so far as this concerns a conception of the individual that rests in a total autonomy that Markell refers to as sovereign agency. Much of his project is devoted to criticism of this naïve understanding of agency, and central to his advancing this argument is the work of Hannah Arendt,<sup>457</sup> thereby positioning his work perfectly (for this thesis) at the interstice between questions of political identity and political spatiality. However, Markell ultimately regards the spatial lexis embedded within the politics of recognition to be one of its most potent bindings – serving as a tired and limited explanatory framework. This is the point of greatest divergence between his project and my own – for Markell seeks to stress the temporal, and therefore existential, dimensions of identity rather than the spatial. My response to this is to at first agree that spatiality as presented within his politics of recognition is impoverished, but to contend that this requires not the rejection of political space altogether, but its reconceptualisation. In particular, I call into question the assumed distinction, both within the recognitive tradition and Markell's own thought, between spatiality and temporality, contending that in order to have a fully realised account of either, one must understand these as dialectically linked. Of particular use here is Arendt's work.

Furthermore, Markell's politics of recognition have a deeper commonality with my conceptualisation of identity enclosure. Though his project does not share my precise interest in identity politics (indeed, we could broadly consider Markell in line with those thinkers that reject identity politics altogether), his work touches upon my aforementioned concerns with the penchant of identity enclosure for reification, essentialism, and the abstraction of individuals and their activity from political space. We

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<sup>457</sup> Markell's treatment of Arendt is distinct from her appearance in Hanssen's text, the latter of which regarded Arendt as a typical example of political liberalism. My thesis considers this positioning as suspect.

can here note the parallels between Markell's interventions and my concerns with both phantom essentialism and objectification of the self. However, Markell does not develop his framework to examine identity discourses specifically, but is instead concerned with the recognitive tradition's claim to explanatory power over conditions of oppression and injustice. This is to say that the scope of his project has a narrower focus than mine own. He contends, *contra* Charles Taylor, that this politics is therefore unable to deal with the ongoing campaigns of social justice. Of course, I agree with this contention, though seek to develop this critique within this thesis in so far as it specifically targets identity politics. Just as I regard identity enclosure as at best a sustainer of oppression and injustice and at worst complicit in it, Markell contends that recognition has become "a medium of injustice".<sup>458</sup> I thereby read Markell's politics of recognition alongside my concerns with the pathologies of contemporary identity enclosure and seek to affirm the mutuality of his articulation of acknowledgement with my conception of the dialectical self. Acknowledgement shall be a necessary component of recognition – albeit a limiting one if taken in isolation or if abstracted from political space.

This section will therefore examine Markell's text *Bound by Recognition*, with particular focus on his distinction between recognition and Hegel, and the rootedness of this within his criticism of sovereign agency. Though Markell maintains some distance between himself and Hegel, I will further demonstrate the proximity of our projects in so far as they concern political abstraction. My two major points of contention with Markell will be treated as follows: Firstly, I shall demonstrate the salience of retaining a recognitive account of the self, though through its dialectical nature this account will be significantly distinct from that of the politics of recognition. Secondly, I consider his rejection of political spatiality in favour of temporality, arguing that without the spatial element, Markell's temporal politics of impropriety proves itself to be as impoverished as those cartographic accounts he seeks to criticise.

The target of Markell's criticism, the politics of recognition, are primarily derived from the work of Taylor. Despite having a similar critical target to Oliver, Markell distinguishes his pursuit of acknowledgement from her framework of witnessing. Primarily, he contends that Oliver formulates recognition and witnessing as two binary, divided strands: one of hostility and conflict, and another of connection and dependence. Each of these constitutes a distinct activity, accompanied by a distinct

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<sup>458</sup> Markell, p. 2.

attitude towards intersubjective relationships. As we have seen in the preceding section, Oliver sharply distinguishes between the two, claiming their mutual incompatibility. Conversely, Markell wants to affirm the role of discord and disagreement both as a general feature of intersubjective relationships and specifically within democratic political systems, though his account appears to hold space for agonism, as opposed to a pseudo-Foucauldian fundamental antagonism.<sup>459</sup> As such, his criticisms of the recognitive tradition do not follow Oliver's trajectory, for Markell does not regard discord as itself a form of harm. He characterises Taylor's project in terms of its desire to understand contemporary struggles for justice in terms of recognition, which is to say in terms of the pursuit of respect and esteem<sup>460</sup> that are grounded in the accurate knowledge of another.<sup>461</sup> Recognition specifically takes the form of a knowledge relationship, with the identity in question forming a factic component of the objectified other. However, Markell notes that Taylor's recognition has a secondary sense. He thereby teases out two distinct forms of recognition within Taylor: the cognitive sense wherein recognition is straightforwardly (in)accurate knowledge of the other and the constructive sense whereby identity is produced through and as recognition. Though there is some room for interplay between these two recognitive modes within Taylor, the cognitive sense appears to be primary for his work and it is the failure of cognitive recognition that forms the bedrock of injustice. Immediately, Markell notes how Taylor's framing of cognitive recognition is mired in the language of authenticity, for recognition is based on respecting another for what they are.<sup>462</sup> Due to the primacy of the cognitive sense, the fundamental problem with Taylor's recognition is that it moulds identity itself by trapping us in a false vision of the self,<sup>463</sup> one which presupposes the independence of an atomistic individual.<sup>464</sup> My reading of Markell thereby brings him alongside Oliver in so far as she frames her criticism in terms of recognition as an intellectual judgement, and yet Markell's treatment of it brings him into even closer proximity with Foucault, for he views this false vision of the self specifically in terms of a form of knowledge, a regime of truth that prefigures the individual. This is to suggest that Markell reads Taylor's recognition as intellectualised, but in so far as it shapes itself into an *episteme* a structured knowledge, rather than as an explicit form of appraising judgement. This

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<sup>459</sup> Markell, p. 37.

<sup>460</sup> We can see here parallels between this and Kojève's reading of Hegel.

<sup>461</sup> Markell, p. 39.

<sup>462</sup> Markell, p. 40.

<sup>463</sup> Markell, p. 41.

<sup>464</sup> Markell, p. 44.



becomes naturalistic and gains a popular assent that is derived from the flattering picture it paints of human agency as sovereign.

Where Markell most clearly sustains this proximity with Foucault is in his tracing of this back into 17th-century theories of language, which paint language as an instrument of control, as the marshalling of ideas in the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>465</sup> This linguistic influence is pursued backwards into Johann Gottfried Herder whose work, though it expresses the tension between the cognitive and constructive forms of recognition,<sup>466</sup> ultimately culminates in a naturalised vision of the *Volk*,<sup>467</sup> of collective, cultural identities that each possess their own definitive forms of life, an inherent and naturalised distinctness.<sup>468</sup> Markell explicates Herder in order to demonstrate the implicit parallels between his work and Taylor's, for the latter's treatment of medieval Europe is guilty of an ahistorical homogenisation,<sup>469</sup> which is further reflected in how Taylor's discussion of the larger social contexts in which individual's pursue recognition represents these contexts as coherent totalities.<sup>470</sup> Indeed, Taylor appears to endorse this notion of *Volk* within his own work.<sup>471</sup> Though he does not go as far as to call Taylor essentialist, Markell's point here is about Taylor's ready endorsement of homogenisation – his explicit lack of appreciation for the extensive way in which the constructive sense of recognition is both embedded and expressed within the practices of one's life. This is a distinct but parallel critique to Oliver's concern with Taylor's hegemonic tendencies and culminates in a vision of Taylor's recognition as reliant on a naturalised individuation.

For Markell, language is furthermore a site wherein the politics of recognition begin to unravel. Language itself challenges the notion of agency produced by naturalism, for language reveals a finitude of agency. Importantly, Markell couches this in dialectical terms (though he does not openly avow this) where he describes language as an ongoing activity that is oriented towards the future.<sup>472</sup> To invoke the terms in which I have predicated the dialectic throughout this thesis: language reveals that the individual agent is always open to further elaboration. Markell frames this linguistic insight in terms of a transition

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<sup>465</sup> Markell, p. 46.

<sup>466</sup> Markell, p. 48.

<sup>467</sup> Markell, p. 51.

<sup>468</sup> Markell, p. 56.

<sup>469</sup> Markell, p. 54.

<sup>470</sup> Markell, p. 57.

<sup>471</sup> Markell, p. 154.

<sup>472</sup> Markell, p. 56.

from monologue to dialogue<sup>473</sup> – a movement he regards as fundamentally shattering the underlying presumption of sovereign agency.

For Markell, these concerns render the politics of recognition unable to appreciate the “real dynamics of many of the forms of social injustice to which the politics of recognition quite rightly seeks to respond”<sup>474</sup> – they do not have the explanatory power to provide a detailed understanding of contemporary injustice. It is my contention that this lack of explanatory power comes from the recognitive tradition’s internalisation of a reified structure of the self, alongside the essentialist foundations it attributes to identity. Through a reassertion of the dialectical nature of the self, as I discussed in Chapter 2, this explanatory power can be reclaimed. In order to be dialectical, recognition cannot abstract the individual from their situatedness within socio-political context. This is to say that recognitive attentiveness to an individual must entail an attentiveness to their condition, to the relations (both productive and limiting) that constitute this individual. In order for the other to be recognised, there must therefore be an adequate attentiveness to the very dynamics Markell correctly notes as having been jettisoned by Taylor.

Markell’s gloss of Taylor’s two modes of recognition is useful for the direct manner in which it articulates my fundamental concerns with Taylor’s recognition. Through not only the admission of the cognitive form of identity, one that exists external to its recognition as a factic element of an objectified person, but furthermore through its primacy, Taylor demonstrates his penchant for essentialist and reified thinking. Though Markell does not go so far as to levy his own accusations of essentialism against Taylor, he does note his naturalism, which is to say the pre-existence Taylor considers individuals to have before they are recognised. Through this naturalisation of the individual, as well as the factic ontology with which Taylor treats identity, it becomes clear that we can regard Taylor’s recognition as representative of a significant break from the dialectical self as I have advanced it throughout this thesis. This is not merely to labour the point regarding the dialectical self’s rejection of essentialism and objectification, but further to note the incompatibility between this account of the self and the formulation of recognition as an intellectual practice of appraising judgement. My account thereby calls into question the distinction between the cognitive and constructive senses of recognition, contending

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<sup>473</sup> Markell, p. 57.

<sup>474</sup> Markell, p. 60.

that recognition is in every sense constructive. The cognitive sense of recognition thereby becomes a rhetorical concealment of the dialogic and discursive practices that underpin the processes of judgement that claim to witness that which is already there. This is embedded with our previous discussion of the underlying phenomenological structure of the dialectic, wherein the constitution of the world must be understood in terms of the mediating influence of consciousness. It further exposes that the only form of recognition that can be compatible with the dialectical self is an account that does not consider this self as *de facto* bounded. This is to say that what is recognised is not a discrete individual, but an individual in connected motion, an individual that is identical with their condition. In Markell's response to his concerns with recognition, an important mark that distinguishes Markell's framing of the politics of recognition from Oliver's delineation of the recognitive tradition is their respective treatments of Hegel. As we have discussed, Oliver almost goes as far as attributing all of recognition's ills to its Hegelian lineage, thereby coming to view all Hegelian (or neo-Hegelian) influence as corrupting. Conversely, Markell distinguishes Hegel from the politics of recognition – establishing him as a critic of these politics. Markell's Hegel views identity-speak as an expression of desire for sovereign agency,<sup>475</sup> a framework he denies in his own work.

Markell specifically highlights Hegel's treatment of the individual "real and for itself" in his chapter on 'Reason' later in the phenomenology.<sup>476</sup> This individual is a schema for understanding the individual subject, one in which Hegel makes explicit reference to the accounts given by thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. According to this schema, the individual possesses a "determinate original nature" that it seeks to express through its action. Fundamentally, this is the vision of the self given by the politics of recognition, wherein the self is bifurcated into its action and the pre-existent source of its behaviour: the internal nature of the self. Under this framework, these two remain distinct, though can converge or depart from one another to varying degrees depending upon whether or not they are in harmony. This mires us in a schematic of individual authenticity setting the task of this as harmonising our inner disposition with its expression through action. For Hegel, such a vision of individuality demonstrates its own inherent contradiction through the impossibility of ever harmonising the two distinct parts of the self that it puts forth. If we divorce the agent from the action in discrete terms, we

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<sup>475</sup> Markell, p. 22.

<sup>476</sup> Markell, p. 102.

both presume that the self is distinct from its actions (which is an abstraction) and thereby create a gulf between this self and its world and its circumstances. But more fundamentally, this leads to an impoverished account of action, one which ignores their open-endedness. Hegel contends that the contingent nature of action, which is to say its inability to be meaningfully detached from the actions of others, demonstrates that this vision of the individual is false. One's actions are shaped and shape in turn a world of circumstances that exceed one's individual agency. Through basing his critique upon the nature of action, Hegel's point concerns the nature of the individual as an agent, and it is on these grounds that Markell discusses Hegel as an opponent of sovereign agency.

It is the gulf generated between the philosophical commitment to sovereign agency and the personal experiences of vulnerability that transform this into a deeper problem, and this gulf plays into the very dynamics that underpin Lordship and Bondage. We have already seen this in my treatment of Butler's reading of this dialectical moment, wherein the Lord's motivations are understood in terms of the fear of death, manifesting as the desire to secure their own abstract freedom and sense of power at the expense of the Bondsman. Markell provides a reading of this dialectic that focuses upon the interplay between dependence and independence, reading the figure of the lord as one that achieves a semblance of independence through forcing his share onto the Bondsman. On this reading, Lordship and Bondage serves to spread the contradiction between these two ways of conceiving the subject as absolutes across social space. This provides a useful parallel reading to Butler's explanation that specifically explains Lordship and Bondage in terms of agency. If Butler ascribes the instruction "you be my body for me" as summary of the Lord's position, then Markell's paraphrase would be "you be dependent in my stead". In both cases, the Lord is then able to sustain their false self-apprehension of their own state as having achieved abstract freedom, which is to say sovereign agency through the monopolisation of their ability to act. This is to say that the Lord is able to convince themselves of the supremacy of their own agency through their denial of the Bondsman's ability to act. But not only does this aspiration ignore the foundations of what it means to act (in Arendt's political sense) thereby rendering the Lord's action impoverished, it fundamentally ignores the very impossibility of ever realising this goal.

For Markell, we can precisely characterise the motivations of the powerful, of those associated with the position of the Lord, in terms of the desire for recognition – in the sense of the politics of recognition. We can thereby read this non-dialectical form of recognition as implicated within the

maintenance of unjust power relations – as a sustaining force for systemic oppression. Markell speaks of this in terms of a form of misrecognition, not of the powerless by the powerful (as would be Taylor's schematic) but of the powerful by themselves. To articulate Markell in my own terms – the pursuit of sovereign agency sustains the conditions of injustice through its support for the logic of oppression. Fundamentally, sovereign agency relies upon imbalanced relations of power, as well as the sedimentation and ossification of these in order to sustain a sense of perfect autonomy – albeit an illusory one. I concur with this perspective in so far as the claim becomes that a misrecognition of oneself, which is to say the nature of one's subject as dialectically produced, comes to sustain the logic of oppression. To expand this point with reference to my overarching concerns with identity enclosure, this is to say that the misunderstanding of the constitution of the self and the naturalised essentialism that takes its place, actively serves as a source of sustenance for socio-political oppression both in terms of leaving the terms of its systematisation uninterrogated and in the obfuscation of both material conditions and lived experiences. This is to establish my account of recognition as explicitly concerned with the polysemic articulation of the very terms upon which identities become identified, articulated, and practiced. The plurality of this is central in so far as the open-endedness of this dialectical recognition is one that actively foregrounds the processes of identification and sedimentation – not with an aim to bring about a final end to these, but with a refusal to allow these to ossify and thereby gain traction as naturalised terms within an essentialist lexicon.

We can further explicate the grounds of the desire for sovereign control over one's identity if we briefly consider contemporary identity politics. The nature of socio-political injustice and oppression constitutes itself as a violation of subject, as a suppression and restriction of the agency of those who become identified in particular ways. The pursuit of identity on naturalistic terms enables a form of security, through the discursive rendering of one's being and experience as beyond question.<sup>477</sup> This serves as a useful rhetorical device in so far as it engenders a form of immunity from strategies that seek to undermine another's agency – a bad faith practice of calling another's identity into question solely to evacuate their experiences and further an exclusionary and oppressive political normativity. However, as we have discussed, this comes at the price of abstracting the individual from the political condition. In

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<sup>477</sup> We have already seen elements of this in Spivak's account of strategic essentialism.

my terms, this is a failure to recognise the very plural conditions that form the foundation of the individual. In Markell's terms, this is a failure to acknowledge impropriety.

In his critique of sovereign agency, Markell affirms 'impropriety' as a fundamental aspect of the human condition.<sup>478</sup> Markell states that it

is not meant as a term of condemnation or disapproval. It refers not to a contingent moral failing but to a constitutive feature of human action: the very conditions that make us potent agents – our materiality, which ties us to the causal order of the world, and our plurality, which makes it possible for our actions to be meaningful – also make us potent beyond our own control, exposing us to consequences and implications that we cannot predict and which are not up to us.<sup>479</sup>

Sovereign agency is the desire to become the master of one's deeds,<sup>480</sup> not in the sense of claiming any form of agency, responsibility, or accountability, but in the deeper sense of desiring total autonomy over the reach and consequence of one's actions. This aspirant desire to achieve total control over one's deeds is summarised in Markell's replication of Arendt's discussion of Greek heroism. According to Arendt, the Grecian hero sought to secure their immortal legacy through the summing up of their life in a single deed. This summary action would necessitate their death, specifically formulated as a withdrawal from the possible consequences of what the hero had begun.<sup>481</sup> The actualisation of death here represents the overcoming of the possibility that this legacy could be undermined through future action or inaction, the desire to overcome the changing nature of one's identity. If one dies in a great act of courage, there is no risk that one might live on and expose themselves a coward in their future action or lack thereof.

The pursuit of sovereignty is the desire to overcome the very conditions of individuality, for it can only be achieved in semblance, and only through the actualisation of the individual's death. Arendt herself is a staunch critic of this Grecian model, for she conversely contends that no individual can ever be the author of their own story. The Greek hero may die courageously on his own terms, but his courage, cowardice, or rashness will always be for others to decide. It is not that this control is denied to us, but that it is rendered impossible by our very constitution as agents. Markell further grounds this refutation

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<sup>478</sup> I do not use this term here in an essentialist way, but instead use this as a way of demonstrating the proximity of Markell's project to the work of Hannah Arendt.

<sup>479</sup> Markell, p. 63.

<sup>480</sup> Markell, p. 65.

<sup>481</sup> Markell, p. 64.

of sovereignty within his reading of Aristotelian *ethe*, wherein he notes the reciprocal relationship between *ethos* and action – a relationship that exposes individual will and agency as communal, rather than isolated.<sup>482</sup> Markell defines individual will as grounded within collective relations of interdependence that render us as definitively vulnerable.<sup>483</sup> Human potency, our ability to act politically reciprocally renders us vulnerable<sup>484</sup> – as there exists an uncontrollable gap between on the one hand our intentions and expectations and, on the other, the results of our actions.<sup>485</sup> Due to the very unpredictability of the future, and the non-deterministic structure of action, the human condition is one that definitively precludes the naïve vision of autonomy that is sovereign agency.

We can readily note the manner in which the individual's desire to achieve a transcendent mastery over their own deeds mirrors the aspiration of the lord within Lordship and Bondage. My previous treatment of this aspiration has been as the desire for abstract freedom, but the figure of the Lord obtains only the illusory appearance of this liberated autonomy through their control over the bondsman. It is the semblance of an independence that is revealed (to ventriloquise Butler's reading) to rest on an absolute dependence on the other. To explicate this dialectic in terms of sovereignty, it is clear that the transcendent (abstract) freedom sought after by the lord is sovereign agency – it is total control over not only oneself but one's actions and their consequences, which is to say that it is domination over the world. Of course, we have already discussed how this is doomed to failure, and this pessimistic outcome is further attributed by Markell to the pursuit of sovereignty, which is not only impossible to achieve, but the pursuit of this itself is a source of suffering.<sup>486</sup>

Markell views recognition as primarily concerned with questions of temporality, with the navigation (if not straightforward unification) of the varying temporal horizons of the self.<sup>487</sup> Temporality takes on a clear existential dimension in Markell's work, for his use of the term does not stress the historicity of identity as has, for example, my work with the dialectic, but instead focuses upon time as a form of unsurpassable limitation. We see this in Markell's centring of impropriety and in his

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<sup>482</sup> Markell, p. 78.

<sup>483</sup> Here, we can readily see parallels between Markell's impropriety and Butler's notion of precarity, see: Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*; Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*

<sup>484</sup> Markell, p. 80.

<sup>485</sup> Markell, p. 85.

<sup>486</sup> Markell, p. 65.

<sup>487</sup> Markell, p. 10.

dethronement of sovereign agency, wherein the inherently limited nature of the agent and its actions come to the fore. Despite recognition's explicit concern with temporality, Markell regards its proponents as largely fixated on spatial metaphors, which he regards as displacing questions of time into space.<sup>488</sup> It is important to note at this juncture how Markell presumes a clear-cut distinction between time and space. Explanations are either spatial or temporal, and these are regarded as discrete registers. Accordingly, Markell critiques the fixity of spatial explanations, contending that these trap us in a naïve framework of facticity. For Markell, spatial frameworks of recognition are as simple as placing ourselves and others on a social map. Importantly, this sustains a simplistic framework of factic authenticity, through which individuals can be placed correctly or incorrectly. Importantly, the metric of the (in)accuracy of one's placement in the social map relies upon an accurate understanding of our normativity. This returns us to a cognitive sense of recognition, one which furthermore requires us to sustain normativity and precludes its critique. Such frameworks naturalise identity and its categories, making these antecedent features of the map upon which we place ourselves and others.

In his consideration of space, Markell operates with a notion of space as already mapped, which is to say that he presumes any mention of space as reliant on a prefigured social world. On his terms, to describe recognition as cartographic is merely to consider where one is placed. However, if we consider recognition to be fully cartographic, the result is in a consideration not merely of where individuals are placed within a social map, but furthermore our interest lies within the processes of producing such a map. Explicitly this concerns the process of identification, and through considering this, the terms upon which identities are articulated come clearly into view. This is to say that spatiality does not necessitate the naturalisation of identity into transcendently antecedent categories. When we expand our notion of map to include the process of mapping, we further enact a transition between speaking of the social world as a singular map to a plurality of articulations each of which takes up a spatial lexis and all of which dispense with the reification of social space that so concerns Markell. What this calls for is a rejection of the impoverished accounts of social space as provided by previous advocates of recognition and by Markell himself. Rather than viewing space as detached from time, we must view the two together.

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<sup>488</sup> Markell, p. 10.



Furthermore, understanding spatial identity in terms of a process of cartography allows us to situate this practice not only within space but also within time – granting us the ability to speak of plural maps that develop and shift over time. This is to say that through uniting the spatial and temporal registers of explanation, we overcome the shortcomings of an explanation that relies solely on one or the other. This is particularly salient when we come to speak of various forms of identity transformation, of migrations across social space.

We can consider these questions in terms of transgender identities and non-heterosexual sexualities, specifically in so far as these come to be structured around a model of ‘coming out’. Often, this process is treated as a singular act of disclosure, as a speech act wherein one places oneself on an unchanging social map once and for all. We thereby have the ossification of ‘the coming out story’ into a trope within narrative fiction, or the valorisation of this into a singular rite of passage for queer people. The question ‘so what’s your coming out story?’ often seeks a specific event, the first time that one outs oneself and thereby views this action as definitive in the sense of a once-and-for-all placement of oneself on a social map. Of course, this ignores the pervasive forces of heterocentricism and cis-normativity, and the ways these condition society such that the majority of queer people will continually enact their coming out throughout their lives. This articulation of coming out is precisely the one provided by this impoverished view of space, and it is one that not only uses a reduced notion of action – ignoring the ongoing nature of one’s queer existence – but further naturalises the identity in question, for one must pick a pre-given place for oneself. If, however, we marry our notions of space and time, we can note the temporal dimension of coming out – not merely in terms of its nature as a repeated (possibly even habitual) act that occurs across time, but also as an act of disclosure that occurs at specific points in time, which is to say its nature as a specific action in a specific moment. The necessity of continuously coming out again and again establishes these identities as ones of migration, as those which proclaim themselves within a particular social space despite the limits of their agency and the persistent socio-political structures that seek to place individuals elsewhere. Neither of these spaces precede their articulation through these competing attempts at placing the individual, but are conversely brought into being by the attempt at localisation. Yet, the spatial dimension of explanation remains important, as it is only through a combination of this and the temporal register that we can meaningfully speak of identifications as a form of movement within social space.

I have thus noted that Markell's politics of recognition are built on distinct ontological grounds to those of Hegel – and that Hegel's project can be promisingly read as a criticism of these foundations, both in Markell's terms and mine own. Whereas Markell is happy to allow Taylor and those like him to claim this term, thereby jettisoning recognition from the vocabulary of his Hegel, I conversely reclaim the term and reassert the Hegelian underpinnings of it. This enables us to understand the politics of recognition in terms of a project of misrecognition, as a project that is concerned with seeing the individual (narrowly conceived) at the expense of the conditions wherein this individual is constituted and lives. My groundwork is comparable to Markell's framing of acknowledgement in so far as both concern a movement away from naturalised individualism towards an affirmation of the conditions of political plurality. We can thereby argue that to some extent, acknowledgement is an attempt to rehabilitate recognition, albeit with a distinct nomenclature. The central point of distinction between my approach and Markell's lies within our treatment of political space. Markell rightly critiques accounts of political space for their penchant for cartographic depictions of the self that thereby reassert essentialism and naturalism through a reification of the terms within which identity can be articulated. Markell seeks to supplant this with a greater appreciation for the temporal dimension of the self – focusing on our vulnerability. However, this comes at the expense of downplaying the spatiality of identity in exchange for a temporal model, rather than appreciating that spatial and temporal dimensions should require mutual expression of their articulation is going to avoid being impoverished.

## MY ACCOUNT OF RECOGNITION

Through these three critiques of recognition, we can note that a common concern lies within the way in which a recognitive account acts as a kind of constraint for the subjects it is recognising. Foucault's concern is that the dialectical nature of recognition renders it as a narrow process. Oliver's is that recognition is only capable of seeing what it wishes to see, that it is not always able to bear witness to the subject as it is. Markell's account of impropriety is intended as a curative to the accounts of individuality and agency at work within the recognitive tradition. Whilst I have maintained over the course of this chapter that my account of recognition does not match with the recognitive tradition – agreeing with Markell that Hegel is a critic of this tradition that he occasioned – hitherto my account of recognition has been presented via negativa. At this juncture, I shall outline the basic traits of my account of recognition,

these being: that it is a phenomenal process of mediation; that it is a kind of interpersonal but not, strictly speaking, intellectual judgement; that it is conditioned by sociopolitical power; that it is an ongoing process that does not seek to secure an end; and that it is constitutive of the self and its identities.

Firstly, in my view, recognition is a phenomenal process of mediation wherein we interpret and define the objects of our experience in relation to one another within the condition they appear to us. Recognition is a form of understanding that constitutes a central condition of possibility for articulation, for interpreting experienced phenomena. This work of interpretative definition, when applied to ourselves or to other subjects, is the work of identity: the application of various qualifiers to the subject in question in order to understand both who and what this subject is.<sup>489</sup> This identification is a matter of tracking how subjects relate to one another - communicating both similarity and difference. We must therefore understand recognition as a mediated process that serves to deploy categories of identity as well as to both create and challenge them.

In this sense, recognition is a form of judgement but it is not - as Oliver fears - always an intellectualised judgement that entails a conscious judging act wherein the recogniser constitutes themselves as the detached observer of the recognised. It seems to me that Oliver's concern with recognition being an intellectual judgement is a worry that this would entail an intellectualisation of our interpersonal relationships. On such a view, recognition would be a cognitive judgement that acts upon our relationships from the outside. Part of Oliver's concern here is directed at Taylor's use of recognition, which understands this as a kind of appraisal as to the value of another subject, with the recogniser then able to confer (or not) recognition upon this other. Conversely, I understand recognition as predominantly an automatic process of judgement that is not solely concerned with the conference of status. Yes, in one sense, recognition can operate as a kind of appraisal of another - but in so far as this implies a conscious attitude this picture does not represent the embedded way in which I understand recognition to routinely operate.

Recognition is fundamentally rooted within the interpersonal - within what Arendt calls the political<sup>490</sup> - with this being inseparable from our appearances, actions, and ways of negotiating our lives

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<sup>489</sup> The distinction between who and what is explored in more detail in the following chapter within the context of Arendtian thought.

<sup>490</sup> As shall be explored in the next chapter.

and relationships with others. My resistance to terming recognition as purely an intellectualised judgement is that this implies a kind of abstraction from our activity and its relational context, the implication being that recognition is a form of judgement that concerns our relationships to others but which reflects upon them from an external position. Conversely, on my account recognition cannot be fundamentally split from subjectivity precisely because recognition is constitutive of it. So whilst recognition can function as an explicitly intellectual judgement, I understand this to be reflective of only a small portion of what I understand as recognition. Instead, as a form of judgement, recognition is more firmly concerned with affect and aesthetic.

The embeddedness of recognition within sociality problematises viewing this as a kind of appraisal - at least in the sense implied by Taylor. Several of the limits of his account have already been discussed in this chapter, but here we can explicitly turn to the question of the relationship between recognition and value. Taylor's view equates recognition and appraisal through understanding this process as the conferring of a kind of social good upon another. We can here see a clear link between this view of recognition as a social good with Kojève's view that recognition is concerned with winning prestige.<sup>491</sup> In both cases, this flattens the process of recognition into a kind of economy - wherein recognition is effectively something that one possesses to one degree or another, that it is a countable resource to be given or taken. On this account recognition becomes a kind of currency that is exchanged between subjects, that can be possessed in differing amounts, and which possesses a kind of neutral value. By this, I mean to suggest that Taylor's view of recognition removes any concern with precisely how a subject is being recognised, subjects are not recognised as something so much as their recognition bestows a value status upon them. The notion of value here is definitively moral - with this forming the basis of Taylor's account of ethics. On this reading, Taylor's account of recognition equates this with a notion of value which I view as comparable to Kojève's prestige.

On my view, recognition cannot be separated from a consideration as to the way in which a subject is being recognised and therefore cannot constitute an abstracted account of value. This is to suggest that any meaningful discussion of recognition entails a consideration as to who or what the subject in question is recognised as being. This is not to suggest that my view of recognition understands

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<sup>491</sup> As discussed in chapter two.

this as being divorced from questions of value or valuation. Instead, I understand these judgements of value to operate within the terms upon which a subject is being recognised. To recognise a subject as belonging to a particular category of identity is not therefore a purely moral judgement, but within a context of political power that hierarchically organises certain identities over and above others, to recognise another is always a process of valuation. The notion of value at work here is quite distinct to that used within the recognitive tradition, as it derives from the way in which the identity categories at play are constituted.<sup>492</sup> The valuation at play within recognition is therefore mediated through the specific identity categories at play - those that a subject is recognised as belonging to and those which it might 'fail' to qualify for. Recognition is not, therefore, a mere judgement of another's worth or social standing - at least not in a sense that can be divorced from the interplay of identification with categories of the self.

This is further to suggest that recognition is a form of mediated judgement that operates within a given frame of reference. As a form of mediated judgement, recognition cannot operate independently of the sociopolitical categorisations at play within a particular condition. This is to acknowledge that categories of identity serve to structure our experiences in pervasive ways. As systems of power, these categories constitute what Foucault refers to as regimes of truth - making these structures omnipresent though not totalising. It is therefore no simple task to think outside of the terms presented by these structures; for instance, it is impossible to rethink a vector of identity such as gender or race in a way that is entirely disconnected from how these categories are constituted by power or from how these categories are circulated and used. But as a form of mediated judgement, recognition does not necessitate a mere repetition of these categories as they are more widely used. Though we are not able to freely redefine these terms without falling prey to various kinds of abstraction, nor do these categories stand independently of our own activity: recognition therefore does not simply make use of pre-existing ways of qualifying subjects, it is also the activity that both produces and deploys these qualificatory modes. This is where we can fully resolve Foucault's concern that recognition provides an overly narrow hermeneutic of the subject. His concern was that the dialectical elements of recognition would pre-figure how the subject could appear - but the only limitations placed upon the horizon of recognition are those

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<sup>492</sup> A lengthier consideration of identity categories takes place in the next chapter.

implied by the conditions within which the recognitive activity is taking place. The suggestion here is solely that recognition is not an arbitrary activity, but that it has a basis within a particular political condition that serves to shape how subjects are able to appear. As stated previously, this brings recognition much closer to Foucault's own structure of *assujettissement*, acknowledging that the production of a subject entails an interpersonal and political dimension that plays a conditioning role in structuring our activity. In this sense, we can again stress that recognition is not a form of intellectual judgement that is itself concerned with the stabilisation and subsequent application of a particular system of identity. Though power can act to ossify particular patterns of recognition, recognition is otherwise dynamic as opposed to fixed. Foucault's critique of asymmetrical power relations constraining the subject does not, therefore, target recognition so much as it targets the ways in which recognitive processes themselves become constrained or disciplined.

Understanding recognition as embedded within the interpersonal is to understand recognition not as a one-sided process wherein recognition is conferred on one subject by another but is to fundamentally understand recognition as an ongoing process of negotiation. As recognition is always recognising a subject as something (and therefore not granting some kind of abstract moral value), there is always the possibility of recognising the same subject differently and of differing subjects having conflicting recognitions. How I am recognised by others and how I recognise myself may align in some cases and differ in others. The negotiation between these differing recognitions is not reducible to a matter of knowledge precisely because, in my view, identity is not a matter of facticity. There is no extra-recognitive truth to subjects that could be said to ground the truth value of a given recognitive claim. This is to suggest that recognition is not a process that is ever complete, it never arrives at a secure and fixed identity for any subject. On this account, identity is therefore continually enacted through the activity of recognition. Identity is the output of ongoing processes of recognition, processes that are fundamentally interpersonal and involve a continuous negotiation and response to the recognitive processes of others. This holds equally for recognising others and recognising oneself - as the process of recognising and articulating is never entirely independent of the way one is recognised by others.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> I explore this in more detail in the following chapter, in my discussion of agency.

To consider recognition as the process that at once creates, circulates, mediates, and challenges categorisations of identity is to understand that recognition has a fundamentally constitutive role with respect to subjects. As suggested in the preceding chapters, the subject of this recognitive theory is a process rather than a product. Categorisations of the self are open to contestation and renegotiation and though this process is often far from completely open, this dynamism entails the possibility of shifting identifications. In a Foucauldian vein, to preserve a dimension of creativity and play within the process of recognition. This is to oppose a presumed factic authenticity: a perspective on the self that understands a given individual as having a correct or true identity that can then be recognised or not. The possibility of misrecognition appears to contribute to Oliver's concern that recognition heavily pre-figures what it is able to hear. I am mindful of this concern but contend that this is not so much an issue with recognition as it is an issue requiring much more specific attention to the conditions of appearance for the subject. When Oliver suggests that her account of witnessing overcomes the problems of recognition because it implies an attentiveness to the other that does not solely listen for what it wants to hear, she appears to suggest that it is possible to merely hear what is said. Whilst it is possible to listen more or less attentively, I contend that it is never possible to listen without any kind of interpretative - which is to say, in my view, recognitive - engagement. This is to suggest that Oliver's account fails to theorise the position of the witness. Oliver calls for this whilst simultaneously fearing that recognition is an intellectualisation of interpersonal relationships, though her account of witnessing appears to imply an almost impersonal kind of listening where one entirely suspends any kind of judgement in order to see the other person as they truly are. On my account, recognition must be understood as constitutive of identity such that there is no self outside of the recognitive process.

This summary of the five basic traits of my account of recognition opens up several questions about how this process unfolds within a particular sociopolitical context. Though my comments here have begun to gesture towards these contexts, it is my contention that much previous work on recognition - including that of Hegel - tends to omit any consideration as to the particular conditions within which recognition operates. As a phenomenal process, recognition is a response to phenomena - with these phenomena encountered within varying contexts wherein they are related to one another. My concern now turns to an examination of these contexts, a concern that requires a clearer theorisation of the spatial dimensions of the self. If we are to claim that identity is a matter of how one is recognised -

both by oneself and by others - then a question arises as to how the spaces within which we appear shape how we can be seen. Given this concern, my next chapter articulates a phenomenological account of space - examining the conditions of appearance for subjects in these spatial terms. Once articulated, this spatial account will further enable me to elaborate more precisely on the implications of power and agency within this account of identity.



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## 4: THE STRUCTURING OF PUBLIC SPACE

### RECOGNISING ACTION: THE PUBLIC SPHERE AS PERFORMATIVE ARENA

The relevance of Arendt's work to my project centres on how her schematics of the public sphere and the political world draw together concerns about space with considerations about identity. In *The Human Condition* Arendt casts identity – the 'who' of politics – as the central aspiration / concern of political endeavour, presenting us with a notion of politics that foregrounds human beings as agents who act within a world, and who experience this world as a distinct collective of equals. Though Arendt does not formally subscribe to a Hegelian structure, her work fundamentally presents the structure of action as a dialectical relationship between the actor and the spectator, between action and judgement – and in so doing allows us to consider recognition in terms of its spatiality. However, Arendt's understanding of identity does not acknowledge its constructed nature, instead framing action as the expression of a pre-existent identity. However, by bringing Arendt into dialogue with Butler's account of performativity, we can both challenge Arendt's minor essentialism and consider Butler's work in terms of a phenomenology of space. In order to clarify the usefulness of Arendt's work, I draw upon Sophie Loidolt's *Phenomenology of Plurality*, which provides a detailed analysis of Arendt's notion of plurality. Of particular interest to this project is Loidolt's understanding of plurality, not as a mere precondition for action, but as specifically a condition that becomes actualised through activity. I contend that this further draws the Arendtian system into proximity with Butlerian performativity. By way of this comparative analysis, I shall develop the spatial dimensions of my account of recognition.

Arendt conceptualises political space by adopting the classical Greek distinction between public and private spaces. She understands these spaces as distinct spheres of life with separate modes of being. When speaking of the public or private spheres, we are talking about modes of life that are distinguished both conceptually and in terms of physical space. As such, one can refer to these spheres as public and private **spaces** without distorting Arendt's conception. As Loidolt stresses, though it is not foregrounded within wider literature, Arendt's corpus is informed by phenomenology<sup>494</sup> – with this influence being of

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<sup>494</sup> Sophie Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*, 2018, p. 7 <<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781351804035>> [accessed 26 November 2019].

particular importance when considering use of terms such as ‘world’<sup>495</sup> and appearance.<sup>496</sup> For my purposes, the importance of Arendt’s work comes from its integration of phenomenological concerns regarding the spatiality of human activity with considerations of individuality, agency, and identity.

For Arendt, the public sphere is a space wherein the public is able to appear<sup>497</sup> (as a condition of appearance, appearance in Arendt’s sense is not possible without the public sphere), but her use of the term public equates the public sphere with the world.<sup>498</sup> Understood within the context of Heideggerian philosophy,<sup>499</sup> Arendt’s use of the term ‘world’ should be understood as foregrounding the salience of phenomenology for understanding the distinction she draws between the spheres of human life.<sup>500</sup> Arendt’s account of the public sphere provides a description of public space that centrally functions as an arena of encounter between individuals. Considered phenomenologically, Arendt’s account of the public sphere provides an account of identity that is fundamentally grounded within the various modes of spatiality.

This results from the fact that Arendt grounds identity in action – that which can only be enacted in the public sphere. Within *The Human Condition*, she provides a tripartite account of human behaviour, dividing our activity into labour, work, and action. Action is fundamentally political for Arendt, for politics proper is concerned solely with the web of distinctly human activity.<sup>501</sup> Arendt’s understanding of politics proper centres human action as the pursuit of both novelty and greatness.<sup>502</sup> Arendt stresses that the fundamental question of human politics is ‘who are you?’ – as such, all politics is a form of identity politics.<sup>503</sup> It is around this question that politics turns, with politics itself constituted as so many ways of asking and responding to this question. However, this is not a reductive account of the political, Arendt never argues that one could simplify politics to make this question more overt. On the contrary, the

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<sup>495</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 52, 204.

<sup>496</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 198–207, 220.

<sup>497</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 50.

<sup>498</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 52.

<sup>499</sup> Arendt makes clear reference to Heidegger, see: Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 134.

<sup>500</sup> As Loidolt notes, Arendt’s use of the term world is not a mere legacy of her phenomenological roots, see: Loidolt, p. 51.

<sup>501</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, chap. The Public Realm: The Common, and The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action.

<sup>502</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, chap. Irreversibility and the Power to Forgive, and Unpredictability and the Power of Promise.

<sup>503</sup> The suggestion here is that we cannot confine identity politics to a specific part of politics, but that politics is always concerned primarily – though possibly indirectly – with identity.

pursuit of identity remains covert, identity is an (often indirect) implication of political activity. This is because asking and answering the question ‘who are you?’ cannot be satisfactorily answered directly, it is not ultimately reducible to a singular question to which we provide a singular answer. This is precisely because for Arendt the ‘who’ is not a ‘what’,<sup>504</sup> it cannot be fully reified or, as Loidolt puts it, become “fully exhausted by an (always failing) “identification” and thus fixation through language.”<sup>505</sup> For Arendt, we answer ‘who are you?’, whether we would like to or not, through our action. Yet this question is never considered fully answerable.<sup>506</sup>

Action depends on plurality, which is to say our mutual existence together that is *par excellence* represented by the public sphere. This sphere constitutes an arena wherein we can be witnessed – it serves as a space of appearance, as a stage for action. Arendt describes it in terms of illumination,<sup>507</sup> wherein one is lit up, illuminated such that they become conspicuous and visible. Once we are visible, we can act. Action is thus to be understood as a relationship; the actor cannot act unless they are witnessed, and thus the spectator is given an essential role. Of course, the relationship between actor and spectator is never fixed. Definitive of the public sphere – in its most ideal form – is that everyone is able to act, that the space is inclusive of every member of its public. The actor-spectator relationship must always be reversible. Anyone can act, but one cannot always act. Regardless, the roles of both the actor and the spectator are both active – we cannot reduce these to being active-passive poles – for both are central to the *vita activa*.

Through inhabiting a shared world, the public aspects of our lives are lived in conjunction with others. This suggests that the answer to the essential political question ‘who are you?’ is a form of disclosure communicated through one’s action. Yet the relational nature of action depends upon its reception by the spectators that create the conditions of its possibility, meaning that the kind of answer action provides to the question of identity never takes the form of authorial statement. For Arendt, one discloses who one is through one’s actions, but one never decides who one is. The disclosure of one’s identity is always communicated to another, to the spectator of one’s action, and it is through the

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<sup>504</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 179.

<sup>505</sup> Loidolt, p. 209.

<sup>506</sup> Arguably the only full answer could be provided after we die, but Loidolt notes that despite the essence of a ‘who’ only coming into being when life departs, leaving a narrative (Loidolt, p. 209.), she also notes that the ‘who’ can never be exhausted by a narrative (Loidolt, p. 263.).

<sup>507</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 51.

interpretation of these others that the significance of one's activity is decided. As such, one's identity – the fundamental interest of the political, for Arendt, without which “action and speech would lose all human relevance”<sup>508</sup> – cannot be something that one determines alone.

We can immediately note that Arendt's account of action introduces a dialectical relationship between the actor and the spectator. Action cannot exist without the other, and it is here that Arendt's text begins to incorporate a metaphor of vision. An individual can only act in relation to an other or others, for “Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others”.<sup>509</sup> The public sphere is grounded within the plurality of human beings – indeed a definitive aspect of the public is that it foregrounds this plurality, that it is fundamentally an open and accessible space. Through bringing plurality to the fore, public space asserts a fundamental relationality or, to use Arendt's phrasing, it reveals that a life is human because it is “lived among men”.<sup>510</sup> As Loidolt expresses it, “Plurality is essentially something we do...it needs to be *actualised*...by engaging in certain activities: speaking, acting, and judging”.<sup>511</sup> Action is thereby the foundation of the political and requires that the actor be seen, which is to say that their action must be recognised as such. We can thereby only understand action as such within the context of the web of human relations, which is to say within a worldly context of others<sup>512</sup> wherein the pursuit of a ‘who’ becomes possible. Identity comes through seeing one another as agents. We reveal and create our identities through the recognition of our action.

For Arendt, our activity takes place in the *inter est*, which is to say that it takes place between us – as a worldly relationship between individuals. It is this relationality of human life that binds us together, that asserts the fundamental melange of both equality<sup>513</sup> and uniqueness.<sup>514</sup> The narrative of our lives is not our own to author or discover in isolation, but is instead something that must be negotiated as part of our relationships with others. Already, we can see numerous points of continuity and commonality with the account of dialectical recognition I have been advancing over the course of this thesis. Though

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<sup>508</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 182.

<sup>509</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 188.

<sup>510</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 176. The use of the male pronoun here should not be taken as an active commitment to centring maleness and masculinity, though does, perhaps, reveal something of the context of Arendt's writing.

<sup>511</sup> Loidolt, p. 263.

<sup>512</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 184.

<sup>513</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 175.

<sup>514</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 176.

Arendt is not reducible to Hegelianism – there are many points of clear resistance to it within her corpus<sup>515</sup> – her treatment of identity constitutes it as a fundamentally political, which is to say plural, manifestation of the way in which people navigate their relationships with others in an intersubjective space. Because the actor-spectator relationship is always reversible, with no individual exclusively occupying one space or the other, Arendt's schematic of political relationships – those relationships that produce identity – shares its trajectory with my account of dialectical recognition. As briefly discussed within the previous chapter,<sup>516</sup> Arendt's conception of identity as presented within *The Human Condition* resists a picture of the individual as sovereign. Though Arendt's account does not explicitly ground individuality or subjectivity itself in relationality, her basing identity upon action and action upon plurality leaves space within her account for a Hegelian claim about the intersubjective nature of the individual. Indeed, her understanding of the individual *qua* political entity stresses this at numerous points, particularly in her consideration of the necessary worldliness that underpins political life as the condition of its possibility.

Arendt's linkage of identity and action provides us with an existential structure of the human individual whereby our self is grounded within the expressions enabled within the freedom of the public sphere. This freedom is a matter of the exclusion of violence, for the public sphere is very clearly a form of shelter from the possibility of violence – which is always to be considered as a violation of the political, and a rupture against power,<sup>517</sup> which is to say agency. Through its exclusion of violence, Arendt seeks to affirm the political as a space that enables the freedom required to act. Action herein must be understood as fundamentally temporal, which is to say that it is something that is enacted and lived out across time and space. To return to Markell's stress on the temporal dimension of the subject – and his resistance to the reification of naïve spatial metaphors – Arendt enables us to fully incorporate this temporality into the structure of action without losing its spatiality. As the actor moves between this role and that of spectator, action becomes part of a process of identity production that occurs over time. Given that the political sphere exists as the weft of the web, the content of this space is never fully or permanently established. Indeed, action for Arendt is not primarily concerned with objects. As we have seen, her distinction between 'who' and 'what' seeks to protect the self from objectification. Loidolt helpfully

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<sup>515</sup> Loidolt explicitly notes her resistance to both Hegel and Marx, see: Loidolt, p. 72.

<sup>516</sup> Within the section on Patchen Markell's *Bound by Recognition*.

<sup>517</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 202.

demonstrates how Arendt's three activities each have their own specific output (that of action being "Stories, history, meaning")<sup>518</sup> but action (specially action *qua* speech) is not understood to be instrumental, its products are thus of secondary significance.<sup>519</sup> For Arendt, identities are a matter of contested meanings and relationships between people, not descriptions of human selves *qua* objects with truth value. Of course, work is a practice that is indispensable to the construction of the architecture of the public sphere, but the act of production is not itself included within the internal activity of this sphere.<sup>520</sup> Action is thereby not concerned with artefacts that can acquire a form independent to the actor and spectator, it is concerned with the connections between human beings – the *inter est* – and thereby presents a picture of the public sphere that resists the reification of political space that so concerns Markell.

Arendt's notion of plurality as the basic condition actualised and tended to by action allows us to better understand the spatial (or worldly) dimensions of recognition. I have discussed recognition over the course of this thesis in terms of an encounter, as the negotiation of intersubjective relationships. Likewise, Arendt's account of identity moves to displace the self (and thus considerations of identity) from an individual's sovereign agency into the web of human relationships and actions. This move is made in response to the prevailing narratives of modernity, particularly towards a certain form of naïve liberalism – on whose account the sovereign agency of the individual is not only possible but essential, entailing a moral imperative to preserve it and enable its expression. For Arendt, such agency is an impossibility, a contradiction of the very terms upon which human political life is premised.<sup>521</sup>

The formulation of the public sphere provided by Arendt is motivated to protect a particular vision of the political. Though her resistance to apolitical elements within the public sphere is admirable to a degree, Arendt's project does serve to uphold a partially abstracted vision of these politics. For Arendt, the public sphere is the condition of possibility for action, which is to say that the public sphere is required for politics. However, the borders of political space are constituted such that only within the public can

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<sup>518</sup> Loidolt, p. 120.

<sup>519</sup> See: Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 95.

<sup>520</sup> Loidolt clarifies this by contending that the production involved in work (or more specifically within wordliness, the basic condition to which work corresponds) is tied to the private sphere, with the public manifestation of work more concerned with how its products exist and are exchanged between people. See: Loidolt, p. 141.

<sup>521</sup> This is made particularly clear in Loidolt's discussion of the points of rupture between her and Heidegger, see: Loidolt, pp. 33–34, 42, 62, 66, 168–69.

one act, which is to suggest that only within the public sphere could one ever disclose oneself. What is left wanting with this picture is an incorporation of how the human activity that ostensibly occurs within Arendt's private sphere would also constitute action in the sense of revealing an individual's identity.

If we think of Arendt's schema of action, its existence as a relationship between actor and spectator within a space of appearance, as being political discourse then Arendt's picture seems all too ready to confine this discourse to a specific domain of life. We have good reason to draw action and discourse together, as Arendt defines action as political speech.<sup>522</sup> Not only is action speech, but speech itself comes to be defined against 'mere chatter', as that which could be considered as merely communicative or as instrumental. Instead, it is within speech itself that action finds its full ability to reveal the speaker, to make apparent their identity. On this reading, the public sphere becomes an ideal container for political discourse and thereby imposes a hard limit as to where the self can appear. If we were to follow the classically Arendtian conviction here, our conception of discourse and the political would become hamstrung – projected or confined into a specific domain of life. Yet should we accept this as a binary divide? If plurality is foundational to the human condition, we cannot be so quick to confine it to one kind of space – to relegate the conditions of possibility of human life to but one domain of this life. This is especially the case if we take Arendt seriously in refusing to consider the spheres hierarchically. We must give further consideration to this binary divide between the spheres.

The division of public and private does not suggest an absolute hierarchy between the two, with 'true' value found only in the light of the public – Arendt is clear that there are many important and indispensable aspects of life that must remain in the private sphere (such as friendship) – but a binary divide does render those things apolitically valuable. If friendship is a private matter, and the web of human relationships is public, and we must maintain this separation, then friendship could never be part of this narrative. Indeed, the personal could never truly be political. This is a *de facto* limiting conclusion, but not one that necessitates a hard break from Arendt.

Arendt's confining of action to the public sphere proper is justified in terms of appearance, and this is expressed through an extended metaphor of light and illumination that reappears within *The Human Condition* at multiple junctures. The public sphere is often described in terms of light, contrasted

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<sup>522</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 26, 175–81.

to the darkness of the private. The light of the public is described as “the shining brightness we once called glory”,<sup>523</sup> with this only being possible within the public realm. The implicit distinction here is between an open space and an enclosed space, between the private recesses of a personal home (the Greek term for the private sphere is *oikia* (household))<sup>524</sup> and the open spaces of the *agora*. With open space come both light and a sense of unobstructed vision, nothing to hide behind – forcing one to be visible.

My suggestion is to consider the distinction between public and private spaces in terms of a phenomenological analysis of experience. What fundamentally constitutes a public space is its foregrounding of the condition of human plurality – which is to say how it enables spectatorship through illumination, how it constitutes a space of appearance. But this is not to suggest that the distinction is merely a matter of perspective in an arbitrary sense, it is to further suggest that one’s experience are shaped by the space. Space thus comes not to determine, but to influence and inform the kind of perspective that is available. Thus, to suggest that Arendt’s distinction between public and private can be reconsidered as a phenomenological distinction is not a reductive move, but instead a suggestion to the effect that the architectural dimensions of her project – the various ways in which the constructed, material shape of the political space – gain their significance in the ways they are lived out by the individual. Of course, this individual is never alone – the political is public and plural. This provides us with a way of reading Arendt’s claim that “not Athens, but the Athenians, were the *polis*”:<sup>525</sup> the very space of Athens is within the lived experience of the people. Athens is lived into being.

If the shining light of glory is required because it enables us to see, which is to say that it is the condition of possibility of spectatorship and therefore action itself, we may not be left with a binary distinction between light and darkness – between being able or unable to see, between public and private in these senses. This would be to simplify the light metaphor to that of a light-switch with merely binary settings: either we are able to see the other, to recognise them, or not. Instead, we could think of degrees of illumination, of the conditions of seeing. If we consider sight phenomenologically, it is clear that we

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<sup>523</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 180.

<sup>524</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 33.

<sup>525</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 195.



can see within dim light – and likewise, that an action could be spectated or recognised (and thereby possible) even without conditions of bright illumination.

The metaphor of light can also be considered in terms of Arendt's desire to make a clear distinction between power – meaning politics, the public sphere – and violence.<sup>526</sup> Violence is absolutely excluded from the political on Arendt's account, with the public sphere thereby considered as enabling in the sense that action becomes possible precisely because it cannot be suppressed through violence. In this sense, Arendt renders her vision of the political sphere as absolutely equalising – at least initially. The only differentiation arises through the internal, and repeated appraisal of action, rather than establishing some fixed standard of greatness so as to turn her political space into a straightforward meritocracy. On this account, violence becomes a darkness, that which obscures the individual and thus comes to disrupt the possibility of recognition. This reading would draw Arendt into continuity with Hegel's considerations in *Lordship and Bondage* – whereby the struggle to the death and the resulting dialectical moment serve as impediments to recognition that must be sublated.

Instead of considering the public sphere as a wholly distinct space, we could perhaps instead consider it as a space specifically structured to maximise the possibility of spectatorship. This is to suggest that the public sphere is not distinguished from the private by type, but by conditions of visibility. This is not necessarily a mere distinction by degree, but we can instead understand the private and public spheres as mutually enabling experiential conditions. It is instead a matter of staging – of constructing the space in order to maximise the possibility of encounter. In Arendt's own terms, it is harnessing light in order to perfect a space of appearance. To argue that the distinction between the public and private sphere is phenomenological is to stress that political spaces are as material as they are conceptual – that they are sites within which our lives are lived together, wherein our plurality becomes affirmed. The public sphere would no longer be considered as a necessary condition of action, but instead as an arena wherein the conditions of action are secured and stabilised.<sup>527</sup> Again, Loidolt's account is useful to us here because of how she conceptualises plurality as a basic condition, the related activity for which is action.

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<sup>526</sup> See: Arendt, *Crises of the Republic: Lying in Politics, Civil Disobedience, On Violence, Thoughts on Politics and Revolution*.

<sup>527</sup> Loidolt further stresses the fragility of public space for Arendt (Loidolt, p. 123.), as well need to institutionally stabilise these spaces (Loidolt, p. 189.).

Likewise, she understands there to be two other basic conditions that labour and work are related to, these being 'life' and 'worldiness' respectively.<sup>528</sup>

In favour of this reconstruction of the public/private distinction, we can note that Arendt's work does suggest that an individual's identity is something that remains latent – something which exists in some form prior to their political action and yet which is only visible to others. The latency of the self, the suggestion of its stable existence prior to its political expression, come through Arendt's quotation of Dante at the opening of her chapter on Action: "Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self".<sup>529</sup> This is furthermore echoed in her discussion of *daimon*, whom she treats as man's constant companion, a mythological expression of each human being's "distinct identity",<sup>530</sup> which sits upon man's shoulders such that it can only be seen from the vantage point of another.<sup>531</sup> To reference my previous discussion about the essentialism without an essence commonly expressed within contemporary identity enclosure, Arendt's text provides a slightly different structure, whereby the self exists in a latent form and yet is neither an object, nor merely visible to the self. As Loidolt notes, Arendt's account of identity is not constructivist, but it should not be understood as essentialist either.<sup>532</sup> So, despite Arendt's language suggesting the existence of a fixed self, a potentiality of self that awaits revelation through action, we do not need to presume her an essentialist. We can see this through the proximity of Arendt's position to Butler's account of performativity, and by uniting these two perspectives we are able to develop an account of performative action that unites parts of each account within the schematic of recognition as developed within this thesis. We need to take Arendt's rejection of the reification of the self into an object further than she did.

Performativity is an understanding of the process of identity construction – specifically examining the retroactive projection of identity as an individual's essence – through actions, particularly through how these actions are repeated over time.<sup>533</sup> Butler's initial mobilisation of this term within *Gender Trouble* primarily advances performativity as the mechanism underpinning the production of gender, however we can consider this more broadly as an ontology of identity, binding it to action and

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<sup>528</sup> Loidolt, p. 120.

<sup>529</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 175.

<sup>530</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 193.

<sup>531</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 179–80.

<sup>532</sup> Loidolt, p. 209.

<sup>533</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, pp. 198–200.

agency. This move would not be to reduce all forms of identity to a performative mechanism – it is, for instance, contentious as to how far such mechanisms could apply to racial identities<sup>534</sup> – but instead constitutes a move away from an impoverished picture of the political agent that would lead towards essentialism. Performativity is fundamentally concerned with how we produce and maintain forms of identity, and this is articulated with the imagery of a masquerade.<sup>535</sup> Performativity can thus be considered as a form of masking, but not in the sense that these identities should be thought of as inauthentic, as opposed to some hidden reality. Performativity thus constitutes a displacement of the identity from the individual and into the plural condition of humanity, it is concerned with identity as a matter of appearances, and of how questions of identity are both pursued and responded to. In this sense, performativity provides a framework of identity that is both very close to Arendt's work and the notion of dialectical recognition I have developed.

We can further explore philosophical performativity through contrast with its appearance and mobilisation within enclosed discourses. As with many terms of post-structuralist theory, performativity has been both adopted and misappropriated within popular discourse. One common use of the term is within the phrase 'performative wokeness', meant to denigrate someone who is inauthentic in their activism. Drawn from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the original context of the term 'woke' denotes an individual's awareness of power structures, particularly a black person's understanding of racial oppression (particularly police brutality).<sup>536</sup> Within contemporary online discourses, 'woke' has been largely severed from its roots within AAVE, and now serves as a synonym for 'progressive' – variably defined. The criticism is that the performatively woke person is just playing the part of a woke individual, that it's a charade and thereby not real. On a genuinely performative account, any 'woke' identity is performative – it is a projection based upon repeated acts, an appearance, a mask. What is really being commented on when one is called performatively woke is how a sense of identity takes priority, that one's

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<sup>534</sup> J Pfeifle, 'Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles against Subjection.', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 13.1–3 (2014); Shirley Anne Tate, 'Performativity and "raced" Bodies', in *Theories of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. by Karim Murji and J. Solomos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>535</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, pp. 63–72.

<sup>536</sup> Charles Pulliam-Moore, 'How "woke" Went from Black Activist Watchword to Teen Internet Slang', *Splinter News*, 2016 <<https://splinternews.com/how-woke-went-from-black-activist-watchword-to-teen-int-1793853989>> [accessed 18 May 2020].

actions are preoccupied with sustaining a woke sense of self.<sup>537</sup> It is not a matter of (in)authenticity, but instead a matter of uncritically accepting the standards of wokeness – with turning activism into an identity to be maintained, rather than a political project of resistance and transformation.<sup>538</sup> Butler's performativity would not call for a politics that excluded performative elements precisely because performance cannot be escaped – it is how identities are produced – it can only be avowed or ignored. As such, whenever we speak about the wokeness of an individual – we are always speaking of identity, and thus performativity, but when wokeness becomes nothing more than keeping up the appearance of an identity it enacts a restrictive form of performative identity construction.

The central claim of performativity is to abolish precisely this naïve picture of agency, fundamentally reorienting the relationship between actor and action. Like Arendt, Butler grounds identity within action, but she breaks from the Arendtian picture in so far as it endorses a schema whereby the self pre-exists its action, lying latent – awaiting expression. Butler instead adopts a Nietzschean perspective<sup>539</sup> whereby there is no 'doer behind the deed', instead arguing that the effect of performativity is to project an identity into the past, to conjure an identity retroactively behind an individual's actions. As such, gender (or another identity) is always performatively 'constituting the identity it is purported to be'.<sup>540</sup> On a performative account, identity is constituted by the actions that one may have previously considered to be its expressions. Much like Arendt, identity is a form of activity – but Butler's account asserts the constructive power of action.

However, Arendt's schema is not undone through the introduction of performativity. If we think of identity as the product of action, rather than finding expression through action, this retains the emphasis Arendt placed upon activity, particularly in so far as action constitutes the core of the political. Arendt speaks of the expression of identity in terms of a desire to affirm individual uniqueness – though this is not abolished on the performative picture. What both foreground is the necessity of a plural condition.

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<sup>537</sup> This being a manifestation of the widespread paradoxes of authenticity and virtue – wherein hyper focus on the pursuit of either acts to make neither of these achievable.

<sup>538</sup> This is not to suggest that the cultivation of identity is incompatible with such a political project, but instead to both highlight and problematise the trend of the former becomes emphasised to the complete abandonment of the latter.

<sup>539</sup> For Loidolt's examination of the relationship between Arendt and Nietzsche, see: Loidolt, pp. 53–54.

<sup>540</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 34.

Indeed, the concern with plurality within performativity comes not only in its use of Foucauldian structures of power – which, as we have noted in the previous chapter, draws our attention to the inescapable dialectics of power as a web of relations – but also through Butler’s development of this idea within her *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Within this text, Butler’s concern is explicitly with assembly as the manifestation of the people’s “understanding that their situation is shared”.<sup>541</sup> Such assemblies are performative in so far as they construct identities, wielding discourse in a certain way to produce a particular notion of population, or “the people”.<sup>542</sup>

Arendt and Butler, when considered in tandem, provide an insight into the unavowed phenomenological aspects of performativity. When Butler speaks of performative acts, she does acknowledge contexts wherein these actions are enacted yet her comments on these contexts are often constrained to speak of structures of power. This is an acknowledgement of plurality and exchange – both being built into the bedrock of the performative framework – but leave these underdeveloped in terms of phenomenology. Butler is certainly aware of phenomenological philosophy and draws directly on this, but her considerations of phenomenology are often limited to her specific consideration of the body. The foregrounding of the body and embodied experience is, of course, itself a phenomenological consideration. However, through this specific foregrounding, there is a sense in which her work obscures wider considerations of political space.

Bringing together Arendt and Butler enables us to develop an account of performative action that specifically grounds this action in Arendtian terms – which is to say within a specifically **political** context, within a space that creates the condition of possibility for this action. The spatial element is not a factor of action but a ground of it. Yet performativity allows us to revise Arendt’s schematic of action so that the public sphere is no longer considered as a kind of ideal political container, but as an arena of performativity – wherein the possibility of recognising these acts is foregrounded and conditioned by the structure of the space. This enables us to speak more clearly about the content of the political sphere, rather than following Arendt’s perspective which seems to, almost *via negativa*, establish action as politically neutral. *Prima facie*, Arendt gives us an idealised account of politics – useful perhaps as a

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<sup>541</sup> Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 25.

<sup>542</sup> Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, p. 4.

regulative ideal – that fundamentally considers all politics as generally neutral in so far as action is just a revelation of the self. However, if we consider the self not to be a pre-existent entity requiring expression, but as something that is constructed through action and within the context of a performative arena whose structure precedes the individual act (for the space itself must exist within a web of relations) then the constitution of the space itself becomes conspicuous. It cannot be considered political merely in an idealised sense. To return briefly to Markell, we have established that Arendt's framework resists the stickiness of naïve, reified space precisely because she does not allow the political ground to become the object of a fixed cartography. As Loidolt notes, Arendt opposes an over-stabilisation of political space that imposes upon it a particular unifying logic – or that determines the possibilities of the 'who'.<sup>543</sup> Instead, it is the relationships that emerge dialectically within the space that matter. Yet, whilst her account resists certain forms of stickiness, her account also precludes an understanding as to how the ways in which we can experience and articulate those very relationships are in and of themselves prone to particular forms of reification.

This is to suggest that we must consider how political space acquires internal determinations – that it does not exist solely in terms of an external boundary. In constituting the space, these determinations condition the possibilities of encounter. Our encounters become possible only within the conditions of space, we can only encounter ourselves and others with a context from which we cannot be wholly abstracted. This is to say that through attending to these internal determinations, we are speaking of how the political space opens a field of encounter – asking what kind of encounters it enables or precludes. We shall examine encounters within political space more fully in the next section.

If we draw together the three interlocutors of this section – Hegel (present in the form of recognition), Arendt, and Butler – we can see how each position has particular shortcomings when taken in isolation. For Hegel, recognition constitutes a fundamental phenomenology and produces a dialectical account of space, but his treatment of the encounter between individuals is provided in the form of a parable and thereby contains no treatment of space. Arendt's account enables us to develop this phenomenological account of space, for she foregrounds the spatial elements of recognition by grounding identity within the activity of human beings. Yet, Arendt's account does not develop the relationship

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<sup>543</sup> Loidolt, p. 189.

between action and identity in such a way as to avoid both the naturalisation of the individual and of the public sphere wherein they appear. Butler, then, provides this requisite development – allowing us to bridge Hegel and Arendt such that we can read all three figures in terms of a dialectical schema of the self that grounds its recognition within the plurality of the human condition and the ways in which this appears – or fails to appear – within space. Yet, taken alone, Butler does not provide us with an account of how performances are to be received by others. Her account of what Arendt would call the spectator is not explicitly formulated. The result is that her work provides an impoverished phenomenology, which can be addressed when her work is read alongside the other two members of this triad.

## ORIENTATIONS OF THE SELF: NAVIGATION WITHIN THE PERFORMATIVE ARENA

We have thus far explored the salience of Arendt's notion of the public sphere, but can continue to examine how this spatialization of identity operates. In particular, we must re-examine the boundaries of the public sphere in light of a reading that seeks to trouble both its presentation as a reified binary and the implications of her presentation of space. As noted, public space appears to foreground certain inexorable elements of the human condition: most notably plurality and appearance – without either of which we could not have human life in the political sense Arendt presents. To regard these elements as inexorable is to maintain that, though they may be disavowed and suppressed, they always remain present – their absence would render a coherent account of identity impossible. This provides us with an opportunity to reread Arendt's public/private division such that the outer perimeter of the public sphere is no longer regarded as a definitive boundary separating performative action from the rest of human activity. Instead the public sphere comes to be viewed as kind of ideal arena wherein plurality can be explicitly foregrounded. This is to say that the public sphere is important precisely because these features are not allowed to fall into the background or drowned out by other aspects of human life.

In this section, my concern is to develop Arendt's account of space in order to examine how public spaces acquire inner determinations that shape them as conditions of appearance. I explore this by drawing on Sara Ahmed's phenomenological treatment of orientation and its connections to Butler's performativity in her presentation of lifelines drawn through political space. This phenomenology allows us to better explore how space figures as a condition of appearance and performative arena, and how this

configures identity as a matter of movement – thereby expanding on the spatial dimensions of my dialectical account of the self. This will then enable us to develop the role of power in the following section.

We must begin by challenging the neutrality of Arendt's treatment of space. Within *The Human Condition* space may be foregrounded as central to politics but it assumes one of two binary forms. Arendt's account can tend towards viewing public space in terms of an idealised container for discourse – her account does not make explicit the ways in which such discourses come to condition space, nor how space itself conditions discourse. This it so suggest that a consideration that is ignored on Arendt's schema is the question as to how the space of the public sphere can itself become visible. Following a certain reading of her text, one suggestion might be that it is only when the space itself achieves some kind of invisibility that it can serve as a space of appearance. Only when the space is sufficiently transparent can it truly enable individuals to appear. To follow the light metaphor – the space needs to be empty of objects – of all else but light – in order to make sure that one's view is unimpeded. But this would presume the neutrality of public space and of the subject itself both of which are openly called into question by the queer theory that fuels Butler and Ahmed's works.

Developing my phenomenological reading, I now draw my reading of Arendt into comparison with Sara Ahmed's account of orientation as presented within *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed's account is primarily concerned with our worldliness – specifically beginning with the question as to how we come to locate ourselves within this world and how we find our way within it.<sup>544</sup> The project of *Queer Phenomenology* should be understood as the desire to “re-animate the very concept of space”,<sup>545</sup> which is to suggest that space must not assume a naturalised or reified status.<sup>546</sup> Specifically, orientation is understood in terms of what is able to appear to us,<sup>547</sup> for “If space is orientated, then what appears depends on one's point of view.”<sup>548</sup> Already, we have several considerable points of comparison between Ahmed and Arendt – which come to fruition in the former's considerations concerning phenomenology as the possibilities of appearance and emergence.<sup>549</sup> The way we face towards or away from objects and

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<sup>544</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 1.

<sup>545</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 12.

<sup>546</sup> Which is itself to consider space dialectically.

<sup>547</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 6.

<sup>548</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 12.

<sup>549</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 38.



others shapes how we experience space as conditioning of appearance. This is what orientation seeks to foreground. Ahmed's project is directly concerned with how things appear to us, and how those appearances are conditioned, which is to say how they have a history. The salience of both Ahmed's phenomenological reading and my own – in the context of a response to Arendt's work – is to stress how such a reading enables an exploration of the impact of these histories,<sup>550</sup> with Ahmed making the central claim that what is present to us, which is to say that which is possible for us to encounter, is not simply casual.<sup>551</sup> We must therefore attend to how the conditions of appearance and encounter are a matter of the conditions of space with particular consideration for the plurality of spaces – an acknowledgement of how space can be differently orientated.<sup>552</sup> Ahmed's schematic of orientation provides a clear critical framework through which to articulate these considerations. Such a phenomenological response to Arendt's work allows us to foreground the unique qualities of individual spaces – challenging the uniform character of her presentation of the public sphere – and to further explore how a single space can be experienced in multiple ways. Through rejecting conceptions such as "absolute space",<sup>553</sup> Ahmed's work enables us to reconsider Arendt's spatial considerations – using phenomenology to open up her treatment of space.

Much like individual identity, the identity and orientation of space has a trajectory. Given the dialectical relationship between individuals and space, spaces of appearance must not be considered as independent grounds for identity but as sites that themselves are shaped by their use. Much like an individual's orientation, the orientation of a space is subject to change, transformation, and disruption – though over time can become increasingly resistant to transformative activity as particular orientations become sedimented.<sup>554</sup> This is to say that how these spaces are orientated conditions how they can and cannot serve as performative arenas – and that orientation conditions the kinds of 'who' that can appear and be encountered. Moreover, consistent encounters with those who do not belong can disrupt the space in such a way that its orientation becomes redirected.

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<sup>550</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 56.

<sup>551</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 21.

<sup>552</sup> We can think here of queer counterpublics, as discussed by Halberstam, see: Halberstam, p. 6.

<sup>553</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 13.

<sup>554</sup> This will be explored further in the following section.

Ahmed's work describes the individual's process of navigating their identity within what I'm referring to as public space in terms of plotting a line. Over the course of our lives, we can be said to have followed or produced a lifeline – an expression of identity that is carved into both political space and upon the body itself – such as with 'laugh lines' that appear on the face of one who laughs often.<sup>555</sup> Rather than understanding lines of identity in the sense of boundaries – borders between categories, Ahmed's account describes identities themselves in terms of the course one takes in navigating the world. In so doing, identity is presented as something that is at once spatial and temporal for they are orientated both towards the present condition of the world but also towards an open set of possibilities in the future – again overcoming Markell's concern with the use of spatial metaphor in describing the self. These lines allow us to find our way through the world<sup>556</sup> – and I read this as conceptualising identity as a trajectory through the world. They map individual lives, but also draw our attention to the ways in which our personal line of orientation is traced for us, how we're brought into alignment with the world, which is to say how power orientates people in a shared direction. The line of identity is thus not always one's own course to plot in the sense that whilst one is always able to push in whatever direction one may wish<sup>557</sup> – pre-extant lines are already drawn within public space and the attempt to move outside of these established routes immediately presents the individual with resistance. The lines are themselves performative – which is to say that they are maintained through repeated use. Those paths more well-trodden acquire and are maintained through a normativity that is enforced by various expressions of political power. Habitual action (either moving along or deviating from an established route) carves out grooves into political space that enable individuals both to move within the space and, to return to Ahmed's discussion of the individual extending themselves, to move as the space. These lines are orientations imposed on us by the alignment of political space, they are manifestations of power that condition space, shaping how one can appear and who can be at home and where.

We can furthermore consider these lines in terms of the kinds of spaces that one is drawn into proximity with as well as the kinds of spaces that are visible and how the conditions of this visibility are shaped. One could imagine a particular space that enables a certain form of marginalised subjectivity to

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<sup>555</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 18.

<sup>556</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 14.

<sup>557</sup> With this idea of 'wishing' expressed in Ahmed's work in the context of the 'willful subject', see: Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, chap. Willfullness and Feminist Subjectivity.

appear, but the normative lines of a society may render that space (and its subjects in turn) invisible to the majority of society.<sup>558</sup> Considering shared political space in the Arendtian sense as a condition of appearance and encounter – Ahmed’s model of the line notes that we do not habitually encounter that which is off the course of the line we have taken.<sup>559</sup> As sedimentations of habit these lines are constituted by the appearances of objects and others that they enable or disable. These lines never completely determine what is and is not possible in the sense that chance encounters can come about – but Ahmed notes that such chance encounters act as forms of redirection. When a line of identity is brought into a chance encounter with something it prohibits, for example, the line must either accept that encounter and thus have the meaning of its course altered, or it must ‘correct’ itself in order to retain its distance.

Here we must trouble the neutrality of Arendt’s account of appearance, wherein visibility is seen as *de facto* enabling and where the fundamental need to secure the right to appear is premised as the desire to secure against the possibility of invisibility. Whilst invisibility is clearly a condition of exclusion, we must note that not all forms of visibility are straightforwardly enabling. Ahmed expands on this in her work on diversity and inclusion,<sup>560</sup> and in her work on phenomenology of race, wherein she specifically speaks of black bodies as conspicuous when they appear within the context of a white space.<sup>561</sup> This gives us a way of developing what is meant by space of appearance. We should not think of such spaces in terms of a simplistic model of inclusivity wherein those that can appear are included and those that cannot are excluded – we do not have a binary of visibility and invisibility. Instead, the terms upon which one can appear must be called into question. Sure enough, invisibility – the inability to appear or to count when one wishes to is a matter of exclusion, a failure of the space to properly consider or constitute the individual as a worthy subject. But certain forms of visibility – particularly the kind of hypervisibility discussed by Ahmed – wherein the individual is visible precisely because their presence challenges the stability of that space is too an example of the limits of that space. This is something of an inversion of Arendt’s schema – for Arendt presented an account of space whereby space was directly supposed to enable individuals to appear.

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<sup>558</sup> Again, Halberstam explores this in his discussion of ‘queer counterpublics’, see: Halberstam.

<sup>559</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 19.

<sup>560</sup> Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (UK: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>561</sup> Ahmed, ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’.

On this account, identity is not a matter of placement so much as it is a matter of articulation. This is to suggest that bringing this account of orientation into dialogue with the dialectical model of the self as an open site of negotiation allows us to further explore and emphasise that identity has a trajectory. As such, identity is never a matter of establishing a fixed sense of what one is as a kind of foundation upon which certain discourses can be built, but is instead always a form of movement. Identity always points us away from where we are, in the sense that it is always mindful of where we have been and is compelled to turn our attention to where we are going. If we consider action – combining the senses used by Arendt, Butler, and Ahmed – in the context of worldliness, we can advance the claim that action is always concerned with the construction not only of an individual identity, but that it is always both implicated within and furthermore inseparable from collective senses of meaning. These collective senses of meaning are what we mean by the term world, which signifies the plural dimension underlying our experiences, how we negotiate and mediate ourselves within a context of collective significance. As Arendt maintained, action is concerned with the meaning – particularly identity in the sense that action always seeks a ‘who’ – and as such within the context of a system of power, action either sustains pre-existent meanings or subverts and challenges them in some way. When current meanings are challenged, those actions constitute a gesture towards a new set of relations, a new world.

Ahmed’s project has identity as one among many of its considerations – though orientation is not explicitly developed as a ground for identity. *Queer Phenomenology* is named as such because of its lengthy considerations of sexuality in terms of sexual orientation, exploring this metaphorical explication in terms of the queering of space and activity. Orientation works to explore subjective experience of thrownness<sup>562</sup> – in the Heideggerian sense – which is to say that it is concerned with how individuals navigate the world. Thus its central concern is with the individual’s experience of space and its conditioning by power. Whilst identity is clearly salient to these concerns, and is explicitly explored within the text, Ahmed does not speak of orientation in terms of an ontology of identity. Orientations are implicated within the construction and proliferation of identities – and perhaps this in itself comments on the process of identity construction – but it is not itself equated with it. Ahmed’s schema does not do

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<sup>562</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 40.

identical work to Butler's performativity in this sense, though through being read both alongside Butler and alongside Arendt the metaphor of orientation can be extended and further explored.

Much like Arendt and Butler, Ahmed's account affirms the role of action within the construction of identity. Like Arendt, Ahmed maintains that action is spatial, but goes beyond both Arendt and Butler when she maintains that the conditions for action are dependent on how we are orientated towards or away from objects or others within space.<sup>563</sup> As previously explored, Butler's performativity is heavily influential on Ahmed's project, though within her account of orientation the phenomenological ground of performativity is developed such that we are better able to consider what kinds of performance are able or unable to appear as a matter of how the space constitutes or fails to constitute a space of appearance for that particular form of performance.

I draw this reading out of Ahmed's treatment of 'queer moments', wherein the world becomes slanted or askew. Such moments 'queer' space not through troubling the space itself (no spatial law is broken!) but through the production of misalignment. Ahmed's work develops the spatiality of identity through the notion of bodily extension. She notes that different bodies are more or less able to extend into particular spaces,<sup>564</sup> with the (in)ability to extend or move through space framed as an explication of agency or lack thereof. Partially, this is a matter of comfort within space, which is to say that affinity<sup>565</sup> with space better enables one to extend into it. This becomes a matter of belonging in the sense of being at home within this space, where one's body is neither directly conspicuous in its individuality nor out of place. This sense of being 'in place' is a matter of habituation,<sup>566</sup> rather than something that is given, it is something that is lived in a performative sense of becoming sedimented through repeated action.<sup>567</sup> Ahmed is not always clear as to what bodily extension means, though I want to consider this in terms of one's (in)ability to identify with a space. When one is able to identify oneself with a space, one's identity – including one's body,<sup>568</sup> is able to expand into that space such that one's identity becomes that space. The identification thus becomes a matter of one's movement through space. Conversely, when one cannot

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<sup>563</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 52.

<sup>564</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 7.

<sup>565</sup> Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 83.

<sup>566</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 7.

<sup>567</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 56.

<sup>568</sup> As previously explored in my discussion of Butler in Chapter 2 – the self includes the body but is not reducible to this.

make this identification one either sinks into space or stands out and is not able to become part of the background. On Ahmed's account, political space is enabling of an identity precisely insofar as one's identity is itself the space. To be invisible and thus concealed or suppressed by a political space is a disabling state, but so too is to be so visible that one stands entirely apart from the space in question. When things no longer seem to be in line with one another, the coherence of a space becomes compromised, and – again to return to Ahmed's consideration about bodily extension – one is unable to extend oneself into that space. The space withdraws from the individual, isolating them such that they can only appear as someone that does not belong. When a space is familiar to an individual, their appearance becomes the appearance of this space – they are part of the space, and as is implied by Ahmed's expression of bodily extension into familiar space they cannot be so easily distinguished from it. Whereas Arendt would present us with a person who remained themselves regardless of the space they were in – with this space only ever enabling or preventing their expressive activity – Ahmed's account of space is itself embroiled within the subject.

To depart from the normative lines of identity, to go off course, is often to make oneself conspicuous. The wayward subject stands out for standing apart from the norm and this hyper-visible appearance comes to be regarded as a threat to the normative line from which they have departed. Ahmed speaks of the disciplinary function that maintains normative lines – such as heterosexuality – in terms of pressure. This can range from the gentle presence of a hand on one's shoulder, guiding one down one pathway over another, to the extreme pressure of physical assault and violence. She invokes Marilyn Frye's etymology that traces the root of the term oppression back to 'to press' and suggests a reconsideration of oppression in terms of pressure – both in a literal, physical, sense and within the psychophysical experience of the subject.<sup>569</sup> Not only does this serve to turn our attention to the lived experience of oppression as the sensation of pressure upon the body – as Ahmed herself considers it – but we can extend this to consider oppression in terms of its spatiality. Ahmed notes that pressure is a calculation of force divided over the area to which it is applied.<sup>570</sup> Though she then goes on to think about the distribution of pressures over greater or smaller populations, we could instead develop this in another direction: to think about how this link between oppression and pressure articulates the spatiality of political power, the

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<sup>569</sup> Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>570</sup> Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 50.

orientations it both enforces and precludes, and therefore of the subject itself. We cannot think about pressure without a consideration of space, space has such a profound impact on the experience of pressure that one's (in)ability to experience pressure is conditioned by the space itself. The conditioning of space by power is itself often experienced as pressure. To return to bodily extension, Ahmed's work helps us to note how the self is spatial because one's sense of self becomes able to extend comfortably into space. The inability for one's identity to become background is itself an effect of pressure that prevents one's extension into public space.

Importantly, this account rests within the phenomenological experience of the individual which allows us to note how pressure is not experienced by everyone in that environment equally. We might say that the pressure caused by power is not a constant for a space in the same way that the air pressure of the room remains more or less stable. Of course, when air pressure changes even subtly this is noticeable by some yet goes unnoticed for others. When speaking of power, the experience of the psychophysical pressure depends upon how one is oriented. Certain dynamics may fail to appear – and thus remain invisible to some – and yet be impossible to ignore by others. This is not to suggest that these dynamics exist only in the perception of the individual, they are part of the structure of space itself. They only become conspicuous or noticeable when the space is turned towards in a particular way.

Yet it is precisely a function of disciplinary power to police orientation such that even when a plurality of orientations present themselves as available to us certain options appear to us as more available than others. Precisely how certain spaces can appear as neutral – and certain framings of the subject can follow suit – is through the maintenance of certain orientations as central, definitive lines of normativity. Power can orient space and those within it such that most people are shaped by these pressures to the extent that they cannot feel them. And yet for those orientated differently, these pressures are experienced as a stifling constraint – and when this is expressed, others often respond as if their very selves have been attacked – which is in a sense true, as to call into question how space enables the movement of some while restricting the movement of others is to make identities conspicuous and to call them into question. The enforcement of a singular orientation upon space does not merely serve to obscure the multiple ways in which these spaces are experienced and conditioned. We must furthermore consider how this singular kind of orientation obscures the phenomenological consideration of space entirely. It is not merely plurality, but spatiality which is threatened.

Understanding articulations of identity in terms of movement – which is to foreground how the performative construction of the self and its qualifiers is a temporal practice that cannot be divorced from its orientation towards the future, and its trajectory and velocity towards that future – is to understand that articulation is inseparable from strategy. Strategy is furthermore central to understanding identity in terms of power: as a function of power, identity is always reinforcing or opposing some wider framework of meaning and significance. On this account, identity is an active engagement in the construction and reconstruction of space. Through centring the strategic component of identity-talk, we are both able and required to reaffirm the plurality of identity expressions in several ways. Not only in the Arendtian sense of plural people living in a shared world, but further in the sense of plural instances of action or political speech. Through acknowledging the temporal arrangement of repeated actions, the habitual quality foregrounded within both Butler's performativity and Ahmed's lifelines, we are forced to reconsider our schematic of political inclusion in order to account for the inability of individual actions to be comprehensive. Of course, individual actions can gesture towards a more inclusive or universal kind of political practice in more or less satisfactory ways, but through the very structure of the subject – each articulation and mobilisation of identity issues from a particular position within shared space. This is to suggest that just as no single act can be considered the absolute ground for one's identity (to paraphrase Butler), the way in which spaces of appearance are conditioned by orientation renders an all-inclusive space impossible. Orientation can be neither neutral<sup>571</sup> nor passive, it is always facing a direction and constituting a limited field of appearance – of objects, others, and possible worlds.

We thus have a schematic of identity that understands the construction of the self in terms of one's ability to appear before others. My consideration of Arendt and Ahmed alongside one another allows us to explore how space itself constitutes a space of appearance – how it must be orientated in a particular way for subjects to appear – and furthermore how these spaces serve as the conditions of possible appearance such that the ways in which one becomes recognisable to others becomes a matter of one's spatiality. The recognitive account of the self stresses the importance of identity as a form of movement and exchange. This is to suggest that the pursuit of a 'who' is never the pursuit of a 'what' in the sense of an object, but is instead always the pursuit of a 'where' both in the sense of a set of physical

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<sup>571</sup> Though it can masquerade as neutral if its particularity is masked by certain regimes of truth, for instance.



relations between objects in space, but also as a set of conceptual and social relations within a field of power.

To be out of touch with the mainstream lines of social life is to have the conditions of one's subjectivity constrained such that one is at once disabled from appearing and subject to conditions of singularising hypervisibility. If we consider this in terms of public space as an arena of appearance, we can begin to consider how the preferential and normative status afforded to particular lines of identity can come to condition spaces such that those spaces are unable to allow certain identities to appear. On such an account, we can come to view oppression and marginalisation precisely in terms of how one can and cannot appear within these conditioned spaces, how power is expressed and embodied within the construction of the spaces wherein we encounter or fail to encounter one another.

We can think of these considerations in terms of the practice of identity cartography. Cartographic conceptualisations of the self often constitute underdeveloped accounts of space by presenting us with a political map divided into various identities with borders of either greater or lesser solidity drawn between them. This is the model often invoked by identity enclosure. On this account identity is then a matter of finding one's place upon this map, matching an inner disposition or allegiance (such as the contemporary framing of gender identity). This is to say that identity is a matter of 'accurately' securing one's placement within a social world. As we have previously considered in the context of Markell's work – such an account of space reifies the terms of identity and identification, accepting the present conditions of power as given. By turning identities into immutable features on the social map, such an account of space leaves us unable to mount any meaningful challenge to the logics that underpin oppressive systems. They maintain categories of identity, but provide no consideration as to how these accounts come about. They omit these ontological considerations whilst simultaneously being unable to consider these identities relationally. Such an account, for instance, fails to consider the contributions of intersectional womanist theory, for instance, for it gives us only a series of identities that are at once strictly divided and yet constructed as amalgamations out of diverse experiences.

This naïve model of space could prompt us – as it does for Markell – to drop space from our considerations, but this would only allow the poor model of space to prohibit any consideration of space. Indeed, given politics' inseparability from questions of identity – whether it avowedly or covertly seeks the who, the who is always sought, secured, and categorised – I maintain that identity enclosure can be

productively considered alongside the extended metaphor of cartography. On this account, we shift the consideration from maps of identity to the process of producing and maintaining certain arrangements within, relationships across, and attitudes towards space. This is to say that we are attentive to the process of drawing maps, to the processes that maintain and underpin the cartography of socio-political space. This is not a reductive move – for I do not maintain that all forms of cartography produce maps in the same way, or that all maps of social reality – which is to say all uses of spatial metaphor – can do the same work, which would be to suggest that they are uniform. To assign centrality to the metaphor of cartography in my reading of the politics of identity is to foreground how categories of identity are always being mobilised or impeded. It is to take seriously the consideration of identity as movement and to extend it beyond Ahmed's uses. This is not to naturalise these categories, but is instead to take seriously the claim that particular lines of being are performatively established within a context of and by mechanisms of power. This is to seriously consider the work done by the term 'movement' within the expression 'identity movements' – in the sense that identity comes to be understood in terms of its trajectory. This expresses how certain frames of identity are maintained as normative through the deployment of disciplinary regimes of power, as well as highlighting precisely what must be faced for other forms of life to become liveable. Cartography brings these considerations into proximity with the notion of political space as arena or terrain, wherein strategic articulations of identity are performed.

Ahmed's work makes the suggestion that we cannot know which way we are facing if we do not have something alongside or against which to orient ourselves – and this is precisely where normative deployments of identity must be considered. Identity movements have no choice but to operate within a conceptual context and to move within a social reality that is already orientated – which is to say that has already been mapped out such that 'proper' places have been assigned to its subjects. Though these discourses both can and must contest these terms, they must do so within these conditions – this is to consider these discourses within the Foucauldian dialectic of power and resistance. Discourses of identity are constituted within these conditions – they have to consider themselves in terms of their worldliness, which is to say in how they enable or disable us to encounter others and objects. We cannot begin to find our way through the social world without these normative points with which to make reference. Through the pervasive ability of power to centralise and prioritise particular forms of experience and activity, we

come to find the conditions that delimit agency, both in terms of its limitations and in terms of our ability to claim agency within the limited space.

This point is further expanded within Butler's *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, wherein she speaks of our inability to act without the conditions of action whilst at once needing to acknowledge that we must also act to bring about those very conditions.<sup>572</sup> This is centrally a question about the conditions of possible appearance,<sup>573</sup> about the creation and mobilisation of collective categories of identity through the cartographic (to apply my own term to her work) creation of contentious borders that constantly demand question 'who counts?'<sup>574</sup> Indeed, we may be tempted to conclude that one way of reading Butler's statement that "inclusiveness is not the only aim of democratic politics, especially radical democratic politics"<sup>575</sup> is to affirm that these borders must always be contentious. A simplistic framework of inclusion – one that mires itself within a 'false universal' – must be discarded in lieu of a more robust consideration as to the strategic nature of identity articulations.

Ahmed's text foregoes providing an analytic of power or of examining the dynamics of oppression in detail – though this is a topic her broader corpus attends to with much rigour and nuance. Within *Queer Phenomenology*, however, Ahmed's commentary on the role of power centres around its punitive effects, how it serves to punish those that attempt to navigate the social world in a way that deviates from the established routes. This is to suggest that power appears in the text only to note that those whose orientations 'fail' to fall upon these established lines – whose orientations fails to allow them to appear straight or in alignment with the rest of the world – are marginalised in so far as they are pushed aside from these main routes through social space as they are performatively maintained such that they are either difficult to reach or completely out of 'range' for those on the line. We must be cautious not to misapply her schema and thus read disciplinary power as solely concerned with a singular line. It is instead concerned with a collection of lines sharing their overall trajectory. As we have established, identity on this schema is not understood as taking a position on a social map but is instead a habitual movement through conceptual and physical space, a movement that has a continual trajectory and velocity towards the future. This is to suggest that the model of power we can read out of *Queer*

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<sup>572</sup> Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, p. 16.

<sup>573</sup> Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, p. 19.

<sup>574</sup> Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, p. 5.

<sup>575</sup> Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, p. 5.

*Phenomenology* when read alongside the other texts within this section (and within this thesis more broadly) is concerned with how the lifelines of particular identities are continually conceptualised as distant from those established lines that are continually re-established as the centre.

Moving away from the dominant orientation is to manufacture political distance. This distance is a form of deviance, in so far as the failure to occupy those lines that are considered primary is a deviation from the established course. At this point I will consider how this schema establishes political power and oppression in specifically spatial terms. We must come to think of the oppression in terms of marginalisation<sup>576</sup> and in terms of political inclusion. When considering identity enclosure, the language of inclusivity is omnipresent – often contrasted with those politics that are viewed as exclusionary, with the applicability of this term to a political movement becoming itself synonymous with an assertion of this politics’ inadequacy if not outright failure. This is particularly the case when populist identity movements invoke the language of intersectional womanist theory<sup>577</sup> – though this move in itself often serves to centre only a few intersections whilst marginalising others. The result of this is a model of inclusion where important distinctions between different identity groups become erased – something that is ironically precisely what Crenshaw’s intersectionality was poised to oppose.<sup>578</sup>

Ahmed’s perspective enables us to reconsider this naïve schematic of political inclusion – with her text *On Being Included* tackling how similarly naïve forms of diversity work come to be expressed within the institutional hierarchies of the academy.<sup>579</sup> Phenomenologically, inclusion is a matter of being able to extend one’s body into space and to identify oneself with the space. Inclusion can thus be theorised in terms of the ability for one to appear within the space as one who is at home there.

My interest in bringing together Arendt and Ahmed is to use the latter’s account of orientation alongside my rereading of Arendt’s account of space in order to constitute different kinds of performative arena that function as distinct spaces of appearance. Ahmed’s work presents and dissects her notion of orientation though often tends towards considering distinct orientations in isolation. Instead, I would

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<sup>576</sup> By this I mean the foregrounding of the spatial metaphors often hidden within the use of this term, the suggestion that marginalised subjects are not centred.

<sup>577</sup> The widespread bastardisation of the term intersectionality speaks to this, see: Habiba Katsha, ‘Your Misunderstanding of Intersectionality Is Harming Black Women’, *The Nope Book*, 2019 <<http://www.thenopebook.com/activism/intersectionality-black-women/>> [accessed 21 May 2020].

<sup>578</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’, *Stanford Law Review*, 43.6 (1991), 1241–99 (p. 1242).

<sup>579</sup> Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*.

like to use her notion of orientation to conceptualise political spaces of appearance and encounter in terms of lattices of orientation, wherein they are constituted precisely because plural orientations are brought together in order to create sites that can foreground particular kinds of performative action. What we gain from the image of the grid is a clearly laid out cartographic picture, where display elements are assigned a particular place and wearing everything is brought into alignment. What is suggested by the lattice, however, is that desperate orientations that seem *prima facie* to run in contrary directions - orientations that would, on the model of the grid, be clearly seen as deviations or ruptures of the grid structure - can instead be understood as part of the same overall structure. Despite a superficially disparate directionality, these orientations are fundamentally comprised and lend strength to the same overall structure of power. Even though the threads pull in different directions the various strands are woven such that this superficially different directionality provides the overall structure greater strength. This further helps to explain how superficially counter structural movements can appear to go against the overall structure was serving that structure. This lattice is Arendtian in its incorporation of an indispensable plurality, but furthermore establishes the salience of Ahmed's work to my dialectical conception of the self as it enables us to envision dialectical mediation in terms of the necessity of negotiating and navigating a world of overlapping and interlaced orientations. Our experiences are both conditioned by and serve to condition in turn these orientations.

The justice sought by identity enclosure becomes misguided in so far as it misconceives its goal as the neutralisation of space, rather than the dismantling of narrow structures of power that serve to collapse a plurality of possibilities such that seemingly immutable normative lines become possible. In order to develop this account of orientation as power and my developing perspective on the spatiality of identity on our understanding of political inclusion and its role within contemporary identity politics, I shall bring these considerations into dialogue with the Gramscian notion of hegemony.

## HEGEMONIC RECOGNITION: STRUCTURAL CODIFICATIONS OF MODES OF ENCOUNTER

Within the previous two sections of this chapter I have presented the spatial considerations of my recognitive theory of the self – the focus being to articulate the role played by the conditions of appearance in shaping identity that both constitute and are constituted by political space. Subjects are

thus to be understood in terms of the spaces within which they are situated, as these spaces shape the conditions under which these subjects can be recognised. On this account, it is not space that determines the subject in advance of its appearance, but the constitution of the subject is a matter of how it is able to appear within a particular space – and the shape of that space is in turn affected by the kinds of appearance that occur within it. Having noted this reciprocal relationship – the concern within this section shifts to consider the ways in which this process, despite its presentation up until now as reciprocal and necessarily open-ended, comes to be reified and affixed. This line of questioning stems in part from a consideration of agency, considering how malleable and contestable the standards of articulation of identity are in our present political conditions. The concern of this section is thus: if we are to understand recognition as conditioned but not determined by the space in which it occurs and indeed if recognition could serve as a disruptive or transformative force within this space, how is it that certain patterns of recognition appear as immutable? How is it that certain articulations of the subject are more or less intelligible? Within this section, I shall begin by considering these concerns alongside the cartographic treatment of identity introduced in the previous section – my aim being to make explicit the practices of identity mapping that attempt to define in advance how the subject can and cannot appear. I shall develop this cartographic framing, as well as the other work in this chapter thus far, alongside hegemonic theory as a model of power. I shall clarify how the recognitive framing of the subject presents us with a subject fundamentally conceptualised as a form of motion or movement, contrasting this with a model of the subject – one prolific within contemporary identity politics – that instead seeks to conceptualise the subject as a matter of position. My consideration of the recognitive self and its spatiality culminate in an exploration of the philosophical grounding of identity enclosure in terms of its specific deployment of spatialisation, and a critical response to this.

The spatiality of the self is to be found precisely in the acknowledgment that any process of articulation or qualification of an individual self is not only going to rely upon the general conditions that make this individual self possible, but also on the ways by which the subject comes to find themselves orientated within the social world. Thus, like qualification – which depends on a field of power to establish objects to be qualified – all articulation of the self is at once an articulation of context. Though the boundary between individual and environment is not outright abolished, it is a distinction that cannot be taken to be absolute, in the sense that to speak of an individual is always to speak within and of the

conditions that constitute that individual – even if one’s utterance does not avow these conditions. No individual subject can be split from the world, from the conditions of power that produce and frame that subject.

To begin with cartography, we should begin with the note that a map in the context of this thesis acts as a conceptualised terrain, constituted as a field wherein certain concepts can come to frame a space upon which and within which activity can occur. Within this determinate terrain, the cartographic practice structures a vision of social space such that distinct conceptual locations are fixed. These specific positions become available precisely through the cartographic foundation and the manner by which it has postulated and then codified space. As a result of this codification, within the cartographic paradigm, the object-ontology of the subject<sup>580</sup> is deployed to frame identity as a matter of placement within a pre-extant social grid. In this sense, the terms upon which the subject may be articulated are established by the terms of the map – and these terms are not open to contestation in so far as the map is precisely understood to be a reflection of the true arrangement of space. Of course, this cartography – as with any expression of power – disavows its own productive role, and as such passes its own constructions off as natural structures. Within the confines of the cartographic model, articulations of identity can only take one form: the qualification of the self as an object, defined by the way it occupies an assigned position within the social world as mapped. We can further see an internalisation of this logic within contemporary identity discourse – where the notion of being placed by external forces is seen as an coercive or violent imposition, whereas one is not only able to but must place oneself if one is to lay claim to what passes for meaningful freedom within the confines of this discourse.

Contemporary identity discourse’s love of position can be seen in its treatment of validity.<sup>581</sup> Many social media posts take the simple form of ‘x is valid’, where ‘x’ here would refer to a specific oppressed identity. Examples could include ‘lesbians are valid’, or ‘trans people are valid’. Often these would take a pseudo-interactive form along the lines of ‘like and share if you think trans people are valid’. Likewise, when people from oppressed and marginalised groups would share their experiences, a commonplace, supportive response would be to simply affirm that ‘you’re valid!’. The notion of validity

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<sup>580</sup> As discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>581</sup> Though at the time of writing, this expression has somewhat gone out of fashion – an exploration of this example helps to illuminate where this identity discourse is coming from, and the ways in which it can get trapped within the terms of its own expression so as to distort this original point.

within this discursive frame was to be understood as a kind of unconditional support, but also more specifically as an affirmation of the ‘truth’ of a particular identity. In a sense, validity was a way of affirming the reality of a particular subject, as a way of affirming that they were not some kind of conceptual mistake or as a move against processes of othering. This is particularly evident in trans discourses, whereby validity can be understood as respecting the ‘truth’ of one’s gender identification. Validity thus comes to mean that an identity is a valid codification, it means to affirm that ‘you, too, have a place within this system,’ that one can be – and should be – accounted for. This accounting of validity is thought by the identitarian to be a confirmation of a truth that power has repressed – a truth that nevertheless remains consistently true, if unavowed.<sup>582</sup> It is important to maintain that another account of validity is available, one that preserves the express interests of those who appeal to validity and yet breaks from the logic of positioning and its resulting essentialism. On this account, to claim validity for oneself or to assert the validity of a particular other or for a particular identity qualifier is a performative act, an utterance that gestures towards a particular condition of possibility that may not yet be present. To performatively invoke validity in this way is to express a desire that one’s desired form of life – perhaps the particular pattern of comportment derived from a qualifier like ‘black’ or ‘trans’ – should be liveable. Yet this is a performative gesture that simultaneously acknowledges that the identity in question is not liveable, or that its conditions of possibility constitute it as a site of enormous pressure and precarity – with this reflected by the very need to validate the identity. To invoke validity, to affirm it, is to imply that it remains to be realised – that it is outstanding and thus still requires articulation and that in so being articulated, one is orientating oneself towards what kind of world they wish to live in, and that they seek to produce through their action. It is an indication as to how performative enactment takes up a particular condition, the unliveability of a life, and attempts to transform that through its own activity – through a mediation with the conditions of articulation.

This ideological notion of the map doubtless has many points of contact with allied philosophical perspectives - we could think of maps alongside notions such as a Gadamerian horizon,<sup>583</sup> or in terms of Butlerian frames,<sup>584</sup> or among any number of alternative theorisations of conceptual space – but for my

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<sup>582</sup> And thus, this view echoes the repression hypothesis. See: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, I.

<sup>583</sup> See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

<sup>584</sup> See: Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*



considerations I shall instead draw this into proximity with Gramsci's account of hegemony. His work of hegemony is of particular use here in explaining how power intervenes upon the recognitive development of identity in order to condition its fixity. Gramscian theory thereby provides an effective lens for the understanding of identity enclosure and its internal logic. Gramsci presents ideology (instruments of domination that feed hegemonic configurations of power) as forming "the terrain upon which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle".<sup>585</sup> This quotation not only notes for us the spatial considerations embroiled within hegemony and its notion of field – but also maps a distinction between the field and its determination, which (to re-express in my own terms) is a distinction between space and its articulation or mapping within discourse. This proximity is further reinforced by Gramsci's presentation of hegemony as the creation of an ideological terrain that shapes consciousness and knowledge – and herein we have ample connections between this framing and the Foucauldian *episteme* considered in my previous chapter.<sup>586</sup> Hegemony in its rawest form is a production of spatial order – an alignment that produces a codified structure that opens up a conceptual terrain, defining the boundaries and rules of this terrain.

The hegemonic conditioning of social space therefore fundamentally constitutes the conditions of being. It orientates social spaces in order to ground the conditions of appearance within its framework of power, dictating the terms upon which an identity can be constituted. It provides a determination of what is intelligible, what articulations of the self can be heard, and collapses all articulations of the self into a framework of the positioning of a substance within a pre-constituted field – the terms of which are presented as stable, static, non-negotiable – such that all articulation is a form of qualification. Thus to answer the question as to how plural spaces come to share the same overall or fundamental orientation, we must consider how these spaces though seemingly disparate and diverse partake in the same underlying conditions of possibility in that they are constituted within a hegemonic field of power that admits plurality provided that this plurality assumes a singular, organising orientation.

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<sup>585</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. by David Forgacs (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1999), pp. 199 (SPN, 376-7 (Q7§19)).

<sup>586</sup> It is important to note that, just as we saw with my discussion of Foucault, Gramsci's notebooks present hegemony alongside numerous military metaphors. Like Foucault, it is something of an open question as to how invested in such military terms Gramsci was, but as Perry Anderson notes in *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* we would be remiss to confine our considerations of Gramsci to the militarism of his language when he seemed to note the limits of such analogies himself.

My concern then comes to focus on the manner in which cartography is both a hegemonic practice, and thus how it provides the conditions of positioning. Cartography, like hegemony, fixes a vision of space – attributing an implied stability to the conceptual apparatus it uses to carve up the terrain. As such, the map provides the conditions required for the project of placement, for the act of establishing the grammar of a discourse of position. Thus, the moment at the forefront of my thinking is Gramsci's distinction between two political conditions – *le guerre di movimento e di posizione*:<sup>587</sup> the war of movement (or manoeuvre) and the war of position.<sup>588</sup> These terms serve multifaceted roles within Gramsci's thought – both referring to distinct moments of political development and possibly to distinct political systems (forming his distinction between 'Eastern' and 'Western' political conditions).<sup>589</sup> Most importantly for my thinking, these terms mark a distinction between a state of open class conflict wherein classes and conditions can move (such that there can be direct clashes between revolutionaries and authorities, for instance) and a political condition wherein this open conflict is rendered impossible.<sup>590</sup> As such, the wars denote those kinds of political strategy that are at once necessary and available for a transformative political project. The impossibility of movement is an effect of power, a condition marked by the consolidated control of a dominant class that precludes open conflict or challenges to their control. As such, resistance to this power (and again at this point we may wish to recall the dialectical relationship between these two concepts as presented in my discussion of Foucault) can only occur indirectly – as a form of ideological competition whereby various camps attempt to gather power for themselves. This reified state of the war of position, whereby resistance can only be conceived in terms of establishing a counterpoint, is defined against the war of movement due to the presence of a hegemonic structure of power.<sup>591</sup> For my purposes, hegemony is thus to be understood as a structure of power that closes down movement in favour of position.

To bring identity cartography together with hegemony is to make explicit how cartographic practices are prescriptive blueprints that prescribe the conditions of the otherwise open-ended conditions of space. Cartography cannot, therefore, be understood as a purely descriptive mode of speech whereby

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<sup>587</sup> Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, p. SPN, 233-6 (Q13§24); SPN, 236-8 (Q7§16); SPN 238-9 (Q6§138).

<sup>588</sup> Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, bk. SPN 233-6 (Q13§24).

<sup>589</sup> See: Perry Anderson, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Verso, 2017).

<sup>590</sup> Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, p. SPN, 238-9 (Q6§138).

<sup>591</sup> Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, p. SPN, 238-9 (Q6§138).

a pre-extant terrain is simply being expressed in language. Instead, cartography is a performative enactment of intelligibility – it is a process of articulation that in and of itself opens up, as well as shapes and delimits, a space, it constitutes and maintains a particular epistemic and ideological framing. A cartography of space is a reification of the terms of appearance, it is a project that attempts to secure what can and cannot appear in advance and as such affixes conditions of possibility and denies their dynamic potential. It is at once a matter of epistemology and ontology – and these are intimately implicated in the conditions of power that shape the possibility of articulation. Precisely because hegemony presents itself as a field of power – we should be mindful to retain those insights on power as presented by Foucault, particularly as regards my explication of his power-resistance dialectic within the previous chapter. Foucault reminds us here of the productive role power plays in the constitution of the *episteme*. Thus, as a function of power, we should not therefore understand the problem of cartography as a matter of concealing some deeper, more true articulation of space. The truth of the articulation is a function of power – such that we are not seeking to secure a more accurate representation of the space in terms of what is or is not intelligible. We do not, therefore, want to reject identity cartography on the grounds that it ‘misrepresents’ space – but instead we oppose it precisely because of its constitutive power – how its denial of spatial dynamism induces a real and potent paralysis. This is a matter of attending to the kinds of articulation this hegemonic structure presents as unintelligible – thus demonstrating how it excludes certain forms of articulation from its discourse.<sup>592</sup> The question thus becomes: within the confines of this particular hegemonic grammar, what are the limits of articulation – both in terms of the content and forms of expression these articulations can take. This very fixity serves as an ossification of the present conditions of oppression – and indeed their underlying project of positioning serves as the conditions of possibility for this kind of oppression. We could say that for some the affixation of the subject makes it possible to asphyxiate the subject.

This is to say that hegemony as a system of power is fundamentally a cartographic project of sustaining and prescriptively enforcing a mapping of space. The determination of the terrain is a process of reification, whereby a vision of social reality is presented as factic – and this is again an instance of power concealing its own activity. We therefore come to understand that a cartography of social space is

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<sup>592</sup> Herein lies another point of continuity with Foucault’s *corpus*, see: Rudi Visker, *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique* (London ; New York: Verso, 1995).

an expression of power that at once naturalises the determinations it makes of social space, disavowing its own activity such that the result is a frame of socio-political reality as ready-made, and along with this goes a particular framing of the subject as an object that can be determined in particular ways.

Hegemony makes the notion of position possible through this cartographic practice. This establishes the limits of discourse as the determination of place, which is to say that what characterises the war of position is the grounding of clearly demarcated social trenches. Discourse has set itself positions, its state has become factic and naturalised. These constraints give rise to a discourse wherein identity projects a prescriptive force over the action of its subjects, whose activity is demanded by the identity they have already assumed, identity no longer serves as a descriptor of activity that pre-exists its codification. Hegemonic power draws determining lines through social space in order to discriminate between various types of subject – again enacting a reification of the subject that foregrounds particular aspects of that subject's orientation (understood in the Ahmedian sense of performative movement) and then codifying them into a distinctive ontological ground – a ground that then dictates the place that the subject must occupy within the conceptual framework of the hegemony. As such, hegemony is a process of homing the subject, and policing those subjects who dwell in the interstices between the categories the system maintains. Hegemonic power acts to constitute an ideological field, an *episteme*, through its creation and stabilisation of normative structures, the effect of which is the production of a boundary between the intelligible and unintelligible articulations of the subject. This is to suggest that hegemony wields intelligibility through its constitution of a socio-political cartography by determining what kinds of position are available. This is a consideration as to what identities are placed on the map, a matter of which are granted space and what kind of space, and which subject positions can only be seen as disruptive of space precisely because to articulate them requires a defiance of hegemonic grammar. Such identities are unintelligible, hegemonic power is thus the structural codification of identity into a series of possible subject positions, the natures of which are prescriptively drawn – embedded into the fabric of the social terrain that this power produces. In so far as this process of codification is a matter of determining the intelligibility of particular forms of articulation (or, understood within the hegemonic grammar, qualification), hegemony serves to fundamentally condition the terms upon which the process of a recognitive encounter can occur.

Hegemony's wielding of intelligibility serves to shape the conceptual foundations of identity – but our concern here is not merely restricted to an abstracted sense of validity of conceptually framing the subject. We are more centrally concerned with the ramifications of this framing upon the practices whereby we articulate the self, the status (ontological and moral) granted to subjects on this basis, and furthermore with the undeniable ways such discourses underpin the conditions of life for certain so-qualified subjects. Our considerations do not only concern how the self is articulated, but also the question as to what lives are liveable and on what terms. Butler raises this question, and the connected consideration as to what constitutes a life as grievable as part of an extended ethical project. For the purposes of my thesis, I focus on a consideration as to how the hegemonic structures I have been exploring both produce a situation whereby certain individuals are both forcibly identified into a particular subordinate category, or brought to (one may be tempted to say coerced) activity identify themselves with this category<sup>593</sup> in order to ground their subject and yet are then simultaneously subjected to a series of oppressive structures and conditions that are only made possible by their occupation of the very space hegemony has not only opened up but also placed subjects into. The hegemonic structure creates the conditions of possibility for certain forms of oppression by discriminating between distinct subject positions. The structure makes it possible to identify a certain type of subject through establishing the conditions of qualification – and in so doing, creates a frame of difference that makes that subject visible in such a way that it can then be targeted.

So to speak of hegemony is to speak of the organisational structure of norms and intelligibility. As a determination of socio-political space, hegemony can be understood as centralising modality of power whereby, to return to Gramsci's explication, the interests of a particular class become projected over and onto other classes, thereby constituting the hegemonic class' interests as central and pushing others to the periphery.<sup>594</sup> We do not need to limit the mobility of this framework to only speak of classes typically conceived. These systems of normativity naturally apply to identity signifiers; we can easily bring to mind the manifold feminist concerns with notions such as the masculine universal, or framings of white supremacy, or compulsory heterosexuality. Following its Grecian roots, hegemony constitutes a

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<sup>593</sup> Here we can again consider Foucault's technologies of the self as a project attending to the terms within which we agree to be constituted as subjects.

<sup>594</sup> In Spivak's terms, this would be to constitute the subaltern.

form of leadership over space; as a system of power it serves to bring the general conditions of spatiality into an alignment whereby they all share the same trajectory – a point I shall explore alongside Ahmed later in this section.

Though hegemony does permit plurality, it unites plural identity qualifiers into an overarching system, whereby each of these qualifiers is subject to its own frame of normativity. We can take any particular qualification of the self – gender, race, sexuality would be those occupying central positions in popular discourses – and divide this into any number of categories: whether treating these as simplistic binaries or a relatively more dispersed number of positions.<sup>595</sup> These qualifiers are distinguished hierarchically, whereby their plural ‘dispersal’ becomes organised with respect to a singular, centralised norm – this becoming the discursive centre around which alternatives are established. Indeed, these alternative positions become constituted negatively through their ‘failure’ to reach the normative ideal and, within hegemony, only acquire positive articulation in so far as they are understood to be corruptions of or oppositions to these norms. Again, any number of positions could be considered legitimate, but the intelligibility of any so-constructed position will be judged with reference to the norms deployed by and within hegemony. Indeed, contemporary identity politics may move to reject the organisational principles of hegemony in so far as it proposes a break from these categories – but this move never breaks from the logic of positioning, such that the process of categorisation may be avowedly opposed, but is nevertheless able to proceed unimpeded and ignored. Such a move is to declare dead the very power structure upon which one founds one’s own discourse. We can consider, for instance, how contemporary discourse frames gender as a manifold number of subject positions – perhaps even making the discursive move to suggest that there are as many positions on gender as there are individual human beings (which is in itself to omit any acknowledgement of how gender serves as a system of social categorisation). Regardless of how many positions one posits – gender remains organised around a particular set of ideals – culturally encoded expressions of idealised masculinity or femininity. Furthermore, masculinity is held up as normative above femininity – it organises the placement of femininity as off-centre, as different from the masculine norm that seemingly requires no further elaboration. On this picture, we further have the placement of binary trans subjects as within the orbit of masculinity or femininity, but never

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<sup>595</sup> Or, to invoke the language of *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, “a plural but static constellation of gender identities”, see: Cuboniks, p. 45.

permitted to lay claim to the proposed centre, just as non-binary trans subjects or gender non-conforming subjects more widely are displaced even further away from these norms.

Not only, as we have explored, does hegemony reduce the identity of the subject into a matter of qualificatory positioning, but the alignment between these positions establishes the organisational power of certain positions over others – of those subjects that are designated through their qualification as being aligned with ‘the norm’. This is never a matter of absolute identification – for norms are an idealisation that, to mimic Butler’s critical note,<sup>596</sup> reveal their own status as a kind of parody through the impossibility of ever being lived. Again, we must here confront hegemony’s constitution as a system of power that projects a particular field of subjectification, that attempts to not only secure but to actively dictate the terms upon which the subject can be articulated and indeed how the subject is itself to be understood as constituted. Through establishing the strict structures through which the subject is perpetually judged, hegemony attempts to continually transform the conditions of the subject away from a form of movement concerning an open horizon of possibilities – the particular condition of which can never be decided in advance – and towards framing identity as a project of perpetual striving to achieve and secure a particular position. As such, when hegemony attempts to close off the possibility of movement, it does so not through denying the dynamism of the subject out of hand, but through constraining the possibility of this movement within the confines of a discourse that is unable to regard the subject as anything other than that which is attempting to pursue a particular identity. Hegemony is permissive of movement provided that this movement capitulates to a logic of destination – one is able to move as long as one eventually settles, the path having a definite and determinate end. The false promise of this hegemonic structure is that position is not only possible, but that the only possible positions are already objects of knowledge – that not only do these destinations exist and that they can be reached, but that they can be known and recognised in advance of one’s arrival. It is a false promise that identity projects have secure destinations, one need only to reach them.

Doubtless, the hegemonic structure constitutes identities in an uneven way, creating conditions of disparity and oppression. But for the concerns of this thesis, there is a deeper structure upheld by this

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<sup>596</sup> See: Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

hegemony – namely the normative structure of the individual subject and the systematic disavowal of several elements I am attempting to foreground in my presentation of the subject as recognitive.

In the preceding section, I began to develop the dialectical self in terms of movement. This notion of mobility should be understood not only as the attempt to further Ahmed's goal of re-animating space, but also to address Markell's concern about recognition's denial of the temporal dimension of the self. The mobility of the self implied within this recognitive framework should be partially understood in existential terms as an avowed openness to the temporal future<sup>597</sup> – and as such as an openness to one's movement into an uncertain future wherein which the terms of articulation may change – this complicates the discourse of the self as a simple, persistent object. Thus, to speak of the self as a form of movement is to deny the reification of the self that all too often takes place within contemporary discourse – it is a refusal to treat the self as that which can be fully disclosed. This is not to reject any articulation of the self, for movements can be mapped – their trajectories understood and anticipated, but it is to acknowledge that any such articulation is fundamentally precarious. The ramifications of this perspective on identity discourse entails a rejection of the security of the self. Whilst continuity of identity is not denied, a presumed continuity of identity cannot serve to imply or constitute a ground from which the self then proceeds. Following Butler's performativity, the self is instead a production of one's activity and, to appropriate Ahmed's terminology, an articulation or disclosure of identity is not a description of one's ontological foundations but is instead a description of one's trajectory. As such, articulations of the self are as fundamentally temporal as they are spatial – for to articulate the self is to recognise where the self has come from, and to pre-empt where that self may go. Of course, such predictions can never fully secure the results they postulate.

Within the hegemonic frame, it thus becomes possible to conceive of a stable foundation of the subject, and of the ways in which this subject can be intelligibly determined. When Gramsci speaks of hegemony as a determination, we can understand this as a matter of setting the terms upon which articulation can take place within the determined terrain. This is a matter of determining in advance the conditions of appearance, of determining that which can be intelligible and that which can be heard only as a disruption. The result is that we have to understand the subject as always positioned in the sense

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<sup>597</sup> Again, here I am speaking to Markell's concerns with spatialization.



that the subject is grounded within a context from which it not only then acts but which determines in advance the shape its action may take through a performative and programmatic prescriptivism. Transferring between positions is possible within such discourses, but a position must always be taken – the subject must always be understood as having settled within a particular place within the borders of the map and within the terms that the map outlines. Indeed, such discourses often shore up this foundationalist mythology through treating transformations as instead revealing the hitherto unavowed ground whence the subject was always already proceeding. Transformation is re-contextualised as instead revealing that one's originally assumed position was never where one truly was, but was *de facto* a misplacement.

We can explore the denial of the subject as movement through a reconsideration of the language with which we speak of hegemonic norms. Whereas Ahmed gives us the model of a lifeline extending through space – the trajectory of which is either compliant with or resisting a particular frame of normativity – hegemony provides us with multiple lines of normativity that are, in Ahmed's sense, brought into alignment, turned to face the same way in the sense that they all share the same hegemonic determination, their trajectories are the same. In the case of hegemony, we have plural lines that form a conceptual lattice. Disparate strands of normativity are interwoven with one another such that they gain not only their articulative force from a structure of mutual reinforcement – but their placement is dependent on this structure. As such, hegemony both collects disparate strands and constitutes those normativities as what they are – it does not merely find a series of normative lines, then bringing them together. The hegemonic lattice interposes plural normativities such that each becomes entangled with, implicated within, and comes to lean on one another. The complex project of hegemonic normativity cannot be reduced to a singular line – but is instead a lattice that constitutes a field of dissected positions – constituting a conceptual field that underpins the possibility of articulating the self. When articulating the conditions of power, the model of a lattice has (somewhat ironically) much more mobility than that of a single line. The lattice is immediately able to speak to the simultaneous rigidity and adaptability of normative structures – the way they rely upon one another, as we see in Butler's heterosexual matrix, and yet retain an indubitable stamina with which they continually reappear in the face of critique. The tightness of the lattice speaks to the encapsulating force of normativity, the way in which it constitutes the very social world upon and within which movement occurs, that it underpins the very horizons of

condition for the subject. Hegemonic power weaves seemingly disparate elements together such that they seem to align naturally – it relies on a perpetual denial of its own constitutive role. Hegemony remains invisible precisely because its results are taken to be a fact of nature.

The lattice is the hegemonic construction of the world. The lattice serves to weave together various conditions of appearance, hegemonically seeking to determine and prescribe modalities of recognition through its organisational wielding of normativity and intelligibility. Hegemony seeks to secure a world – and to pacify or realign any movement towards another one. The lattice forms a tight structure to maximise the possibility of re-articulation, to make so many disparate paths lead to the same predetermined and secured destinations. Gramsci speaks of hegemony as the political construction of a collective will – a process of gathering up distinct elements and interests and bestowing onto them a unified trajectory. His consideration here is the process by which a ruling class establishes itself in its position of rule precisely through the universalisation of its particular interests, producing an ideological field whereby these particular interests are understood to be the interests of all groups. Perhaps we can go further than Gramsci does by noting that these particular interests do not pre-exist the production of the field – that the process of hegemony does not merely serve to manipulate pre-extant interests, but constitutes the interests of disparate groups as either legitimate or illegitimate – as serving the hegemonic structure, or as a site of disruption. But whether we regard it as necessary to challenge Gramsci's tacit presentation of class interests as pre-constituted or not – it is clear that the hegemonic structure is a matter of alignment – of, to once more return to Ahmed, bringing subjects together such that they all 'face the same way', which is to say so that they all pursue the same end. In the case of hegemony, the proposed end is the same as with many other systems of power: its own replication and preservation – though this is not an end that could ever be ultimately achieved or finally secured. Hegemony thus serves as a programmed unification of plural structures of signification, it is an active work to ensure that these elements align that is at once coupled with a disavowal of this activity. Hegemony constructs its artifice and then claims to have found objective truth.

Hegemony must therefore be understood in terms of an orientation device, as the fundamental structure with reference to which the social terrain is organised. To return briefly to the cartographic metaphor, hegemony is as fundamental to the process of mapping as the notion of the compass, without which it would be impossible to understand how the mapped elements relate to one another, which is to

say how they are aligned. Gramsci presents hegemony as a unified structure that is at once ideological, moral, and epistemological – and its power is derived from how its structure extends over plural elements so as to draw them into one. Once again, we see the original meaning of the term *hegemon* appearing herein – hegemony is a matter of leadership, it provides an overall trajectory for these elements. Through so wielding normativity as it does, hegemony constitutes a kind of normative singularity, the socio-political gravity of which serves to affix subjects into various positions within its orbit – conditioning, and in particular constraining, their ability to move. To be caught within this force is not to be caught in a closed casual picture wherein one becomes absolutely determined by these structures, but is instead to be conditioned in the sense that attempts to defy the proscriptions of this structure – though still possible – most continually posture themselves as an escape, as a reorientation that is not only forced to begin with the hegemony condition but that must also perpetually contend with the ongoing influence of this condition.

Through its framing of a universal interest, hegemony constructs a ‘general will’. In the context of identity, we can understand this both in terms of those positions it constitutes as central – as explored above – but also in terms of a broader construction of intelligibility, as a matter of what identities can meaningfully exist or be liveable. This general will is a determination of universality in the sense that it is an attempt to construct a universal out of particularity – albeit a particularity that is deeply riven on identarian grounds. Regardless of this divide – hegemony attempts to provide leadership, to guide in the sense of providing a unified trajectory. Hegemony’s produced field is the prescribed condition of the socio-political world, it is power expressing itself as a blueprint – seeking to enforce the conditions of possibility (for both appearance and action) on its own terms, securing itself against contestation. We can see points of commonality between this and identity populism, in so far as both are attempting to secure some universal grounds by which to lead discourse down a particular path. Indeed, we could therefore understand identity enclosure in terms of an attempt at producing a counter-hegemony. Such an attempt to open up a site of resistance albeit one that wholeheartedly embraces the cartographic model, retains the notion of identity as position and thus which only succeeds in a displacement of hegemonic disparity – a displacement that nevertheless retains the very underlying problematic, the conditions of oppression and their overt logics. The result of this is that identity enclosure can speak only of positions, it can only establish grounds and reinforce them, it cannot ever move to challenge the system

overall – precisely because it wholeheartedly embraces this system and thus forfeits the possibility of movement.<sup>598</sup>

This makes clear the ideological component of these identity categories. When we are discussing these categorisations, we are not merely concerned with qualifications of particular groups of subjects but further concerned with a fundamental structure of the subject. As we learn from Althusser,<sup>599</sup> the function of ideology is “of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects”<sup>600</sup> (his italics), which is to suggest that the very notion of the subject is itself a function of power. In his account of interpellation – where Althusser describes a particular manner wherein an individual is made a subject through being addressed by power – this is explicitly understood as a form of recognition.<sup>601</sup> For Althusser, this recognition is that of a particular individual person whose concrete subjectivity becomes affirmed through ritual practices of ideological recognition – for example, the handshake. One key aspect highlighted by his account is how this recognition is specifically internalised, which is to say how these ritual practices encourage an individual subject to identify themselves with the terms within which it is possible to be identified. Within this configuration of power, subjects come to identify their own lived experiences with these categories of being – with this act of identification, willingly submitting to a condition that demands a foreclosure of an open-ended who, for a fixed and static what. This is what I understand Althusser to be suggesting when he says that “the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he [sic] shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject”<sup>602</sup> (his italics), that there is a constructed (we may say coercive) structure at play which subjects freely identify because those terms of identification appear to be ‘simply obvious’. This prompts a further consideration as to the common-sense status with which certain categories of identity are often endowed.

Though Althusser is specifically concerned with various forms of state power his work yet applies to structures of power more broadly. That the structure of subjectivity appears to be a ‘self-evident fact’

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<sup>598</sup> A refusal to ‘take part’ in ‘taking a side’ against hegemonic power is touched upon in another of Gramsci’s texts, see: Antonio Gramsci, *Odio gli indifferenti*, 2016.

<sup>599</sup> Althusser has hitherto contributed to this project indirectly through his influence on Butler’s work. For this reason, I have restricted my treatment of him to a few salient points.

<sup>600</sup> Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London ; New York: Verso, 2014), p. 262.

<sup>601</sup> Althusser, p. 263.

<sup>602</sup> Althusser, p. 269.

is an effect of ideology<sup>603</sup> - which is to say that it is the effect of a particular systematisation of power. When speaking of the identity of a subject, it appears to be 'simply obvious' that the most salient vectors of identity are gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, physical ability etc. - but the salience of these particular categorisations is a consequence of the cartographic organisation of our socio-political field, which is shaped such that these vectors are granted more importance than others. There is thus a purely ideological root to the historical determination of this field, the effects of which have become so sedimented that the significance of these identities is often taken as a given. What Althusser's notion of recognition through the interpellating address provides to hegemony is an understanding as to how hegemonic power also operates as a mode of address through determining the field within which it is possible to appear and therefore the conditions within which it is possible to be recognised.

This is not to suggest that a dismissal of these categories as in some sense arbitrary would be an appropriate praxis, as we have seen in our exploration of the hegemonic lattice the conditioning function of these identity vectors would render such a dismissal little more than an abstraction. But, what Althusser reminds us of - as did Lukacs back in my first chapter - is that "there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects" - that this ideological force is not a natural fact that transcends the activity of subjects, but that it lives and perpetuates exclusively within it.

The concerns I raise should not be read as a prohibition against articulating the self,<sup>604</sup> but instead as a critique of the misguided reduction of articulation to a discourse of qualification and qualification alone. Conversely, articulation should be understood as indispensable, precisely because the structures of oppression thrive in their productive silences. Ahmed's work chimes well with many other scholars (notably Kimberlé Crenshaw and Angela Davis) when she gives voice to the power of naming a problem - of having the language to express something and the voice to speak it (even if that voice does not necessarily have to be a literal voice). My considerations herein are to note not only the partiality of any particular articulation, but to affirm the conditions that underpin that articulation. To reduce identity to the notion of a fixed subject position, held secure within what comes to be a thoroughly policed and controlled discourse, is to commit to a foundational essentialism that whilst it can help to give grounding

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<sup>603</sup> Althusser, p. 189.

<sup>604</sup> Indeed, that my position could be confused with this kind of prohibition is indicative of the entrenched grammar of qualification.

to that identity within certain liberal discourses, comes at once at the expense of sustaining a fixed sense of difference that merely abides by the structures of hegemony – both in terms of its power to make absolute discriminations, and in its naturalistic framing of the subject – such that the conditions of oppression come to be naturalised. There are clear prices for the reduction of the scope of resistance to these discourses of qualification – the logics underpinning the conditions of oppression are neither seen, nor opposed. They remain inconspicuous.

Understanding the spatial conditions that underpin the production and circulation of identity categories speaks directly to a phenomenological dimension of identity, rooting our qualifications of the self within a particular environment. One's identity is fundamentally a matter of the space within which one appears, the degree to which one becomes or fails to become that space, as well as a matter as to what kinds of self are able to appear. These considerations become much more clearly relevant to identity enclosure when we consider how its discourses primarily take place online. The following chapter shall consider how this particular form of online spatiality and its accompanying logics, condition identity enclosure, perpetuating the pathologies hitherto analysed over the course of this thesis.

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## 5: ONLINE DISCOURSES OF THE SELF: THE SPATIALITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FRAMING OF THE ONLINE PERSONA

Having explored the spatially embedded, phenomenological dimension of recognition within the previous chapter, this chapter turns to consider recognition as it takes place online. The identity enclosed discourses this thesis has been examining predominantly take place online, and thus in order to provide a clear theorisation as to how these discourses treat the self, we must explore the determinations of the spaces within which these discourses take place. My aim is to demonstrate how my theory forms an analytical instrument with respect to these online discourses. I have established the role played by spatiality in the conditioning of how a subject is able to appear, which is to consider spatiality as playing a fundamental role within how a subject comes to be recognised and thus how an identity comes to be constructed, experienced, and lived. This chapter considers the impact of a shift from physical space to the virtual spaces, environments, and fora of the internet – particularly in so far as these take the form of social media platforms. In examining the contours and structures of online spaces, I consider the question as to how these fora constitute conditions of appearance, which is to say what kind of online or ‘cyber’ subject is made visible? This is to consider how these technologically produced environments are at once continuous with and break from physical environments, to understand the conditions of mediation that shape what kind of subject can exist within the bounds of an online platform. Contrary to the semblance of dynamism and open-endedness often considered to go hand-in-hand with virtuality, I contend that online spaces are structured so as to prescribe clear constraints on subjects’ possible conditions of appearance, constraints that foreclose the possibility of movement. This is because virtual spatiality constitutes an abolition of both distance and temporality – with online fora structurally dominated by cybernetic processes, such as algorithmic procedures and datafication,<sup>605</sup> that repeat the philosophical pathologies identified in my discussion of the cartographic model.

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<sup>605</sup> Meaning the transformation of everything into data for use by and within information technologies, see: Patrick Biltgen and Stephen Ryan, *Activity-Based Intelligence: Principles and Applications* (London: Artech House, 2016), sec. The Datafication of Intelligence.

This chapter shall be divided into three sections. In the first of these, I shall consider the conditions of appearance within online fora, discussing the visibility of the subject and the invisibility of its conditions of mediation through technological interfaces. This shall be developed in the second section, wherein I shall explore the profile as the fundamental ground of the cyber subject. Within this section I shall explore the ramifications of the profile as a central framing of the subject, particularly through the notions of substance and sovereignty. Finally, I shall explore how online spaces at once maintain a sense of constant development and dynamism whilst simultaneously acting to foreclose the possibility of the future. As such, I understand online spaces as collapsing temporality so as to produce an eternal present wherein the subject remains in a kind of fractured stasis.

## ‘APPEAR ONLINE’: SOCIAL MEDIA SPATIALITY

Given the virtuality of online spaces it is *prima facie* tempting to view them as a form of disembodiment. To follow this line of thought would be to consider how the technological forms of appearance made possible<sup>606</sup> through the internet disrupt our schema of physical embodiment. Despite this, recent work on virtual reality has explored how contemporary technology, when seeking to construct a virtual environment, tends towards a replication of physical embodiment, rather than an exploration of potential alternative forms of experience.<sup>607</sup> This paradigmatic interest in the replication of the world prompts us to consider how online spaces thereby serve to repeat the conditions of physical spaces – it leads us to ask what is carried over into the online space. Though the focus of this chapter is not virtual reality in directly the same sense, it is salient to consider how the spatiality of online fora does involve a particular kind of embodiment – albeit one that is heavily mediated through technology and thus that breaks from physical embodiment in numerous ways. I therefore reject the overly optimistic perspective that technology straightforwardly expands our capabilities so as to transcend particular limitations, thereby allowing us to develop clear modes of escaping from certain configurations of social control. When implemented uncritically, information technologies merely replicate old problems under new guises. Instead, my concern is with the numerous ways that technological spaces fail to subvert the hegemonic

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<sup>606</sup> Although this phrase perhaps implies an expansive rather than transformative quality.

<sup>607</sup> Craig D. Murray and Judith Sixsmith, ‘The Corporeal Body in Virtual Reality’, *Ethos*, 27:3 (1999), 315–43.



structures of power that – as previously discussed – shape the contours of physical space. Whilst it may be true that technology makes possible various kinds of transcendence over particular limitations, these should not be *de facto* understood as liberatory. Contrarily, when considered in light of the corporate ownership and cultivation that underpin them, online fora must be understood as expansive in so far as they enable the technological extension and reimagining of systems of power and domination. Though the phenomenal experience of interacting with others<sup>608</sup> within online fora does break from embodiment as I have considered it in my previous chapter, this chapter shall consider embodiment in terms of how one appears before others on the internet. The question is thus: how does technology permit the self to appear online?

Over the course of this thesis, I have considered the processes through which the self becomes recognisable and how it is articulated. Within the context of online fora, one continues to appear to others, one remains a presence that can be encountered and recognised. However, the schematics of this embodiment are transformed through the technology that produces the spaces. We can think here of avatars, and the structure of the profile (which I explore in more detail in the second section of this chapter). Rather than dispensing with the notion of the body altogether, I want instead consider how cybernetic forms of embodiment act within online processes of recognition. This is to suggest that the pervasive power of online technology does not merely constitute online spaces as distinct fora that can be considered as abstracted away from physical spaces. Rather, technology contributes to the mediation of our daily experiences – and that the structures of social media are not merely confined to discourse that takes place within them. Therefore my claim is not merely that social media are structured so as to prefigure and condition the discourses that take place within them – but that the expansive presence of social media, indeed its melange with the very notion of sociality itself,<sup>609</sup> serves as a structuring logic of the contemporary subject that conditions our experiences beyond the confines of the platforms themselves. In this sense, I take Geert Lovink's claim that just as Foucault's notion of disciplinary society was expressed in the institutions of the hospital, asylum, and prison, "Today's institutions of self-

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<sup>608</sup> This is to say the mode of encounter with the other, and thus the conditions within which the other can be recognised.

<sup>609</sup> This has become a significant trend within Italian-speaking communities, see: Marco Aime, *Comunità, Parole Controtempo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019).

containment are no doubt the social media platforms”<sup>610</sup> as a crucial reading of the contemporary situation. Social media fora and the logics of the subject they produce are to be understood as paradigmatic to contemporary identity discourse.

Just as we can consider the disciplinary apparatuses of Foucault’s chosen institutions as implementations of power not merely upon an inert body but as modalities that make bodies visible and produce bodies as social entities, we can consider how contemporary social technologies also serve as productive of bodies. These technological bodies are cybernetic in the sense that Donna Haraway explores within *A Cyborg Manifesto*.<sup>611</sup> Taking the science-fiction notion of a body produced through the melding of the organic with the synthetic, Haraway’s contention is that this figure is more than mere fiction but is a social reality. Under our present conditions of technological mediation – more so now than when Haraway originally wrote her text – we are all fabricated hybrids of machine and organism. Accordingly, we are all chimera, all cyborgs. Haraway’s text provides us with a way of reading our online appearances as embodied, as allowing us to view technology not as something external to us, but as something integrated into the phenomenological experience of our own embodiment. Technology so-understood serves as a mediating force, shaping our notions of reality and identity precisely through the mechanisms by which it shapes power so as to produce conditions of appearance.

The introduction of technological mediation disrupts certain framings of the body as a unified whole. Haraway’s cyborg is a figure that reveals the inadequacy of such notions of the whole, and likewise resists the mythology of the fall. It is not, therefore, that technology serves to corrupt us – for this framework rejects a reductionist binary of organic vs. synthetic, or natural vs. artificial.<sup>612</sup> Bodies, much like our articulations of identity, are not straightforwardly factic entities awaiting discovery but are framed within socio-political contexts. Schemata of embodiment are as much constructions of power as schemata of the subject or identity. Within the context of social media – precisely what technology serves to disrupt is a naïve naturalisation of the body that understands it to be a straightforward unity.

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<sup>610</sup> Geert Lovink, *Sad By Design: On Platform Nihilism*, 2019, p. 61.

<sup>611</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>612</sup> When considering virtual reality, then, we may do well to question the forms of unity they implicitly produce in the name of replication and ask whether such schemas of unity are themselves artificial, reflective of something our bodies never possessed.

Appearances within online fora disrupt traditional spatiotemporal framings, effectively pluralising the manner in which the self can appear. Not only do such platforms enable plural forms of media – such as text, video, audio etc. – so as to seemingly multiply the modalities of appearance, but they further enable the dislocation of the self within space and time. Not only are past appearances preserved as a matter of course<sup>613</sup> – with the platform itself serving as an archive of its own constitutive representations – but plural appearances can appear simultaneously. Of course, the composition of such appearances – the writing of a text, the recording of a video, the taking of a selfie – do not themselves defy temporality. It is instead the experience of the one to whom these appearances appear that becomes disrupted – with technology presenting a new phenomenological possibility of encountering appearances.

We thus come to understand appearance within online fora as fragmented – with each instance of appearance experienced alongside others but remaining discrete instances. Again, this does not fundamentally break from physical embodiment – for our encounters with another’s embodiment can be intermittent and be experienced as isolated incidents – but is instead a matter of degree, with technology both expanding this possibility, and transforming it into the usual condition of encountering another. Within social media, appearances of others can be experienced both successively and simultaneously. Social media encounters are rooted within an incidentality, fragmenting sustained appearance. Though this process of fragmentation has been considered as pathological (or at the very least negative) by some theorists, and whilst certain forms of fragmentation can undoubtedly be fundamentally disempowering (as I shall argue later in this chapter), it reveals the disunity of the self. The self is never simply single, it is subject to continual dispersal as well as continual synthesis, in process at multiple sites at once. Through examining technology, these processes of self-making can be made all the more explicit – in part revealing what has always been the case, but also constituting a novel arrangement of power, a new condition of discourse.

So, unlike the encounter within physical space – wherein the bodily appearance of another tends towards singularity – the cybernetic body that appears within online fora trends towards plurality. Again, this should not be taken as a binary split between two absolutely different forms of embodiment – (dis)unity of appearance can become emphasised or deemphasised by differing conditions of appearance.

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<sup>613</sup> We need look no further than legal debates over the right to be forgotten to note how difficult it can be to delete certain kinds of appearance from this technological preservation.

Yet, we should not be so quick to uphold a straightforward division between online and physical spaces. Certainly, there remains a distinction between physical and virtual spaces – and the phenomenological conditions of these spaces may be very different, however we must acknowledge how the virtual is not encountered abstractly as being beyond the physical. That assumption rests on a troubling metaphysics of technology that would fail to account for the material reality of its hardware and the processes of mediation it both makes possible and enforces. Rather than this dualism, I contend that we should understand virtual space more as a parallel modality of spatialization, which is to say that it is – as is physical space – another way of organising social reality. Of course, online social fora provide us with novel modalities of ‘connecting’ with others, it provides us with new virtual environments through which we can communicate, interact, and thus conduct discourse – and of course my interest lies particularly within how these digitised discourses produce, sustain, and mobilise the self.

Firstly, it is important to consider how one accesses these online spaces. Unlike physical spaces that one inhabits with one’s body, the spatiality of online fora is virtual – meaning that we do not directly inhabit them as we do physical spaces. Instead, our ability to see into these spaces, and indeed our ability to appear within them are directly mediated by the interface. There is no access to the virtual spaces of the internet without the hardware that renders such spaces not only visible, but which underpin their very existence. Despite certain tendencies towards abstraction within contemporary, popular discussions of online spaces – tendencies that, we might be tempted to say, demonstrate a preoccupation with a symbolic order over and above material conditions – the hardware that make such spaces possible are absolutely crucial to the ability to enter such spaces. The interface is the gateway that permits entry to the one who uses it, and since the widespread adoption of smart phone technology those individuals who forgo the continual accompaniment of such an interface are increasingly remarkable – with the possession and frequent use of this technology increasingly the norm. Nowhere is the ubiquity of the interface more demonstrable than within the pageantry with which it is possible to declare oneself as undergoing some kind of digital detox or rejection of such technology.<sup>614</sup> That these choices can constitute something noteworthy attests to the pervasive adoption of technology.

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<sup>614</sup> For example, see: Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism* (Portfolio, 2019).

With the ubiquity of the interface comes a melange of online fora with everyday experience. Whereas we may once have been able to draw a sharp line between the physical experiences of one's life and the occurrences of virtual networking, this division has become problematised and blurred – though perhaps not outright effaced.<sup>615</sup> Despite the slight resilience of the physical / virtual distinction, the logics of *assujettissement* at work within social media (particularly those of the profile, as we shall explore in the next section) have come to condition contemporary discourses of the self even beyond strict boundaries of the virtual. This is perhaps because there is no longer a strict division between physical and virtual space. We can consider how the technology of augmented reality – which produces a kind of virtual reality overlay of physical space, usually in the context of games such as *Pokémon Go* – serves as an example of the intermingling of technology with experience of space more broadly. Though physical space has not been subsumed into the virtual – and given that physical space is not less mediated than virtual space, it would be unclear how such a subsumption could occur or what it would look like – technology appears to haunt our experiences of space. The interface is always there, and provided we are connected to the network – which is becoming increasingly possible to access wherever one is physically located – it always upholds its promise to let us access that virtual space. In this sense, virtual space surrounds an increasing majority of the population – and it certainly encapsulates a good portion of their attention (this being very much a feature, rather than a side-effect). Virtual space is thus lived alongside one's presence in physical space and just as virtuality itself enables a plurality that is not commonly experienced within physical space, so too is this simultaneity a notable quality of one's virtual presence. The physical is never abandoned, although a shift in one's phenomenal field may cause it to recede to the background of one's attention it is never fully left behind. It is precisely one's embodied attention that is captured by the internet. It is in this way that I qualify virtual space as an accompaniment to the physical – both are lived together.

The near universality of access to the virtual, coupled with the compelling (potentially even addictive) logics of subjectivity it upholds produces a situation wherein social media, alongside the online platforms that host such media, have become synonymous with the notion of the social. Lovink asserts that such techno-social spaces tend towards the foreclosure of any social outside of social media,<sup>616</sup> a

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<sup>615</sup> I explore this in the context of the coronavirus pandemic in my post-script.

<sup>616</sup> Lovink, p. 3. This is further reflected in an Italian context, see: Aime.

claim that becomes more comprehensible when we read this as the suggestion that the mediating power of social media is such that it upholds a particular logic of subjectivation – or, to use Lovink’s more technological phrase, that it reformats our interior lives.<sup>617</sup> It is not that we only socialise online – although that may be becoming more of a reality too<sup>618</sup> – but that technology has constituted a fundamental restructuring of the ways in which we are able to interact with each other. Online interactions and relationships are no less real than those enacted in person, but these interactions are only made possible through a technology that profoundly conditions their structure and the horizons of possibility.<sup>619</sup> The technology is a determiner of the possibilities of communication – the shape of the online fora determines what can appear upon it. But the logics of such spaces do not remain solely located within them. As new means of relationality have become possible, preceding patterns of sociality have been transformed, as the logic of social media has extended to become a logic of the social. Such a transformation has problematised traditional structures of connection and commitment – particularly through technology’s reworking of communication such that spatial distances, and the time it takes to traverse them, have become seemingly abolished.<sup>620</sup> No longer does distance present such a complicating factor for communication, wherein one’s ability to communicate was hampered, or at the very least required much more time – such as written, postal communication. Alongside the reformulation of communications technologies, new network structures have come into being, structures that allow information to abolish distance. Whilst transporation technologies have greatly reduced our appreciation for physical distance – making all locations seem almost always within our reach – their impact on our experience of distance does not compare to communications technologies – which allow us to always share at least a particular form of presence with those who may be on the other side of the earth. This challenges preceding structures through which we experienced space, with technology uprooting us from the straightforward limitations of physical experience. And with such challenges to spatiality, so too are our modalities of relating to and recognising others transformed. Through the plurality of our virtual

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<sup>617</sup> Lovink, p. 1.

<sup>618</sup> Particularly in the context of our recent lockdowns and times of ‘social distancing’.

<sup>619</sup> We are, therefore, not operating with a Deleuzian conception of the virtual, see: Gilles Deleuze, *Bergonism*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberiam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 15, 42–43, 56–57, 60–63, 100–105.

<sup>620</sup> We can consider this alongside Heidegger’s thought on the concept of dwelling, see: Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), chap. Being, Dwelling, Thinking.

presences – our physical presence undergoes a kind of dislocation. Accordingly, the fragmentation of the self seemingly enacted, or at least exacerbated, by technological mediation takes a spatial role of dislocation.

It is worth noting here that this concern with sociality echoes certain concerns present within Arendt's corpus – wherein the social figures as a lively force that subsumes the lives and actions of human beings both in the way it threatens private and public life, but also in how it extends a particularly naturalising form of logic so as to structure social relations. The admixture of public and private spaces is straightforwardly present in the formulation of online fora, for these spaces at once appear to lay claim to public status: these are spaces wherein the public can meet and interact, where conversations can happen between people (invoking the Arendtian sense of the inter-est), whilst also being owned, developed, and managed by private, corporate interests. It is not clear that platforms such as Twitter or Facebook would constitute spaces of appearance in the Arendtian sense – thereby troubling their ability to adequately constitute public spheres. Of course, this is a marker of sociality for Arendt, for whom the social is itself a problem that fundamentally erodes human uniqueness through rendering action impossible.

Part of how I see Arendt's social manifesting within the structure of social media is precisely through the fragmentation of appearance. Action becomes impossible within these online fora due to the way in which they structurally transmute would-be actions into atomised moments of appearance, isolated from one another. We can think here about how the 'dokei moi' (the 'it seems to me') approaches uniformity within online spaces – with the constraints of fora such as Twitter leading the cultivation of standardised communicative shorthands (prevalent, for instance in meme culture). We have a transition from action to behaviour, to use Hanna Pitkin's term.<sup>621</sup> Here, I am talking about 'the post' as a fundamental structure of online fora. An online 'post' is the underlying structure of a Tweet, it is the isolated unit<sup>622</sup> – one of billions – contained by each social media platform. Again, such platforms are increasingly media-diverse, with posts taking the form of text, still image, and video – or mixtures of

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<sup>621</sup> See: Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>622</sup> The use of hashtags may permit individual posts to accrete into trends or waves of information, but does not fundamentally challenge the atomistic nature of the post. As a logic, the post produces discrete utterances that may be additive, but which are rarely understood to interpenetrate.

these. *Prima facie*, what may problematise the ability of such spaces to support action is the ossified form of appearance it provides, an opposition we may be tempted to parse as the tension between the fixity of text and the fluidity of speech – but I think this ossification, in so far as it is the problem, stems from a more fundamental way in which online fora complexify notions of presence (the post can, of course, take the form of recorded speech), and how the structure of the post itself forecloses certain conversational possibilities.

Thus far, we have explored how technology enables a kind of perpetual presence wherein one is able to be always present in one's online fora. Yet, this presence is itself a form of dislocation from one's physical presence, that which online fora can attempt to suspend, but which it can never fully succeed in escaping. The simultaneity of various forms of presence, of plural streams of attention – we can think of the increasingly common experience of entertaining two (or more) conversations at once, some in person and others through social media, with conversations able to transition to and from social media effortlessly – problematises our ability to consider either presence or attention as unitary or total. Indeed, the account of recognition I have been exploring within this thesis would reject the notion that a subject could ever be fully present, which would itself be a socio-political presumption of reality as much as a phenomenological one. Arendt's account of action depends upon the ability for an individual to act with others such that one's action can be said to be before them, that it is witnessed by others and that it goes on to form a web of relations that impact future acts. Action is a transient practice, and one can act only in so far as one's act is boundless – both in the sense of being open to an as-yet-unarticulated future and in the sense that one's action is fundamentally relational. Action cannot stand alone. On an Arendtian account, we speak more of action than of acts – a linguistic distinction between that which is ongoing and that which has been reified into discrete units. Likewise, though 'posting' is understood as an ongoing activity – the interaction of social media is dominated by discussion and dissection of individual posts. The structure of the post is such that it presents itself as already bounded, as an already complete act.<sup>623</sup> Unlike Arendtian action, which is always open to response – with its own nature being susceptible to subsequent transformation – the post is only open to reply in the form of another post.<sup>624</sup> The structure

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<sup>623</sup> We could further consider this in relation to Derrida's theorisation of the relationship between "living speech" and inscription / writing, see: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 27, 56–57, 119, 141, 151.

<sup>624</sup> This narrowing the horizon of natality significantly.



of online fora are such that commentary becomes list-able in the form of comments, we are thus confronted with objects, rather than processes. Though this does not foreclose the activity of language, nor does it disqualify online fora from constituting public spaces *in potentia*, the structure does mediate our experience of activity such that its dynamic and open dimensions become less apparent, with this coming to shape what kinds of appearance we deem possible within such spaces.

Further, the structure of the social is one that Arendt seems to fundamentally characterise as conformity.<sup>625</sup> We can see here an immediate point of continuity between her concerns and Foucault's formulation of disciplinary power – for both are concerned with how agency becomes curtailed by structures of power.<sup>626</sup> Despite claims to the contrary, social media provides a uniform schema for self-articulation and expression. It may be one that can admit a good deal of superficial diversity, but it nevertheless remains an organisational structure that maintains the hegemonic structures of power explored in my previous chapter. As such, online fora structure discourse in such a way that the conditions of appearance within these platforms fail to break from the hegemonic structures that condition the visibility and invisibility of various articulations of the self. Though of course technology does enable forms of community making that can constitute sites of resistance to the overarching structures of power<sup>627</sup> – in a similar fashion to how such sites can be opened up in physical space – we must be wary of any techno-optimism that considers virtual spaces as naively outside pre-extant structures of power. Just as technological advancement has transformed communications technology to enable different modalities of appearance and relation, so to have these advances enabled the extension of disciplinary frameworks of surveillance and control.

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<sup>625</sup> See: Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob*.

<sup>626</sup> Though Arendt may contest that such instances are really power – given her particular use of the term.

<sup>627</sup> A topic example is the role of social media within the rise of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, see: Monica Anderson and Paul Hitlin, *Social Media Conversations About Race: How Social Media Users See, Share and Discuss Race and the Rise of Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter* (Pew Research Centre, 15 August 2016) <file:///ueahome4/stuhum3/dyx12dru/data/Documents/PhD/PI\_2016.08.15\_Race-and-Social-Media\_FINAL.pdf> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Rebecca Bellan, 'Gen Z Leads The Black Lives Matter Movement, On And Off Social Media', *Forbes*, 12 June 2020 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccabellan/2020/06/12/gen-z-leads-the-black-lives-matter-movement-on-and-off-social-media/#35ee576b19a8>> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Aleem Maqbool, 'Black Lives Matter: From Social Media Post to Global Movement', *BBC News*, 10 July 2020 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-53273381>> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Bijan Stephen, 'Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power', *Wired*, 2015 <<https://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to-fight-the-power/>> [accessed 23 July 2020].

Furthermore, integral to a robust understanding of the relations of power within online spaces, and, accordingly, the conditions of appearance these relations produce, is an understanding of the visibility of this power. I have explored in the previous chapter how questions of power and appearance cannot be simplified into a rigidly dyadic model whereby the ability to appear is a signature of power, whereas oppression is marked by invisibility. There are ample examples of systematically induced visibility for precarious, which is to say structurally oppressed, populations, wherein they are forced to appear on narrow and restrictive terms – just as there are many examples of those in power being eminently able to become invisible, particularly as a form of eliding responsibility. Indeed, as both Foucault and Butler go considerable lengths to stress, the invisibility of power and its ability to masquerade as a given reality, is crucial to its functioning as power. When relations of power cannot be seen, or when certain forms of sleight of hand become possible, so too does it become possible for power to operate with a kind of prescriptive certitude whilst remaining uninterrupted. When considering how virtual spaces play into this question of the invisibility of power, we must consider the way in which social media technologies have become increasingly naturalised within contemporary society. Though it is openly known that these technologies are the products of human artifice – which is to say that they are unambiguously constructed by human activities and relations – this technology has become such a commonplace part of our everyday experiences that the ways in which they serve to structure our experiences are often inconspicuous. So too does the work of power slide to the background, for most users passing without notice.

Lovink terms this phenomenon the disappearance of the interface. Within his text *Sad By Design*, he presents the interface as itself a form of mediation, describing how the user negotiates with the interface rather than directly with the technology.<sup>628</sup> The interface mediates the user with the underlying processes that it also serves to conceal. Likewise, Ben McCorkle describes the interface as a “thin chrome line”,<sup>629</sup> as a zone within which the user is able to contact the personal computer, and through it the network in which the computer is implicated. McCorkle’s use of the image of the boundary is motivated by his concern that interface is disappearing. This is not a claim about the literal disappearance or collapse

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<sup>628</sup> Lovink, p. 32.

<sup>629</sup> Ben McCorkle, ‘WHOSE BODY?: Looking Critically at New Interface Designs’, in *Composing Media Composing Embodiment*, ed. by Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki (USA: University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press, 2012), p. 174.

of the interface but is a concern that seems rooted in precisely its success. Due to its ubiquity, the interface is no longer remarkable, indeed it surrounds us so fully that it has become another element of our phenomenological reality. McCorkle is concerned more with what kinds of bodies are able to cross this threshold, and thus seemingly shares my conviction that when discussing virtual space the physical body cannot be forgotten. However, my concern over who can access virtual space foregrounds the question as to how it is possible to appear within such space. It is not enough to consider the interface as a mere gateway and then to confine one's questioning to asking 'who can cross this boundary?' Instead, we must ask what it means to cross the boundary of the interface, and the very act of passing through it – alongside the mediation this clearly entails – transforms the subject as it undergoes this passage.

Phenomenologically, the increasing invisibility of the interface produces a false sense of immediacy within online fora. The appearance of the virtual space is seemingly a direct presence, able to provide instantaneous feedback in ways physical space may not be able to compete with. The appearances enabled by these technologies allow an abolition of certain spatiotemporal constraints present with respect to physical presence, allowing users to appear before multitudes of others within disparate environments in disparate modes simultaneously. The interface is felt as little more than a window, something that enables one to see but not something that fundamentally conditions what appears. In a similar vein to a Heideggerian tool,<sup>630</sup> the interface functions precisely by masking the very difference in spatiality that requires an interface. Furthermore, we are increasingly surrounded by such 'windows into cyberspace' such that we are increasingly immersed within this sense of immediacy. The presence of others through multimedia appears so direct as to be raw and unfiltered (with the ubiquity of various filters – particular popularised on Instagram – making it far easier for one to think one's images unfiltered if these alone are left unapplied). This directly impacts the notions of selfhood and identity circulated within online fora, producing spaces wherein an unconditioned self appears. Of course, there is a widespread acknowledgement that some appearances are more contrived than others, but there remains a persistent sense – whether avowed or not – that social media can provide an unmediated access to an authentic or 'raw' self.<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>630</sup> We can think here about the aggravating experience of attempting to use an *unhandlich* interface, how conspicuous the lagging computer becomes.

<sup>631</sup> We can see this in discussions of authenticity within social media influencer culture, see: Elissa Vainikka, Elina Noppari, and Janne Seppanen, 'Exploring Tactics of Public Intimacy on Instagram',

However, despite its invisibility, the interface's decreasing visibility, it operates much more like a camera than a window – which is to say that it brings with it new ways of seeing. Within his examination of the 'social photo', Nathan Jurgenson contends that the "photograph on social media is as underconceptualised as it is ubiquitous",<sup>632</sup> reminding us that vision is both an historically located and socially situated activity.<sup>633</sup> Appearance is never unconditioned: how one appears and how one is visible are mediated by conditions of appearance. Yet, phenomenologically, the invisibility of the interface contributes to this sense of an immediate self, a subject merely awaiting representation within the online fora in the form of a post.

We find ourselves in a world of appearances, not in the sense of an unreal simulacrum<sup>634</sup> – for the appearances, relationships, and subjectivities of online spaces are no less real than their physical counterparts – but one wherein the underlying material conditions remain largely unseen. It is for this reason that so much of the discourse that constitutes identity enclosure remains largely concerned with the symbolic order – with appearances rather than the conditions that underpin those appearances. Though power is frequently referred to within such discourse, there is seemingly no awareness as to how power is operating within the very fora wherein these exchanges are taking place, which is to say both that such discourses often leave their own conditions unavowed, and that any praxis they attempt to constitute remains at the level of the symbolic. As Barney notes, online senses of community are rooted within collective identifications with (or indeed with dis-identifications against) a particular symbolic order.<sup>635</sup> Of course, when rooted in an abstract sense of identification, such communities tend to be far more fluid, with the formation and fragmentation of communities potentially occurring rapidly. Given the individuating modality of power I have discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear to see how any sense of collectivity produced within online spaces is rendered *de facto* precarious, precisely through its

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*Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 14.1 (2017), 108–28; Phuong Thao Nguyen, "Nostalgia for the Present": Digital Nostalgia and Mediated Authenticity on Instagram' (Stockholm University, 2017); Alice Audrezet, Gwarlann de Kerviller, and Julie Guidry Moulard, 'Authenticity under Threat: When Social Media Influencers Need to Go beyond Self-Presentation', *Journal of Business Research*, 2018; Essi Poyry, 'A Call for Authenticity: Audience Responses to Social Media Influencer Endorsements in Strategic Communication', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13.4 (2019), 336–51.

<sup>632</sup> Nathan Jurgenson, *The Social Photo* (London: Verso Books, 2019), chap. 1. Documentary Vision.

<sup>633</sup> Jurgenson, chap. 1. Documentary Vision.

<sup>634</sup> Contrast with: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>635</sup> Darin David Barney, *The Network Society, Key Concepts* (Polity Press) (Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2004), p. 156.

inability to escape the atomising logics maintained by hegemonic power. We see this, as well as the desire to sustain a particular symbolic order, in the way that identity labels are used within such discourses, often attempting to capture identification or a sense of orientation that only ever grants collectivity a secondary role, if any.

So, with the increasing incorporation of the interface into our everyday phenomenal field, the interface becomes decreasingly conspicuous, rendering it increasingly invisible. As a result, it becomes a part of our reality, integrated so as to suffuse our experience of physical space with an accompanying sense of virtual space that is not purely felt as a disruption. Yet, unlike other kinds of tools and technology – all of which serve to create the conditions of our world, and thus can be understood to play a mediating role – internet technologies constitute a distinct kind of space that is much more able to constitute itself as a channel for systems of power.<sup>636</sup> Despite the impression of constant movement and transformation, seemingly made possible precisely because online spaces are immediate and responsive, we must recognise how such spaces and the appearances they both enable and render mandatory are fundamentally mediated.

Having thus far explored how technology begins to reshape how we come to encounter others and ourselves, and how it begins to produce a logic (or even a law) of the subject, we must now explore the fundamental condition of mediation at work within contemporary online fora: the profile.

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS: THE PROFILE AS THE GROUND OF THE ONLINE SUBJECT

If the interface is the general, mediating structure of technological accessibility to virtual space, the profile is best understood as the specific mediating structure of the cybernetic subject. We have hitherto concerned ourselves with the constitution of the conditions of appearance in online space, discussing the logic of the post as providing a plural series of appearances that can phenomenally appear both at once and yet as distinct from one another – like a series of parallel, simultaneous appearances. Yet what underlies the possibility of the post is the structure of the profile – the ground that precedes the appearances. Much like the interface, the profile can be understood as a gateway, for without it there is

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<sup>636</sup> This is partially reflected within Castell's conception of communication power, see: Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

no access to (which again is to say that there is no appearance within) virtual fora prior to the profile. When one attempts to access an online forum, one is encouraged to register, to create an account – a profile through which they can appear within the online space. We can therefore consider the profile as less a mere gateway, but can further view the creation, cultivation, and use of an online profile as a process of producing a cybernetic body – a technological mode of appearance within a virtual space. As discussed in the previous section, the interface as both hardware and tool becomes part of our world, it becomes implicated in our sense of embodiment and of our reality. The profile extends this process of phenomenological transformation to shape and frame our lived experiences and our notion of the self – producing a logic of what it means to be a subject, a person, an agent etc. within a context dominated by this specific technological mode of mediation. To have a profile is to take one's place within a space, this is both to suggest that one has a place – one that is cultivated for an individual user by design – and that to be so placed within a virtual environment is to be orientated, in the sense I explored in the previous chapter.

The profile is not absolute, for there are ways of interacting with certain fora that do not require its creation and use – but to access social media without one is to never fully enter the space. Most of the content of Twitter is public, and therefore most Tweets can be seen by anyone with an internet connection regardless as to whether they are a registered user on the site. However, one cannot respond or interact, one cannot appear in these spaces without an account. As such, we understand the profile as a way of involving oneself, of entering the space fully in the sense of exercising the ability to appear within the space. Of course, as all such appearances require a profile, all such appearances occur through the profile, which is to say that the profile is the condition of those appearances and that it serves to structure what form these appearances can take. In order to participate in online discourses, one must be registered, one must be profiled. Fundamentally, the profile is a specific modality of articulating the self, one that serves to uphold a specific logic of *assujettissement*.

The virtual space is organised by the profile in two foundational ways. The first of these concerns how the profile is understood to be a ground for specific forms of appearance that take places within online space. One's profile is the ground from which one's online activity is seen to proceed; it is the origin of one's online being. Secondly, the profile serves to organise the appearances (both one's own and those of others) of online space through seemingly enabling one to control what appears to them online

– from as seemingly innocent a thing as the cultivated timeline, to the ability to directly render one's profile invisible to specific individuals or groups.

In order to fully explore the first point, it is important to counterpose its resulting schema with the insights explored in my preceding chapters. Within the second chapter of this thesis, I discussed how recognition requires a rejection of essentialism. This was followed with an exploration in the fourth chapter of the productive way recognition can be read alongside Arendt's account of action and Butler's account of performativity. In all three instances, precisely what is rejected is the presumed split between the agent and the action. Butler's work fully abolishes such a distinction through her rejection of the metaphysics of substance. Likewise, the agent/act distinction does not presume the temporal fixity within Hegel or Arendt, wherein action is understood to be constitutive of the agent in some sense. Precisely the opposite implication arises within the logic of the profile, wherein the profile is understood to stand behind the individual appearances it then seems to produce – even when such appearances constitute the profile in question. At this point we can see the twin logics of the profile and the post working hand-in-hand; with the structure of the post serving to rupture the connections between individual appearances, presenting them as being isolated units of discourse and thereby uprooting them from their conditions of mutual constitution. We thus have a schema wherein individual, isolated appearances become implicated in a shared origin – they become organised around the profile that appears as their origin. The fracture induced by the logic of the post does not link these plural instances of appearance with a mobile subject – the kind I advocated for in my preceding discussion of the opposition between the logics of position and movement – but instead links them to the immobile entity the profile appears to have fixed down. Not only do these logics harmonise to produce a sense of the profile being the doer behind the deed, which is to reassert the immobility of the subject compared to the activity that proceeds from this self, but this moments of appearance are understood as staccato instants – organised in relation to a profile as nothing more than items on a list. Such a framework impoverishes the subject and action – rendering both relatively mute and immobile as it separates one from the other. So at once, the logic of the profile fragments actions, reifying them into objects that appear to stand apart from the doer, and at the same time serves to fortify a sense of an underlying agent behind the action. In this dual movement of fragmentation and stitching together, the profile impoverishes action and renders us unable to move.

The profile presents the subject as being in a kind of stasis, again playing its part to uphold the mythological structure of an eternal self, originally concealed and only to be revealed through its actions. I discussed this framing of the self in my second chapter, in my treatment of contemporary identity politics as a project mired in essentialist logics, but within the new conditions of virtual space – wherein technology introduces new potentialities – one’s appearances, in the form of one’s posts, attain a seemingly permanent quality. Once again, despite the received opinion that online spaces are forms of perpetual flux wherein things are continually appearing and disappearing, online spaces serve an archival function. The appearances that one makes are nearly always preserved in one form or another – and although lip-service may be consistently given to the ephemeral and transient quality of the internet, we must not forget that posts and the appearances of the subject they constitute are forms of content, and online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and other fora primarily exist to host such content.

The profile itself serves this specifically archival function, collecting information about an individual user in order to constitute itself as a kind of digital fingerprint. This is less metaphorical when we consider the rise of biometric technologies, such as those that enable someone to access an account or a device through their own body – furthermore constituting a condition of cybernetic embodiment. The profile is an informatic impression, a technologically produced subject constituted as the bearer of specific kinds of informational qualification. This makes possible the generation of specific online populations, by organising a list of profiles alongside a specific keyword. Within such a possibility we see an increase in magnitude of the ability to produce and maintain a demographic, not only in the sense of gathering up information about subjects but, in a specifically Foucauldian sense, putting power to the work of producing these subjects through the structures of informatics – routinely referred to as ‘big data’.

This archival function is embedded into the very structure of both the post and the profile – for the online fora serve to preserve the very content that they both host and produce. Understanding, as I contend we should, a profile’s posts in terms of how that profile appears – which is to say as action in the Arendtian sense – this preservation renders one’s actions perpetual in the sense that the content can continually be encountered in almost precisely the same way as when it originally appeared. With Arendtian action – or action in physical space more broadly – this original encounter is not *de facto* preserved, but can be remembered, and perhaps recorded but the record stands independently of the action. When we consider online fora (particularly Twitter and Facebook) – the action is itself a record,



through appearing in the form of a post one is already archived in the sense that one's words, whether written or spoken over a video, have already – through their very appearance – been entered into a system for the production, recording, and manipulation of data. Within virtual fora, appearance itself becomes data – the conditions of its visibility are datified.

Preservation as enabled by internet technologies contributes directly to the first manner in which the profile mediates our understanding of the self in so far as it upholds. Whereas in the Arendtian sense, action takes places within a specific context – the spatial and temporal constraints of one's body appearing and acting within the public sphere – with the transience of this context foregrounded in the sense that the subject is always able to move beyond one's actions, the modality of action available to the user of an online forum breaks with this constraint. More or less all of one's actions exist simultaneously, can be experienced alongside one another, quite literally if we consider how the structure of the profile is bound to the production of timelines and lists to organise its salient posts. Though this simultaneity is never fully achieved (the very structure of the timeline / feed implies succession), this tendency trends towards the closure of the temporal dimension – as I shall explore in further detail in the third section of this chapter. For the moment, it is salient to emphasise how this simultaneity structurally predisposes us towards the idea that there is a constant self that underlies these appearances. Given the predominance of call-out culture and cancel culture within contemporary identity discourses, with both framing the self as a kind of object about which qualitative descriptions can be made as a matter of fact, we can see how the praxis of such politics replicates this presumptive structure of the self. The result is an empowerment of reactionary responses that seek to determine the nature of the self once and for all – responses that replicate the very conditions that enable the problems identity politics is attempting to attend to.

Among the most notable examples of this was the firing of James Gunn from the Disney Corporation. Though he was later rehired, the *Guardians of the Galaxy* director was fired in July of 2018 after Tweets he had published several years prior (2009) were strategically brought to light by political opponents – in this case it was a Trump supporter engaged in a form of identity politics that is teleologically (if not methodologically) opposed to those that form the focus of this thesis. Despite the age of the Tweets, and despite the fact that they had already been subject to controversy<sup>637</sup> – it was

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<sup>637</sup> Bryan Bishop, 'Writer-Director James Gunn Fired from Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3 over Offensive Tweets', *The Verge*, 20 July 2018 <<https://www.theverge.com/2018/7/20/17596452/guardians-of-the->

relatively easy for Mike Cernovich (the origin of this outcry and notable origin of the ‘Pizzagate’ fake conspiracy theory)<sup>638</sup> to weaponise the poor-taste content of Gunn’s Tweets to make an essentialist allegation about who Gunn fundamentally is as a person. This incident was centrally about drawing on specific posts, these specific instants wherein Gunn has appeared online, and appealing to them to assert a subject that exists behind these appearances, a subject that – in this case – was to be qualitatively understood as the wrong sort of person. By producing an essentialist account of identity, Cernovich was able to (albeit temporarily) tap into the underlying puritanism that suffuses many online spaces, wielding that in unison with the reactionary penchant such spaces induce through their apparent immediacy. The firing of James Gunn exemplifies how the archival function of online fora readily lend support to such essentialist framings of the self, and as such further demonstrates such framings to be implicit within the structure of the fora themselves. Precisely because of the phenomenal simultaneity that such spaces present us with, online fora readily induce a sense that there is an underlying subject standing back from its appearances, that remains at a distance from its actions.

Though the example of James Gunn can be understood as an appropriation of ‘progressive’ identitarian praxis for regressive ends – and thus may lead some people to dismiss this as a reflection of online spaces’ framing of the subject – many additional examples of such supposedly ‘progressive’ instants of this can be pointed to. In particular, Jon Ronson’s *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed* serves to collect a few case studies – including that of Justine Sacco, whose poor-taste joke resulted in her branding as a racist and her expulsion from her position as a PR executive.<sup>639</sup> It is not my interest to defend the actions of Sacco (or Gunn, for that matter), but I am instead focused on how the logics of post and profile work in unison such that individual posts achieve a special status in ‘revealing’ the profiles from which they

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galaxy-marvel-james-gunn-fired-pedophile-tweets-mike-cernovich> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Mike Fleming, ‘Disney Reinstates Director James Gunn For “Guardians Of The Galaxy 3”’, *Deadline*, 15 March 2019 <<https://deadline.com/2019/03/james-gunn-reinstated-guardians-of-the-galaxy-3-disney-suicide-squad-2-indefensible-social-media-messages-1202576444/>> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Dani Di Placido, ‘The Return Of James Gunn Proves That Twitter Redemption Is Possible’, *Forbes*, 16 March 2019 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2019/03/16/the-return-of-james-gunn-proves-that-twitter-redemption-is-possible/#3c16205b434e>> [accessed 23 July 2020].

<sup>638</sup> Gregor Aisch, Jon Huang, and Celia Kang, ‘Dissecting the #PizzaGate Conspiracy Theories’, *The New York Times*, 10 December 2016 <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/10/business/media/pizzagate.html>> [accessed 23 July 2020]; BBC News, ‘The Saga of “Pizzagate”: The Fake Story That Shows How Conspiracy Theories Spread’, *BBC News*, 2 December 2016 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-38156985>> [accessed 23 July 2020].

<sup>639</sup> See: Jon Ronson, *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed* (London: Riverhead Books, 2015).

issue. Through the immediacy inculcated by the invisibility of the interface, the logic of the post lends itself to a kind of essentialising judgement that regards the profile as a stable, substantial, and factic self.

What intrigues me here is the production of online populations – which is to say how the profile stabilises not only our sense of individuality but also our sense of collective identity. On the one hand, we can understand this as an ossification of the terms of articulation of the subject, but it goes beyond this – encouraging a totalitarian puritanism wherein the open dimensions of the subject become reduced to a positional logic. In order to fully explore this concern, we must first understand how the logic of the profile conducts its reification, which is to say we must explore how the profile mediates us through a lens of commodification.

When one appears on an online forum, when one posts or comments, one is creating content that one consumes alongside others. When one likes or shares another's post, one is playing one's part in the proliferation of content. Online fora are structured as networks for the sharing and exchange of such objectified particulates of discourse, neatly structured into bounded chunks of text or snippets of audio-visual media. Given the function of such platforms in the circulation of user-generated content, we cannot merely consider the user of social media as an ordinary consumer. What is being consumed in such spaces, the appearances that one encounters, are at once being produced by that very user – both in the direct sense of being the one who posts and in the indirect sense of being the one who receives the post, and through whose interaction the quality of that post – most notably its visibility to others – is determined. The user is an active participant in this process, and though their activity may be heavily conditioned, this conditioning does not render them as passive consumers but as proactive prosumers – those who simultaneously produce and create the content that is to be consumed. The cycle of appearances circulates across the online fora, the conditions of its (in)visibility implicated within algorithmic determinations as to what content is deemed to be of likely interest to a particular profile. The question of interest is motivated specifically by the desire for such platforms to capture the user's attention, increasing their exposure to advertisements that are frequently used to support such fora. These adverts are, of course, appearances within their own right, corporate manifestations within the online fora – often presented as content like any other, which the definitive markers of their sponsored status frequently remaining so-integrated into their appearance that these marks are all but invisible.

The presence of advertising does not represent a rupture of commodification into the online space, but instead reveals how the structure of the post itself, and thus the quality of all the appearances it mediates, is already mired within a network of commodity. Online appearance operates within an economy, wherein not all appearances are created equal – with corporate users, in particular, able to use their class privilege to directly intervene in how they appear online. This is one among many potential examples of the very same power relations that shape physical space operating within virtual space – often aided by the technologically malleability of such spaces, the tools to control which is held almost exclusively within the hands of those who regulate the platform in question. Far from escaping power, online fora are perhaps even more straightforwardly productions of power than their physical counterparts. The profile is another instrument wherein the subject becomes framed, and constrained, to appear and thus be recognised and lived, it serves as a disciplinary instrument in the sense of Foucault's disciplinary power, but furthermore it acts as a form of biopower – drawing the body into its web of commodification and control. Beyond Foucault – the profile mediates the subject's psychic and phenomenal experience of itself, constituting something comparable to Byung-Chul Han's psychopower<sup>640</sup> – wherein the individual's very psyche is appropriated and controlled<sup>641</sup> – with this allowing its framing to extend beyond those arenas of life that technology directly mediates – though these are increasingly few. It is on these grounds that I assert that the profile is the schema of the contemporary subject.

Mired in structures of commodification, the profile gives rise to the self as a product of a process of both reification and marketisation. Again, we return to the dual movement at work within such spaces that on the one hand seem to uphold a structure whereby an essential, naturalised subject merely awaits or assumes a specific form of representation, and that on the other hand openly understand the self to be a kind of output, albeit of processes that are absolutely dependent on the commodification of the subject into a kind of object. In both instances, what is primarily denied by these logics are processes of movement, and so despite its appearance as a realm of absolute acceleration, I consider virtual space to

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<sup>640</sup> See: Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, Futures (London ; New York: Verso, 2017).

<sup>641</sup> This is close to Foucault's understanding of the psyche as a field of virtuality within which disciplinary power operates, see: Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France (1973-74)*, ed. by Jacques Lagrange, trans. by Burchell, Graham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

be thoroughly mired in the logic of position. The position in question is, as previously explored, made possible only through a cartographic process of power, and within virtual space – wherein certain forms of technological manipulation and control are possible – this process of producing a fixed map wherefrom fixed terms of articulation derive their descriptive power and wherein fixed subjects are contained occurs through the deployment of power through algorithmic networks, through the very process of producing virtual subjects as profiles, a process that in turn occurs through the deployment of information technology.

My suggestion is thus that online spaces openly acknowledge themselves as sites of self-actualisation, if not explicitly as sites of self-production, but constrain the possible form taken by this self as that of a commodity. As explored in my second chapter, this commodification of the self is itself a process of reification, wherein the self is transformed into a kind of object. Though the reification enacted by online spaces does not in and of itself directly imply a commitment to a pre-discursive, essential self, the two moves are mutually supportive. The profile is itself an objectification of the self into a specific discursive site, *de facto* requiring that the user actively submit to a process of objectification that discursively frames the self on strict terms. Once these initial terms are accepted, and they often remain unseen so as to be accepted without the realisation of the user, the metaphysical baggage of the pre-discursive self becomes far more possible. Of course, given the culturally embedded idea – often still invoked within certain discourses on internet technologies – that virtual space is counterposed to ‘real’ space, the idea of a self that precedes the technology becomes further reinforced. The idea that the physical self neatly pre-exists the digital self and that a clear line can be drawn between them ignores how these digital technologies of the self have become so integrated into our lives such that virtual spaces accompany us wherever we go – even if we are not actively using them ourselves. We have already passed the point wherein we can neatly divide our ‘actual’ selves from those digital personae and profiles through which we appear online. Through reinforcing logics of commodification, and making them compulsory to the very fundamental condition of one’s online appearance, the structures of online fora thus play their central role within the reification of the subject.

We must therefore understand that profiles serve as a foundational structure for mediation. They ground the subject’s online appearance through the transformation of this subject into a fixed entity – the kind that can output various kinds of appearances to further reveal itself, but, despite all the claims

to the contrary, which is unable to every truly transform itself. What is provided, however, is a vision of absolute agency that further serves to implicate this subject within the very systems of power that foreclose the possibility of movement, which is to say the structures of power that both produce and benefit from the existence of the profile and from the datafication of the self it makes possible.

Online space promises its user a kind of absolute control over their experience, stressing the importance of customisability. Overtly, such fora appear to proffer a great degree of control over how one appears. The content one produces can seemingly be deleted on a whim, appearing to enable a user to literally unspeak something they later regret. Likewise, technologies such as photo editing (such as the infamous SnapChat and Instagram filters that can do anything from colour correction to altering one's appearance to look like a dog) and other forms of multi-media may allow one to appear to others in a way that they could not offline. Using software to change one's photographic appearance is a direct way of mediating one's bodily appearance with the technologies available on such fora, but many choose to leave their physical appearance behind altogether – instead choosing an avatar that may be a celebrity or a fictional character. One's profile is the site of seemingly infinite control and customisation, wherein one can go on to add or alter information *ad infinitum* and appear in whatever way one wishes. The technology of such fora enable us to curate our appearances beyond what is possible in physical space.

Though this may appear to offer endless creative opportunities, when paired with the control such fora grant you over the appearances of other people we can begin to see how such apparently control can be harmful to the notions of discourse, recognition, and political action as we have been exploring them in this thesis. On fora such as Twitter and Facebook, it is possible for an individual to use functions such as mute and block to render certain kinds of content invisible when accessing the forum from one's own profile. Twitter, for instance, differentiates between a mute that sets the content in question to be invisible by default but still allows the user to see it if they 'opt in' for a specific post, and a block that renders everything posted by a particular account invisible, as well as making one's own profile and associated posts invisible to the blocked person. *Prima facie*, we can understand this technological capacities as the ability to actively intervene in the conditions of appearance, allowing an individual to control what does and does not appear to them. Not only does this actively undermine any Arendtian sense of plurality – thereby foreclosing the possibility of action, or any political appearance – but it also structurally predisposes online fora towards an individualistic, atomised framing of the subject that

impoverishes any possible sense of discourse. This is to suggest that such platforms undermine their own ability to meaningfully constitute fora in the fullest sense of the term precisely because they indulge in a vision of agency that uphold some notion of sovereign individuality.

With the ability to control the appearances of others comes two implications. The first is that one's profile, which is to say one's appearance, sense of self, and one's mode of identification is entirely one's own, that it precedes any encounter with the other. This is, naturally, a reassertion of the individualist, essential self. Secondly, however, is the ability to expel various figures from one's own phenomenal experience. As we've discussed, this can take place on an individual level, but the technology can also find specific terminology or phrases, or even use the data interred within profiles to produce online populations for the purpose of conducting programmes of mass silencing. As with any technology, there may be good reason for doing this. Twitter, for instance, files its tools for muting and blocking other users under the heading of 'privacy and safety' and for good reason. Given the replication of systemic oppression within online spaces, it is often within the interest (if not a matter of necessity) for members of oppressed populations to be able to silence those whose sole intent is to abuse the communications technology for the purpose of harassment. But just as it is commonplace for users to engage with such oppressed people in bad faith, the structure of online spaces can transform an act of practical and advisable self-defence into a general policy of flight from discourse – further shoring up the structurally-induced sense of the subject as atomised and absolutely individual. Precisely what is lost here is the sense of the public.

We see this in the decreasing ability of such spaces to serve as fora *qua* spaces for discussion. Instead, the logic of position as embedded in the structure of the profile and the post creates a tendency towards thinking of the content one uses to appear online as being *de facto* bounded, as being isolated instances of speech that are not open to reply. This culminates in a fundamentally combative attitude, wherein any form of dissent and disagreement can be conceptually confused for antagonism and even violence. This at once mirrors the distinction I've raised earlier in this thesis between agonism and antagonism, as well as the distinctions between conflict and abuse, and between an abstracted symbolic order and material conditions understood as mediated through a symbolic order. Online spaces allow abstraction from material conditions to such a degree that intellectual disagreement can often become immediately conflated with violence such that direct acts of physical violence can themselves become

ignored, or not addressed fully. The result is that identity politics becomes hamstrung by the constant need to shore up and defend particular identity positions, reified stances of subjectivity that are collapsed into normative accounts, rather than complex, lived experiences and modalities of articulation. Not only does this heavily reinforce a specific set of terms under which identity is forcibly articulated as a result of conditions of power, but it can further serve to naturalise these very terms and as such results in a perspective that ignores the role of both power and community altogether. The vision of the subject produced by the profile is thus the sovereign individual, whose sense of agency has become transformed into a kind of entitlement and who fails to understand their sense of self, or their experiences as in any way mediated by frameworks of meaning and articulation that both extend beyond and precede the very sense of self they are taking as an absolute ground.

Though harmful, it is difficult to condemn such behaviours given how rooted they are within the conditions of power and appearance that are coded into such fora. It is also important that we do not ignore the degree to which the precarity induced within oppressed populations has a deeply affective dimension that understandably predisposes such communities towards defensive praxeis. There may be good reason why those who are oppressed endorse particular practices, particularly when those practices reinforce a sense of security they have been denied. However, we must understand the discursive breakdown enacted by such structures and the forms of praxis they accordingly prescribe as dangerous in so far as these serve to reinforce harmful and oppressive structures of *assujettissement* that not only make possible but further intensify the very terms of oppression that render such communities precarious. Understandably, the response to the induced precarity of oppressive power structures is to seek security – but such a security is itself dependent on a false understanding of agency, the very same picture we discussed with respect to lordship and bondage – wherein the unlimited agency of the lord was only an illusion that was made possible through the servitude of the bondsman.<sup>642</sup>

What we are therefore seeing within online fora are structural conditions that reinforce a framing of the subject that remains determined by the logics of lordship and bondage. This philosophical moment centrally presents us with a vision of subjects who believe themselves to be isolated from one another, only brought into contact through competitions of power wherein they must fight for the ability to assert

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<sup>642</sup> See Chapter 2.



their individualised sense of meaning over and above that of the other – whose ability to make meaning can be understood as nothing but a threat. We have already explored this in my second chapter, but the important point to remind ourselves of at this juncture is how the subject as it appears within lordship and bondage cannot be fully recognised. This is a philosophical moment wherein only a partial recognition is possible, where the recognition of the other is restricted by the dynamics of power in question.

Through casting the user as being in control over their online experience, and granting them the tools to control, often to a very fine degree, not only how they appear but also how others are able to appear, open discourse is rendered impossible and recognition becomes highly constrained. Part of what defines the discursive, or the public, for Arendt is its universality in the sense that anyone is able to appear within it – and this promise is closer to be fulfilled than ever by the implementation of technology. Yet, we find within online space a complication, just as we did within physical space, wherein the ability to appear is not universally available, and not all subjects are able to be recognised on terms that do not continually reassert oppressive and violent regimes of control. In so far as online spaces succeed in providing this sovereign control, they do so at the expense of the very conditions of discourse.

Yet, the promise of control is never delivered on fully, both in the sense that sovereign agency involves a philosophical contradiction at its heart and in the sense that the platform actively manipulates its users. This most clearly happens when we consider what appears to the user when they engage with the online space. As we have explored, these platforms often seem to offer their user a complete customisable experience, wherein they can control the terms upon which things appear to them. The major point at which this is broken is through the advertising that appears on the sites, often taking the form of ‘sponsored posts’ that are designed to appear – at a glance – like any other piece of online content.<sup>643</sup> Importantly, these advertisements are not merely random, their appearances are determined on the one hand by the capital of the advertiser, which is to say by the economic power of the one who wishes to appear, and, on the other hand, by the affinity the advert has with the profile that is viewing it. The datasets within which the online self appears and out of which it is constructed allows these platforms to tailor what adverts appear to whom. One’s feed is thus a custom made, individualised lens through

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<sup>643</sup> See: Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso Books, 1980), chap. Advertising: The Magic System.

which one experiences online space – but that lens is not entirely one’s own to determine. Of course, one is able to give one’s feedback on particular forms of advertising and remove individual ads from appearing – but this does not constitute an escape from the system, but is rather a form of producing the user’s consent. When one removes an ad, one is prompted to explain why, and whatever feedback one makes immediately becomes more data, only serving to make the system more able to tailor its advertising.

We thus have an understanding of the profile that considers it to be a crucial logic, the boundaries and constraints of which serve to create the terms and conditions of any individual’s online appearance. When one appears online, they do so through the profile, and thus the ways in which can be recognised are fundamentally implicated within the profile’s resulting logics – which include discursive fracture and the commodification of the self. Any discourse occurring within such spaces is going to be inevitably affected by such conditions, and though this does not render resistance impossible, the invisibility and naturalisation of the logics that come with the interface, post, and profile make even the identification, let alone the evasion, of such conditions highly difficult. For identity discourses, this is a much more central concern, precisely because the very phenomena under consideration is so heavily conditioned within these spaces, leading to the increasing co-option of identity movements under the very structures of power that sustain the oppressions such discourses attempt to identify and oppose.

Crucially, what renders resistance so difficult is how these logics are deployed in order to enact a form of temporal foreclosure, wherein the conceivability of an alternative – particularly of a future that escapes such logics – becomes decreasingly thinkable. This foreclosure of the future as enacted by such technologies extends the logics of position to entomb the subject within a limited horizon of possible appearances. It is for this reason that the final section of this chapter shall consider how the spatiality of online fora has further temporal implications.

## CYBERNETIC PERDITION: THE LOGIC OF POSITION AND THE ETERNAL PRESENT

Having explored how virtual spaces both continue and reshape the implications of physical space, and having then explored how this spatiality frames the subject, we now turn our attention to how this structure of power sustains itself. If the internet and its associated technologies both promise and deliver seemingly infinite possibilities in terms of potential lifelines, orientations, and technologies of the self,

how is it that this underlying structure remains seemingly immutable? This question becomes a consideration not only of the underlying structures of power that actively maintain their own invisibility, but is furthermore a reflection on the nature of movement within online spaces. Many reflections on online spaces stress how such spaces make apparent the constructed nature of the self.<sup>644</sup> This line of thinking examines the profile and the specific kinds of work that go into its production and refinement and then argues that this overt building of a self clearly signals the cultural death knell of naturalised or essential accounts of the self. It appears that such technologies are presenting us with a revolutionary reframing of communication and subjectivity, delivering on Haraway's "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, dangerous possibilities" that she considers as central to her figure of the cyborg. Accordingly, one would presume, on this view, that social media would serve as *de facto* liberatory technologies, as technologies of the self in their most positive form. Yet these accounts fail to take into account that it is not merely a tug-of-war between a pure essentialism on the one hand and a pure constructivism on the other. The terms upon which and within which one constructs their identity are not themselves neutral, but are produced and maintained by discourse and its associated conditions of power. So whilst I agree that social media does actively avow the constructed nature of the self through its reliance on the logic of the profile, I contend that this logic when considered alongside the logic of the interface renders the technological mediation of the self that occurs within online fora decreasingly visible. Thus, we have a contradictory situation wherein the self is both affirmed as constructed, but also as deeply essential – a contradiction often overcome through conducting a conceptual split between the constructed revelations or performances of the self and the essential self that underlies them. It is a view that allows a superficial acknowledgement of the role played by power in the process of conditioning *assujettissement*, but that also refuses to part from the logic of commodification due to the rhetorical security this can grant one's identity praxeis.

We are faced with a situation wherein the overarching logic of *assujettissement* is internalised; the terms upon which it makes the articulation of the self possible are rarely challenged. The logic of the

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<sup>644</sup> For examples, see: Patricia de Vries, 'Dazzles, Decoys, and Deities: The Politics of Digital Invisibility', *Institute of Network Culture*, 2016 <<http://networkcultures.org/contesting-capture-technology/2016/03/09/dazzles-decoys-and-deities-the-politics-of-digital-invisibility/>> [accessed 10 July 2019]; Nguyen; Nick Yee, 'The Hidden Logic of Avatars', in *The Proteus Paradox: How Online Games and Virtual Worlds Change Us - And How They Don't* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2014).

profile remains enduring, continually appropriating all attempts to shed essentialism and its resulting discursive breakdown back into its foundationalist structure. Within this frame of power, we witness the decay of essentialism in the sense that the profile so clearly implies artifice within the very process of becoming a self (whether digital or physical) and yet the impossibility of ever escaping the process of reification that is built into the structure of the online forum. I understand this tension as a struggle between movement and position, wherein internet technologies promise an infinite number (or at least very wide array) of possibilities for movement, whilst simultaneously ensuring that one forever remains in one's assigned position. Mirroring a popular online invocation, users are encouraged to 'stay in your lane'; though this phrasing implies movement, it works to hold a subject in place, understanding the speech of that subject – its activity – as issuing from an essentially fixed entity. This implicates this phrase within a process of placement and homing that occurs within online space as well as in physical space.<sup>645</sup> As discussed within the previous chapter, the logic of position is one that always seeks to home the subject, to find the right location for it within the cartography of social space. Online fora are structured to ensure that each individual assumes a particular position, that they take a particular perspective upon which they are grounded and from which they proceed. Yet, movement cannot be completely denied or foreclosed. Yet, due to the groundedness of the subject within such fora, their potentialities for movement are highly constrained. As such, such fora often do little more than pay lip service to movement, affirming self-transformation through flashy advertising, whilst effectively offering seemingly infinite variations of the same underlying structure. Movement within such spaces thus only ever takes place within a closed, cybernetic feedback loop. One is able to move, but never far, and one must always end up where they began. This is precisely the work done by the imperative to 'stay in your lane', it evokes an image of movement and trajectory, but does so to disguise the stasis it actually maintains. This is to say that in online spaces, one may move but one may rarely, if ever, go anywhere. The subject remains fixed.

This is precisely the outcome of the ongoing processes of datafication, wherein the profile is precisely designed to capture and contain the subject. The accompanying mediation serves to affix the subject into pure data, which is to say into that which can be manipulated and put to use. We see this most clearly illustrated in Byung-Chul Han's *Psychopolitics*, wherein he contends that present conditions

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<sup>645</sup> See: Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*; Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*.

of power can be characterised by the general transformation of the human mind into a resource, with this evident in discourses of self-improvement, wherein we are continually called to maximise ourselves precisely in capitalistic framings of productivity.<sup>646</sup> This notion of the utility of the subject should be understood alongside systems of categorisation, which is to say alongside various modes of constructing and identifying the self. It is no accident that productivity oriented communities often demonstrate a love for personality tests or other forms of identity typology. As we have previously explored, contemporary identity discourse often regards identity as a demonstrable quality of a substantive self, and this essentialist framing is empowered by datafication's process of tagging various profiles, a process of sorting, homing, and positioning. The process of datafication can thereby be understood as the process whereby the subject is not only reified into a static profile, but further as the underlying conceptual cartography of social space articulated and maintained through mechanisms of manipulation and control. Big data is a field that seeks to determine the possibilities of movement and transformation, and due to its orientation towards sustaining its own ability to see, it seeks to abolish the possibility of transformative movement, thereby ensuring that the subject always remains anchored in its assigned position, tethered to it if not held completely still.

Therefore, we understand online spaces to be fundamentally hegemonic in the sense that the logic of the profile constitutes a prescriptive grammar of the self in order to sustain a field of control and determination. Through the process of datafication, the cyber hegemony of online spaces aim to produce a determinate subject, a subject that is accounted for in an absolute sense, that has been completely articulated and that is so secure that it is effectively protected from its own future. Of course, any articulation of the self remains temporally situated and is unable to induce a total paralysis of the subject – precisely because the subject is always in motion. Yet, this hegemony is able to discursively appropriate any moments or periods of transformation or transition into the logic of position, recasting these as revelations of a hitherto obscured, deeper truth. This process of capturing the subject through the enforcement of strict regimes of self-knowledge and *assujettissement* is transformed when it occurs within virtual spaces. Though I reject any distinction between virtual and physical space which depends

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<sup>646</sup> See: Han. Additionally, we can compare this to Foucault notion of 'human capital', see: Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at the College de France (1978-1979)*, ed. by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

upon an opposition between the mediated and the immediate, it is important to acknowledge how virtual spaces contain within them a greater capacity for manipulation and control. The conditions of appearance within online space can be more stringently controlled, in terms of the basic phenomenology of the space, its aesthetic dimensions, as well as the greater capacity to individualise (which is to say privatise) the experience of a particular user. All of this is to suggest that the combined logics of the interface, post, and profile, serve to uphold the logic of position that constitutes the hegemonic structure. These combine to create a form of cybernetic perdition, a perpetual asphyxiation of the subject into an eternal present and a foreclosure of the future. The concern here is centred around a spatial structure that seeks to both dominate and determine our experience of time.

In so far as online fora uphold the logic of position they are complicit in the foreclosure of the future. Within such spaces a framing of being that preferences a detached ‘who are you’, severed from questions as to who you were or who you will / could be. The question is never ‘who are you **now**?’ as this would be to emphasise the present as opposed to the past or the future, to acknowledge, even implicitly, that the now is not forever, and that the pursuit of the who is not a task that could ever truly foreclose or resist time. As Lovink puts it, “Time has collapsed into the current moment, the space between a person and his mobile has shrunk, and any individuality has been compressed into the same generic self-portrait.” We should, of course, be wary of any perspective that critiques technology on the grounds that it mediates a self that was previously immediate, as perhaps Lovink implies at certain points in his text. Nevertheless, what he accurately highlights is how online spaces ensure that the form taken by the self within online spaces is conditioned so as to adhere to the fundamental logic of the profile. Of course, this self can appear *prima facie* in many diverse forms. The fundamental structure, however, remains heavily abstracted.

This notion that online space conducts a foreclosure of the future may *prima facie* appear contradictory. There is a clear sense in which the technologies that underpin the structures of such spaces are orientated towards the future, but it is precisely the manner in which this orientation takes the form of continual prescription that is at the heart of this very foreclosure. The process of datafication routinely presents itself as neutrally predictive in the sense of a detached and neutral (or perhaps even beneficent) algorithmic system that is merely presenting various likelihoods or possibilities. However, if we are to take datafication seriously as a form of recognition, we must appreciate (as explored in my second

chapter) how the very means by which big data draws the subject into view is itself a productive process. In this sense, when the process of datafication appears to be merely making predictions, these articulations of the future are productive and, wedded as they are to systems that manipulate and control the conditions of appearance of subjects and thus the very foundations of discourse, constitute themselves as attempts to proactively write the future. This process of writing the future,<sup>647</sup> of making the future something determinate is to eliminate the future in a phenomenological and existential sense, it is to make the future present, to undermine its virtuality, to bring it into the now so as to abolish any meaningful, lived distinction between what is now and what is yet to be. Given its prescriptive dimension, the writing of the future is a form of projection, wherein present conditions of power are not merely presumed to go on indefinitely, but this prediction proactively prescribes their continued existence. On a conceptual level, this is a process of reification and naturalisation that suppresses the ability to reimagine the social arrangement of power. Hegemonic power is allowed to become so deeply intertwined into the political consciousness that it becomes an unquestioned fact of our political reality. In terms of identity, this is not only to naturalise the modes of articulation, which fails to account for the historical situatedness of these, but which further naturalised the disparities of power that constitute so many of these identities.

This is to say that the failure of identity discourses to break from this foreclosure of futurity itself serves to allow its praxeis to be readily appropriated by present systems of power. Though many meaningful challenges to particular instances of power disparity can and are being made, at the conceptual level there remains an often unarticulated, fundamental challenge to these underlying logics. In their understandable haste to articulate present conditions of oppression and injustice – particularly in terms of how these produce and delineate various populations or demographics of identity – such discourses often become complicit in the naturalisation of these modes of articulation, importing and thereby sustaining the dynamics of power that then become internalised into discourse. My point here is deeper than the superficial claim that oppressed groups are complicit in their own oppression<sup>648</sup> (a point which no matter its variable accuracy is routinely made in bad faith), and is instead to echo Audre Lorde's

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<sup>647</sup> An example of anxiety concern this process is expressed in Capulcu's online pamphlets, see: Capulcu, 'Disconnect - Keep the Future Unwritten', 2015 <<https://capulcu.blackblogs.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2015/12/Intro.pdf>> [accessed 10 July 2019].

<sup>648</sup> See: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1996).

contention that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”,<sup>649</sup> which is, in this context, to maintain that uncritical repetition of hegemonic structures (whether these are justified through appeals to practicality or to strategic necessity) serve only to repeat these structures. This is not to chide all repetitions, for as we have learned from Foucault it is impossible to conduct a clean break from present conditions of power.<sup>650</sup> Indeed, as Butler has often claimed, agency can often be found in complicity with such structures – and though this does allow us to acknowledge that we cannot help but be mediated by present conditions of power, this does not legitimise a complicity in the reification of hegemonic framings of identity and the ossification of present conditions of power *tout court*.

The foreclosure of the future primarily describes the process through which the present, hegemonic positions lay claim to a universality that affords them the ability to appear synonymous with reality. The mediating, conditioning, and determining capacities of this frame of power have become so internalised within the phenomenological experience of the individual subject that these mechanisms appear, in so far as they appear at all, to be synonymous with a given reality. This is to primarily note how the foreclosure of the future constitutes a mechanism through which the hegemonic structure of power sustains and replicates itself – which we have explored with regard to its continual reassertion of the logic of position. To return to the language of socio-political cartography, the foreclosure of the future is the process through which power is able to map out not only where we are but where we can go, which is to say that the foreclosure of the future is to make the future into something determinate, and directly intelligible. This is to say that it makes the future present through the elimination of the experiential distinction between the present and the future, wherein the future’s futurity lies precisely in its indeterminacy.<sup>651</sup> The indeterminate, unwritten nature of the future is, of course, foundational to the political in Arendt’s sense, as this underlies the natality of human action, its inherent capacity to begin something new. This is precisely the function of datafication, the transformation of everything into an account such that the subject appears to be entirely contained by this account, which can then be

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<sup>649</sup> See: Audre Lorde, *The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* (London: Penguin Classics, 2018).

<sup>650</sup> Indeed, this sense of impotence is further explored by Berardi, see: Franco Berardi, *Futurability* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

<sup>651</sup> As such, we can understand the future in terms of hope in Ernst Bloch’s sense, as “something undisclosed” within which “no form whatsoever can be viewed”, see: Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), II, p. 883.



prescriptively enforced through the capacity granted by technology to manipulate how subjects appear – especially to themselves. This predictive power may *prima facie* appear to be an incorporation of the future, but it is instead an extension of the cartographic logic – and of course to remain within the logic of the map is to forever remain in the system of signification as produced at the point in time from which the map originates. Though it is not solely responsible nor inextricable from these processes of reification and the extension of power, social technologies in the form of online fora have made possible new dimensions of self-knowledge, along with the novel forms of social manipulation and control that accompany the hegemony that underpins this contemporary framing of the self. Through extending the mechanisms of the present moment into the future so as to give us a prescriptive prediction of what is not yet here, hegemonic power is able to perform a sleight of hand wherein the future seems to appear to us in the same manner as a memory – a memory of what has not yet happened. Phenomenologically, the technological mediation of the self obscures the negativity of the self in the sense that it attempts to suture the self to its articulations, allowing no room for transformative action nor for an acknowledgement of the plural ways in which the self fails to be identical with the terms through which one may attempt to define it.

Hegemonic power must always be at odds with any meaningful incorporation of temporality within the framing of the self precisely because the acknowledgement and incorporation of futurity actively undermines the processes that form the foundation of this framework of power's control. Futurity constitutes itself as a perpetual threat to any essentialist account of the self, for the potential for change is itself an overt acknowledgement that how we identify and articulate the self are ongoing processes. This is to say that to acknowledge the temporality of the self is to acknowledge that any articulation of the self or any mode of identification is precarious, that is can always be contradicted or replaced, which is to acknowledge that the self – no matter how settled it may seem – is always threatened and uplifted by what it could be. When our account of the self is orientated towards the possibilities and potentials of the self, this fundamentally threatens the foundationalist perspectives that not only centre by myopically focus upon 'what the self is'. To use an Arendtian turn of phrase, when seeking the 'who of politics' such essentialist perspectives tend to presume that the self has already been found, and any acknowledgement of the process of finding or constructing the self is impoverished if present at all. This is, of course, an

acknowledgement of the self as a form of movement – a logic that opposes the ossification brought about by hegemony and its logic of position.

Central to the phenomenological dimensions of this foreclosure is process of reification through which the terms through which the self is articulated become isolated from their historicity and instead become projected into abstracted, eternal modalities of self-definition. As we have explored throughout this thesis, this reification of the self into an object not only constitutes a fundamental form of essentialism, but further conditions the praxeis that those operating within such a framework can conceive of as possible. When these schemata of the self become internalised as the foundations from which political action then proceeds, they serve to condition the boundaries of conceivable action. When identity politics is either unable to acknowledge these processes, or when it refuses to do so, it has internalised the present conditions of power and is thereby unable to effectively oppose these. Though this is not to assert that such politics are without merit, nor is it to deny the clear gains such politics have achieved, this is to note that there are very clear limitations on the transformational power such modalities of praxeis can achieve. When these boundaries are not made conspicuous, the result is a series of politics that make comparably superficial gains whilst simultaneously proliferating the limiting framings of the self that continue to perpetuate present conditions of power, along with structural disparities, harms, and violence.

Online fora intensify the mechanisms through which subjects are classified and categorised into identities. Of course, power, as both Foucault and Butler staunchly maintain, is able to act precisely because it can do so without being seen. To translate this point into the language used by this thesis, this is to maintain that control over the conditions of appearance is fundamental to any operation of power. The structuring of virtual space, with its many ongoing processes that datafy the self and use these data points to control the individual's conditions of appearance, demonstrates these processes *par excellence*, for appearance within online space takes on a technological malleability yet to be realised within physical space. The phenomenology of online space, not unlike that of physical space, is shaped by power such that the manner in which one is able to see, and – to reassert Ahmed's point – what one sees and is drawn into proximity with, are directly influenced by the processes of power that condition the terms of articulation of the self.

In response to this condition of impasse and ossification, we require a radically different conception of the self that is able to affirm the sociality of the individual, which is to affirm the requisite conditions of plurality that underlie any individual, and that is able to affirm the necessary incompleteness of the self. Only through refusing to support the socio-political processes through which the self becomes reified into a substantive entity trapped in the ahistoricised conditions of its own articulation can we cultivate a framework of identity that is open to the future – including all the ways in which the future threatens the essentialism and the logic of position that present conditions of hegemonic power rely upon to sustain themselves. Recognition is not immune to power – and it would be naïve to think that we could conceive of a schemata of the subject that somehow sits outside of the purview of power *tout court* – as it is a phenomenological mode of encounter, and both what we are able to experience and how we are able to understand and articulate our experiences are directly mediated through regimes of truth.

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# CONCLUSION: AGAINST THE ENCLOSURE OF IDENTITY

I opened this thesis with several examples – the Harper’s letter, the Tuvel affair and several others – in order to provide a brief history as to how popular practices and critiques of contemporary identity politics routinely proceed. This contextualises my critical project against the backdrop of this history wherein identity politics is repudiated on variable grounds, but rarely taken seriously as politics. This project takes seriously those ethical and political concerns often grouped beneath the identity political heading, understanding critical consideration and inclusion of these aims to be central to any politic rightly termed ‘progressive’. Despite my broad agreement with the goals of identity politics, this thesis considers how the practices of these politics are often limited by their philosophical bases. I have critically analysed the notions of identity and selfhood that underpin contemporary identity discourses, arguing that the notion of the self in use constrains their *praxeis*, limiting discourses so as to render their aims unrealisable. Centrally, I am concerned with how the underlying ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological commitments of contemporary identity politics limit the critical possibilities of its activism. I ask what avenues of critique are permissible within these discourses, and which are foreclosed?

My intention in this thesis is not to hold up identity politics as an object of investigation from which one can be easily detached. I do not understand identity politics as a clearly bounded set of discourses, but instead my understanding of the politics of identity broadens to regard those practices – both intentional and unintentional, both overt and covert – that make use of, produce, sustain, and circulate identities. I understand identity here to refer to the variable ways in which selves *qua* political subjects are formed and become qualified or defined, with a major motivation for this project focused on questioning how these qualifications become stabilised and recognised. Identity is always already embedded within the political field, and I therefore understand it as a fundamental aspect always at play within human relationships.

I understand the pathologies present within contemporary identity politics as a form of identity enclosure. Identity enclosure assumes a broadly essentialist understanding of the self as a bounded, sovereign subject that arrives on the scene of politics fully formed. The enclosed subject is understood as detached from their political conditions, and understands identity categories in an equally ahistorical and

abstracted way. Through these abstractions, conceptualisations of the self and its identity qualifiers assume a static form. Abstractions acquire a normative force within contemporary discourse that often ossifies the self into fixed, dogmatic conceptions. We can understand enclosure as an uncritical – and mostly unwitting – repetition of hegemonic norms from which would-be progressive movements have been unable to escape. Therefore, rather than disparaging identity enclosure or those who proliferate its harms, the intention of this project is to examine the elements of selfhood that this account omits, to explore how this selfhood underpins a kind of discursive blockage and the proliferation of an anti-political attitude – and to explore the structures of power that render enclosure so prolific. I have termed this pathology ‘identity enclosure’ due to its disavowal of the relational aspects of the self and categories of identity. Without a consideration as to how individual subjects are constituted in their relatedness, a relatedness that unfolds within a shared, public / political space – identity enclosure enacts an abstraction of its discourses away from shared political conditions – rendering both its structural critique and its understanding of the political field severely impoverished. Without incorporating a clearer understanding of these elements, I understand the discourses of enclosure to be gravely hampered.

Though some of these comments run parallel to preceding commentary on identity politics – such as Fisher’s *Vampire Castle* – I distinguish my project through a refusal to denigrate identity politics, particularly its ethical concerns. I do not agree that identity politics can be so neatly divorced from the politics of class – though class has not constituted the central focus of this thesis. Though the division of material and symbolic concerns, enacted by Fisher and others, does accurately capture part of enclosure, it would be erroneous to generalise this to identity politics universally, with this becoming quickly translated into a broad-strokes rejection of all identity-speak. Such perspectives preclude the possibility of engagement with identity outside of a reduction to class – a reduction that has been widely interrogated by scholars working on other vectors of oppression.<sup>652</sup> Fisher’s lament thus accurately mourns a loss of discursivity – a loss of the political – but results in the exclusion of identity politics from the bounds of ‘proper’ discourse. Though I broadly agree that contemporary identity politics have failed to adequately critique power – I do not subscribe to Fisher’s *Vampire Castle*, nor do I think that the ruptures of

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<sup>652</sup> Reed Jr., Adolph, ‘Reduced and Abandoned’, *New Republic*, 250.10 (2019), 10–11.

contemporary discourses can be adequately interrogated with overly-sensationalistic concepts such as cancel culture, militant wokeness, or ‘political correctness gone mad’.

Instead, I contend that the pathologies of enclosure must be understood as the result of how the self is understood within these discourses. I critique the enclosed framing of the self through recognition, contending that we can only understand individuals in relation to others. This thesis draws on Hegel’s account of recognition, though I distinguish my reading from ‘the recognitive tradition’ as the term pertains to thinkers such as Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth. A central motivation for this project is understanding how political subjects are produced through the conditions of their (in)visibility. This is centrally a phenomenological concern with how subjects appear within political (or public) spaces. My contention is that we cannot understand the ongoing and plastic processes of subject formation without understanding how these processes take place within political spaces. My concern with visibility considers how power serves to shape the conditions of appearance for subjects, the conditions within which they can be recognised.

We can see these politics at play within the two letters mentioned at the outset. Whereas the ‘elite’ signatories of the Harper’s letter uniformly have their names visible, many of those who signed *The Objective* letter felt unable to put their names to it precisely because of the disparity of power.<sup>653</sup> This greatly weakens the power of the second letter as a political act. To use Arendtian language, what we are witnessing is a collective act of speech wherein ‘the who’ is unable to make themselves known. This weakness, however, is not a simple matter of the signatories lacking courage, but instead speaks to the power dynamics that trouble the visibility of marginalised subjects in ways that do not factor for more privileged agents. Likewise, the security of the powerful often affords them a greater ability to control how they are perceived, granting them not only a greater ability to appear, but also the ability to render themselves and the power dynamics from which they benefit invisible. Evidently, such protections do not extend to the signatories of the response letter, many of who would have been unable to enjoy selective invisibility had they openly signed their names.

Though I agree superficially with several of Fisher’s concerns, I note that despite his contention that identity politics fails to think structurally, he does not consider how contemporary power operates

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<sup>653</sup> Anon.

to render its own structures invisible. That is why I have analysed the structures of online fora – the spaces within which the majority of identity discourse unfolds – as spaces of appearance which maintain the proliferation of the enclosed self. Nowhere are these new norms more succinctly expressed nor fatalistically accepted than within ‘The Aesthetic’, a video essay written and produced by Natalie Wynn for her YouTube channel ‘Contrapoints’, wherein she states: “Our America, our internet, is not ancient Athens, it's Rome - and your problem is you think you're in the forum but you're really in the circus.”<sup>654</sup> Here, appearance is reduced to spectacle and the complex forces that shape the specific conditions of appearance are ignored in exchange for a passive acceptance. Any critique of the conditions of contemporary appearance is abandoned, leaving a subject pacified into those disciplinary structures that regulate and control the subject’s performative enactments. I do not share Wynn’s reductionist attitude that our reality is simply not philosophically minded enough for philosophy to be at all relevant, instead contending that the pathologies at the core of identity politics are problematics only philosophy is equipped to analyse.

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<sup>654</sup> Natalie Wynn, ‘The Aesthetic | ContraPoints’, *YouTube*, 2018  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1afqR5QkDM>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

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## POST-SCRIPT: FLIGHT INTO THE VIRTUAL

The focus of this project has been identity, how we understand ourselves and the socio-political conditions that shape the ways in which we are (in)visible to one another. Fundamentally, this is a concern with our shared political space, with the performative and hegemonic fabrics that constitute our shared spaces and that thereby impact the fundamental conditions of plurality and mutuality that inform us as subjects. Increasingly, these conditions – as well as our relationships – are mediated through information and media technologies, and our relationships with these technologies are substantially transformed by the global pandemic, constituting a flight into the virtual. This flight into the virtual is part of a series of much larger crises, many of which concern how the pandemic is going to reshape our world – with this raising the question: what kind of world do want to shape together?

During the period of lockdown, physical proximity has become antithetical to solidarity, with presence itself becoming a source of potential threat. Our ways of appearing to or with others have become disrupted, with physical proximity widely replaced with technological, virtual substitutes. Of course, the pandemic has demonstrated the limits of these technologies, for instance in the production of the figure of the ‘key’ or ‘essential’ worker – the one whose labour requires a physical presence that cannot be substituted for the virtual.<sup>655</sup> Despite those aforementioned techno-optimist fantasies, technology does not straightforwardly abolish limits and physical presence cannot be entirely suppressed. The figure of the essential worker represents an economic manifestation of technology’s limitations, whereas the concurrent anti-racist protests across the United States – as well as similar events held in solidarity elsewhere – demonstrate a political vector of these limitations. That protests have become physically present on the streets<sup>656</sup> whilst the pandemic is yet ongoing not only speaks to the dire necessity of anti-racism<sup>657</sup> but also is a testament to the central importance of both appearance and presence within the political field. Of course, these protests, have identity written at their core, they encapsulate identity politics in the broadest possible sense: as a series of interconnected movements,

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<sup>655</sup> This division has, of course, followed the fault lines of class.

<sup>656</sup> The difficulty and political salience of this act of appearing on the street is further explored by Butler, see: Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>657</sup> This underscores the pervasive presence of racism as a necropolitic, see: Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (US: Duke University Press, 2019).



dialogues, and discourses that are centrally concerned with a critical project of interrogating the mechanisms of power that enable the oppression or marginalisation of certain populations by qualifying these subjects with the mechanisms of identity. Throughout this project, I have stressed the importance of the ethical and political questions posed by these movements, even though I have further contended that many of these discourses struggle to escape from the very limits thus opposed. This I have made clear specifically with respect to technology, understanding it not as something that straightforwardly liberates us from various constraints – such as physicality and embodiment – but it does extend and multiply the modes in which we are able to appear to ourselves and others. The increasing co-presence of virtual and physical space has to some small degree interrupted the seamlessness of the interface. With virtual space becoming dominant over physical, precisely because the virtual was sought as a substitute for a physical proximity that could not be safely shared, the interface has regained its conspicuousness. As the ongoing pandemic and protests demonstrate, physical and virtual spaces of appearance often work in tandem – sharing similar logics and conditions of appearance, and this conjunction can operate as a double-edged sword.

As explored by Judith Butler is a lecture delivered ‘at’ the Whitechapel Gallery,<sup>658</sup> the opening weeks of the pandemic saw a moment of ‘queer’ optimism from several on the left who saw potential in ‘the world shutting down’, along with the shutting down of capitalism and other mechanisms of inequality.<sup>659</sup> The idea of a world closing down allowed many of those engaged in critical projects against the conditions of this world to experience a reprieve in these conditions of domination, revealing perhaps their limitations. This sentiment was expressed poetically by Arundhati Roy’s image of the early weeks of the pandemic as a portal opening onto a different future.<sup>660</sup> Yet, the shut down and particularly the requirement to socially distance has occasioned a flight to online fora and social media as replacements for physical proximity. Indeed, we might understand this distancing more precisely as physical distancing, as the social element was instead translated into online fora – though this was accompanied by a shift in the spaces and conditions of sociality. The flight onto online fora has brought about a greater degree of

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<sup>658</sup> Of course, the lecture was actually delivered from her home in California as travel restrictions and social distancing made a physical event impossible.

<sup>659</sup> Judith Butler, *Judith Butler: The Force of Nonviolence*, 2020  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN5D9rlkRcA> [accessed 23 July 2020].

<sup>660</sup> Quoted in: Judith Butler, *Judith Butler: The Force of Nonviolence*, 2020  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN5D9rlkRcA> [accessed 23 July 2020].

interpenetration between physical and virtual spaces, accompanied by an extension of their logics. Though we can characterise the opening weeks of the shutdown in terms of this fraught optimism, the quick reliance on technology rapidly foreclosed this enthusiasm by demonstrating the limits of the shutdown – making clear that many of its vectors of oppression were yet active.

The continued presence of these vectors – particularly the vectors of class and race – rose to the fore of social media platforms over the course of the shutdown. The presence of wealthy celebrities in these spaces has been described as a breach of “etiquette”,<sup>661</sup> with the nature of their posts making the class-based rifts between them and wider society all the more conspicuous.<sup>662</sup> Though many celebrities have tried to cultivate their online presence such that they feel relatable, many have clearly failed,<sup>663</sup> with this prompting many to reflect on the notion of celebrity<sup>664</sup> – particularly in the face of a pandemic that is clearly not functioning as the great leveller many thought (or perhaps feared) it might.<sup>665</sup>

The pandemic’s uneven effects begin to underscore the vector of race, not only given the direct impacts of the virus upon people of colour,<sup>666</sup> but also the intensification of police brutality that added

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<sup>661</sup> Guy Kelly, ‘The Celebrities Who Have Got Lockdown Etiquette All Wrong’, *The Telegraph*, 11 April 2020 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/life/celebrities-have-got-lockdownetiquette-wrong/>> [accessed 31 July 2020].

<sup>662</sup> Amanda Hess, ‘Celebrity Culture Is Burning’, *The New York Times*, 30 March 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/arts/virus-celebrities.html>> [accessed 31 July 2020].

<sup>663</sup> Megan C. Hills, ‘OK Zoomer: Celebrity Video Fails in Lockdown, from Lady Gaga to Demi Lovato’, *Evening Standard*, 15 May 2020 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/alist/ok-zoomer-when-celebrity-video-calls-go-wrong-a4440926.html>> [accessed 31 July 2020].

<sup>664</sup> Rhymer Rigby, ‘Celebrities and Ostentatious Wealth Lose Their Appeal in Coronavirus Crisis’, *Financial Times*, 19 May 2020 <<https://www.ft.com/content/b8980746-7433-11ea-90ce-5fb6c07a27f2>> [accessed 31 July 2020]; Louise Wise, “There’s a Sense That Celebrities Are Irrelevant”: Has Coronavirus Shattered Our Fame Obsession?, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/may/02/theres-a-sense-that-celebrities-are-irrelevant-has-coronavirus-shattered-our-fame-obsession>> [accessed 31 July 2020].

<sup>665</sup> Owen Jones, ‘Coronavirus Is Not Some Great Leveller: It Is Exacerbating Inequality Right Now’, *The Guardian*, 9 April 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/09/coronavirus-inequality-managers-zoom-cleaners-offices>> [accessed 31 July 2020]; Amber Milne, ‘UK under Fire for Suggesting Coronavirus “Great Leveller”’, *Reuters*, 9 April 2020 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-leveller-trfn/uk-under-fire-for-suggesting-coronavirus-great-leveller-idUSKCN21R3oP>> [accessed 31 July 2020].

<sup>666</sup> See: Caelainn Barr and others, ‘Ethnic Minorities Dying of Covid-19 at Higher Rate, Analysis Shows’, *The Guardian*, 22 April 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/22/racial-inequality-in-britain-found-a-risk-factor-for-covid-19>> [accessed 31 July 2020]; Benjamin Butcher and Joe Massey, ‘Why Are More People from BAME Backgrounds Dying from Coronavirus?’, *BBC*, 19 June 2020 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52219070>> [accessed 31 July 2020]; Christine Ro, ‘Coronavirus: Why Some Racial Groups Are More Vulnerable’, *BBC Future*, 21 September 2020 <<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200420-coronavirus-why-some-racial-groups-are-more-vulnerable>> [accessed 31 July 2020]; Nidhi Subbaraman, ‘How to Address the Coronavirus’s Outsized Toll on People of Colour’, *Nature*, 18 May 2020 <<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01470-x>> [accessed 31 July 2020].

George Floyd to a continually lengthening list of both named and unnamed victims of state sanctioned murder. Floyd's murder was recorded, with the video widely circulated on social media platforms. Though the structures of police brutality against black populations are so pervasive that even an egregious killing such as Floyd's have become a matter of routine, Floyd's execution became a catalyst for the now widespread anti-racist protests across the US. These facts suggest that the protests required those communication technologies that underpin, constitute, and circulate through virtual spaces. It was the way in which the brutality was displayed, that Floyd's murder appeared – that it was next to impossible to fail to recognise it for what it was – that prompted the subsequent collective action. Indeed, the protests themselves have continued to depend upon the co-presence of virtual space to continue their momentum. Organisers have relied upon these communication technologies in order to orchestrate mass movements.<sup>667</sup> This has further been a matter of appearance, both in their ability to appear to others around the world when covered by global news networks, and in democratisation of appearance through social media that has allowed protests to document their mistreatment by police. During the height of the protests' presence online, social media feeds were routinely filled with graphic displays of police brutality. Around the world, those abiding by social distancing guidelines who had engaged in this flight into the virtual struggled to ignore these displays.

When considering this flight into online fora, an Arendtian distinction can again help us here, as to assert the sociality of this period of distancing (by stressing that it is a physical distancing) we can foreground the social elements at work within the heavily increased presence of social media and other online fora. Rather than understanding the social as something that is being actively suppressed or interrupted, we can instead see how sociality is being extended and intensified. To remain with Arendt's understanding of the terms, we can further note how sociality is at odds with the political – with political acts of speech interrupted by the idle talk of social behaviour.<sup>668</sup>

We can see the interplay of the political and the social in the 'Blackout Tuesday' phenomenon. This began as a campaign in tandem with a music industry blackout in support of the Black Lives Matter

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<sup>667</sup> See: Stephen.

<sup>668</sup> Again, to borrow from Pitkin, see: Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998).

protests, with the hashtag #TheShowMustBePaused.<sup>669</sup> Started by Jamila Thomas (of Atlantic Records) and Brianna Agyemang (of Platoon), the idea was to pause posting in order to free up the timelines and homepages of various social media fora and thus to allow ‘content’ focused on the protests to take up that space.<sup>670</sup> The simple idea was to pause or suspend one’s appearances online in order to allow those online fora to showcase the political struggles of people of colour, to foreground and centre these in a way that has hitherto failed to be possible within these fora. This was a call for action in concert, for a political solidarity through the amplification of marginalised voices. It also masterfully highlights the dynamics of appearance within online spaces, how these *prima facie* purely democratic fora are often conditioned such that certain subjects cannot appear within them as easily as others – an uneven dynamic the campaign sought to redress. This campaign quickly spread across multiple fora and beyond the music industry alone, becoming the mass phenomenon of #BlackoutTuesday.<sup>671</sup>

In its translation from one hashtag to another, Blackout Tuesday collapsed from a political project – from action – into a viral media sensation. Instagram was flooded with millions of identical posts, each uniformly consisting of an empty black box, with many using #BlackoutTuesday and, more problematically, #BlackLivesMatter or #BLM. Some understood this as an act of solidarity, an act that – through the support of non-black ‘allies’ – would allow the message of the campaign to essentially blackout the feeds of other users. The thought was that this would disrupt the casual user’s experience of the app, an interruption that could then be used to spread a message of solidarity. The result was actually a perverse taking up of the very space that the campaign was meant to be opening up for people of colour by these would-be allies, often to the detriment of activists who use the platform (and in particular the relevant hashtags) as a communications network to co-ordinate the protests.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Paul Monckton, ‘This Is Why Millions Of People Are Posting Black Squares On Instagram’, *Forbes*, 2 June 2020 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulmonckton/2020/06/02/blackout-tuesday-instagram-black-squares-blackouttuesday-theshowmustbepaused/#457778172794>> [accessed 29 July 2020].

<sup>670</sup> Jem Aswad, ‘What the Music Industry Can Do to Show Solidarity on Blackout Tuesday, by #TheShowMustBePaused’, *Variety*, 1 June 2020 <<https://variety.com/2020/music/news/blackout-tuesday-what-you-can-do-1234622028/>> [accessed 29 July 2020].

<sup>671</sup> Andrew Griffin, ‘BLACKOUT TUESDAY: WHAT DO INSTAGRAM BLACK SQUARES MEAN – AND HOW CAN YOU TAKE PART?’, *The Independent*, 2 June 2020 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/blackout-tuesday-instagram-black-squares-how-to-post-box-a9543896.html>>.

<sup>672</sup> Arielle Pardes, ‘On Instagram, Black Squares Overtook Activist Hashtags’, *Wired*, 2 June 2020 <<https://www.wired.com/story/instagram-black-squares-overtook-activist-hashtags/>> [accessed 29 July 2020].

This demonstrates that the virtual spaces of online fora serve as potent sites for viral transmissions of another kind: patterns of behaviour and action, as well as the onto-epistemological and phenomenological frameworks that underpin and inform these. Throughout this project, I have stressed the importance of understanding the conditions of subjectivity as part of any critical mission against contemporary systems of domination. Part of this entails a critical understanding of how these conditions are sustained, policed, brought into line and made uniform. If we seek a transformation of our political conditions, we must be attentive to how these conditions operate and how we are produced by and within them. If we are to advocate for marginalised subjectivities (whether this is for ourselves or for those who are marginalised on grounds that we are not), the conditions that produce these subjectivities must be made explicit. Our perspective must incorporate a critical consideration of how physical spaces is co-penetrated by virtual space, how these two spaces share and extend compatible structures and logics of subjectivity. The pandemic has highlighted how our contemporary world is already deeply mediated through technology, with social media often constituting crucial sites wherein our appearances are mediated.

The pandemic has demonstrated the limits of these systems of domination, their borders both in the sense of how their reach is not unlimited and in allowing us to see just how far they can reach. Though I understand the systems of power which underlie contemporary matrices of oppression as hegemonic – which is to say as fundamentally determinant of the political field upon which subjects move and act – we would do well to heed Foucault’s reminder that power and resistance are dialectically co-productive.<sup>673</sup> Though dominant, these systems can never truly become totalising. The limits of these systems of domination have been exposed as has their contingency on widespread societal structures. In this sense, I find the hope many felt during the first few weeks of the shutdown to be both natural and commendable, if perhaps slightly optimistic. Yes, the pandemic has shown how these systems can be vulnerable to strain, how their reach only extends so far, but so too has it revealed both the flexibility of these systems – their ability to ‘bounce back’<sup>674</sup> – as well as their ability to offload the ‘costs’ and losses (both financial and vital)

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<sup>673</sup> As explored in chapter 3, see: Michel Foucault – Resisting the Determination of the Subject

<sup>674</sup> Butler explores this through the arguments given for hastily re-opening despite the ongoing pandemic, presenting these arguments as a form of reduction of the world into the economic, see: Judith Butler, *Judith Butler: The Force of Nonviolence*, 2020  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN5D9rlkRcA> [accessed 23 July 2020].

from its centre. The pandemic has followed the lines of domination, impacting marginalised subjects – particularly people of colour – far more adversely than those subjects closer to the hegemonic core.

Particularly, the flight into social media occasioned by the pandemic has reasserted securitisation as a motivating concern. As I have sought to demonstrate over the course of this thesis, a primary motivation underpinning the politics of enclosure is the desire to protect marginalised subjectivities from induced precarity – with this informing the onto-epistemological and phenomenological bases of these politics. This desire for security expresses itself through orthodoxy and orthopraxy, introducing strictures into the space of appearance that wound the political through attempting to pre-determine what can appear within it. Social media platforms – particularly through the logic of the profile – have provided numerous tools that allow for cultivation and control. Our pandemic-induced reliance on virtual spaces has disrupted these mechanisms of control, however, particularly our hasty move towards replacing activities requiring physical proximity with online appearances. Having to interact professionally over video conferencing software has allowed a public (or perhaps social) sphere to overlap with our private, domestic spaces. We can think, for instance, about how many of us have inadvertently revealed aspects of our private spaces to others through the use of this software – how the camera or microphone may have transmitted something we did not want it to, how those we are sharing our domestic space with may have interrupted our appearances or otherwise inadvertently shared them with us.

When considering this idea of a crisis as transitional, Gramsci's words come to mind:

“La crisi consiste appunto nel fatto che il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere: in questo interregno si verificano i fenomeni morbosi più svariati.”<sup>675</sup>

“The crisis consists exactly in the fact that the old dies and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum occur many highly morbid phenomena.” (my translation)

- Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*

We can think of the current state of identity politics as reflective of this interregnum, with the ethical and political concerns at the heart of these movements motivated by a reflection that “the old” – the world constituted through the latticework of oppression – is not good enough. Ongoing conditions of domination are intensifying – becoming increasingly visible (one could say brazen), aided by technology

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<sup>675</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni Del Carcere*, ed. by Valentino Gerratana, Secondo (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1977), II, p. 311.

such that these questions are becoming far more urgent. Yet, these discourses are struggling to oppose the hegemonic structures that condition identity speak, with this dual movement inducing a kind of paralysis wherein the many, highly morbid phenomena of identity enclosure begin to breed.

I have brought these phenomena to the fore out of a desire to articulate precisely where the blockages of contemporary discourse lie – and to offer the beginnings of a strategy of resistance. If we are to radically rethink the world, it is my contention that we must radically rethink the self – that we must turn our critical attention to how subjectivity is produced, and how we are immersed within a shared, plural political condition. As I have shown, this is a contribution that works alongside – and partially as a synthesis of – several disparate-yet-interrelated fields of scholarship, with this project constituting a (sometimes uneasy) nexus of ongoing engagements. Vitally, I contend in this thesis that only through a fundamental reconsideration of the underlying ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology of the subject can the pathologies of enclosure be both examined and critiqued. Throughout, I have presented the project of identity politics as seeking a new world, and perhaps we can further consider this as seeking to actualise a possible alternative, to work to subvert the lattice and bring about precisely what Gramsci refers to as the birth of ‘the new’. Yet as Gramsci notes, this transition is a difficult birth, and one that – at the philosophical level – requires a fundamental reconsideration of self, other, and the worldly relations between us. But such reconsideration is not to be abstracted from action. As Arendt, as well as Loidolt, have demonstrated, mere thought is not enough without action, and even our basic conditions, such as plurality, must be actualised and lived. We therefore require a far more radical approach to the politics of identity, a politics that is avowedly explicit in its understanding of how identity operates at the structural level, a politics that is able to challenge the dominant imaginaries of contemporary hegemonic power. If identity politics is to achieve its transformative ends, it must broaden the depth and scope of its praxeis in order to attend to the various vectors of hegemonic power that continue to develop novel modalities of domination and control. It must far more fundamentally break from the pacified form into which it has been reduced.

To return to a moment of optimism, I shall conclude with another quotation, one that poetically reaffirms the radical hope expressed by the broader project of identity politics. This hope is far from a promise, however, that mere identity-speak shall be enough to constitute a fundamental challenge to our

contemporary conditions of domination. Instead, this is a hope that I contend can only be actualised if we are to thoroughly reject the politics of enclosure:

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”<sup>676</sup>

- Arundhati Roy, *Confronting Empire*

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<sup>676</sup> Arundhati Roy, ‘Confronting Empire’ (presented at the World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, 2003) <<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/confronting-empire/218738>> [accessed 28 July 2020].



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