Stuart Brisley: Performing the Political Body and Eating Shit

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Most, but not all, of Stuart Brisley's performances have involved the presentation of his body. In many of his performance works since the late 1960's the body endures difficult or extremely unpleasant conditions, or performs actions that sometimes involve extremes of endurance, to the point of exhaustion. Some of the performances have employed marking and painting, including painting his own body, and using his own body as an instrument to make marks. Where objects feature, they have been furniture, things to make constructions, rubbish, waste, discarded things, organic matter that decays, and recently facsimiles of shit.

What does it mean to present a body? What is a "body" such that it may be presented? How does the way Stuart Brisley presents his body relate to the body, as it has been determined in the West? Are there ways in which he displaces this self-understanding of the body? How are these displacements related to ways in which the sense of the body has changed in modernity? When does the modernity of the body begin?

Jean-Luc Nancy has argued that "the" body is an invention of the West, figured in Plato's Socrates, who sacrificed himself for philosophy, and of Christ, who sacrificed himself – or in whom God sacrificed Himself – to redeem the sins of mankind. It is the body that incarnates Spirit, or more generally, a "this" that is "that" "as his body".[i] This conception of the body, as incarnation and as sacrifice, has determined the representation of the body in Western art, and, indeed the very conception of the "medium" of art: art's materials as means of embodiment, and the medium, literally, as a conveyance. Arguably there is continuity in the West from the Christian body to the body according to a certain interpretation of psychoanalysis, where the subject has to give up a bit of itself to enter the Symbolic order, and, indeed, will have already done so, whether this is acknowledged, repressed or disavowed.[ii]

Stuart Brisley's performances, despite the extremity of the situations to which he subjects himself, do not convey a sense of sacrifice. However much he makes himself endure, the point does not seem to be the elevation of his body through suffering. His body is presented in its subjection, to the extreme of a de-subjectification, without this process being redeemed according to a sacrificial logic. For example, talk is involved in many, if not all, of the performances. Either the performance itself is silent, and then gives rise to discussion with whoever happens to be there as it comes to an end, or, increasingly in the later performances, storytelling forms a part of the presentation, and in a certain sense determines the action. However, there is no sense of a continuity or simple conversion between the two, of the body being sublimated into language. Rather, the performances remain affecting and enigmatic in the memory precisely because of a break between the two, without that break or gap reifying the body into a spectacle. The performance is not an illustration of a proposition that can be extracted from it; nor is it a "passage a l'acte" that ought to be converted into speech.

The actions seem to take place on a tight-rope between ritual and dissolution: fragmention, liquidity and rot are maintained not despite but because of the formal parameters or framework of the performance (the way the place is delimited, the length of time it is supposed to take and the way in which the intervals of time are marked), and the ritualized aspect of the movement. However, these are not "performances" in the sense implied by dance and theatre. For an audience with such expectations, Brisley's performances would mostly seem too casual, under-rehearsed (they are in fact not rehearsed at all), and constantly collapsing into contingency. It is this last quality that seems to be crucial, and it is where the "inward" character of the more ritualistic aspect breaks down, where an openness occurs.

I would like to describe these moments as moments of "exposure" in the sense that Jean-Luc Nancy uses the word, where "exposure" is always already exposure to the plural others. I will come back to this. The presentation or exposition of the body in Brisley's performances is doubled, and consequently can be understood in two ways. If one of these is "exposure" in Nancy's sense, another is as a being under or evocation of the gaze. What is the relation, then, between being for the others and being for the gaze? Or, to put the question another way, what is the relation between the presentation of the body to the others who are there and also present, and the presentation of the body in such a way that it is for the sake of, or for the incitement of a gaze that is associated with power. In order to approach this question, we need to articulate Nancy's account of the body with that associated with what has been called the "theologico-political", the body politic understood according to a theological model. Brisley's performances indicate the way in which the break with this model in modernity may be understood. For this reason, my approach to his work will be inflected through the thought not only of Jean-Luc Nancy, but also Michel Foucault, the philosopher of the political Claude Lefort, and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, all of whom, in one way or another, approach the break of modernity through a certain theologico-political conception of the body, a "this" that is for the sake of "that". I will then go on to consider how Brisley's performances engage with the collapse of the "sacrificial" model. This collapse points in two directions: towards another, non-sacrificial way of thinking about the body (it is here that I take to be the weight of Jean-Luc Nancy's thought, instanced in his sympathetic critique of Bataille); and towards the underside of modernity, towards what the body has been reduced to in its utmost suffering, including in the camps (here I will take up Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life"). The importance of Brisley's performance art, it seems to me, lies in the way that it connects up these two aspects: the possibility of another way of bodily being, absolutely here and now together with other people; and the worst to which human life has been reduced, and continues to be reduced.

First, let us consider the question of the relation of the body to power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault evokes, in two images, the difference between punishment under the ancien régime, and the invisible workings of power in the disciplinary society. The first image is that of the punishment in 1757 of the regicide Damiens, who was burnt with sulphur, had his flesh ripped away, had his limbs torn off by horses and cutting, and was finally burnt.[iii] The public spectacle of the body being tortured rendered power visible. This contrasts with the invisibility of power in the panopticon designed by Jeremy Bentham, a prison in which the prisoners could be seen at all time without themselves seeing the one who spies on them. Being under the gaze is internalized.[iv] The transition from the ancien régime to modernity is from the corporeal visibility of power in punishment to its

invisibility when it functions through the gaze in disciplinary society. The prisoners in the panopticon cannot see whether or not a guard is watching them, but in the end this does not matter, since the subjectifying gaze of power is thoroughly internalized. It could be argued that a subsequent recourse to the public presentation of self-punishment or manifest physical suffering by the performer is an attempt to make invisible power visible once again: that it is addressed to an Other that it seeks to incite or even bring into being.

It is evident that Stuart Brisley's performances are concerned with structures of power, in effect re-externalizing and corporealizing effects of power that have become internalized in

180 Hours - Work for Two People Acme Gallery London, 1978 (performance)

modernity. This is evident in *180 Hours – Work for 2 People* (Acme Gallery, 1978), where the space was divided between two personae, A the anarchist who lives downstairs, and B the bureaucrat who lives upstairs, both performed by Brisley himself. His performances are specific in their situation, and references to kinds of work, such as mining, and the way of being of people who fall out of the economy, such as people who live rough; but they are not didactic, nor are they representational, neither in the sense of presenting an imitation of something else, nor of speaking for others. That said, the specific references to labour and to class politics distinguishes Brisley's work from more universalizing self-presentation of the artist's body in the American performance art of the 1960's and 70's (Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman).[v] The political presentation of the body has been a concern of women artists since the mid-1960's, exploring issues of gender and spectatorship.

In relation to Brisley's way of working, one might think of Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export, Gina Pane or Ana Mendieta. While there are implications concerning the representation of masculinity in certain of Brisley's performances, for example in the male rivalry of the performance *Between* (De Appel, Amsterdam, 1979) with a younger man Iain Robertson, this tends to remain implicit. Where Brisley's work has a specific political reference, this is most often towards class politics, modes of labour, and the economy of art, rather than to gender. The kinds of actions Brisley performs – at times subjecting himself to extremes of hunger, discomfort and pain, painting himself to the point of rendering himself blind (*Moments of Decision/Indecision*, Warsaw, 1975), and using a material like blood (*Tanjentcies*, Barcelona, 1992) might remind the reader of the performances of Hermann Nitsch (blood ritual), Otto Mühl (abjection and breaking taboos), and Günter Brus (self-painting of the face and body). On the other hand, his strategy with respect to the "incorporation" of power is distinct from that of the Vienna Actionists who push the corporeal logic of incarnation, trangression and sacrifice to an extreme.[vi] Brisley's relation to the law is perhaps more subtle; his actions can be extreme – and even seem so when they are not – without being transgressive. Rather than appealing to, invoking or transgressing a law that is supposed to be transcendent, performances seem more concerned with the way in which conflicts and contradictions with respect to power and institutions work themselves through the body immanently. Nonetheless, as is becoming increasingly apparent, Brisley's work has as its subject the same historical moment as that which affects the Vienna Actionists, even if, given his different situation, he approaches it in a very different way. His presentation of the body as a political body also has affinities with post-war Polish performance and theatre, notably the work of Tadeusz Kantor,[vii] which is concerned with memories of the war and the Holocaust.[viii] This concern, which has become more evident in Brisley's recent performances, complicates the sense of presentation in ways we shall consider.

Presentation can no longer imply the supposed self-identical presentness of presence to self, but rather a non-identity. A non-identity, first, with the status quo: the "ordeal" introduces a distance with respect to the everyday. In addition, the performance becomes a trace of itself – whether or not it leaves a trace in the form of marks or objects. This becoming-trace of the presentation connects it with memory, both intimate and historical. The historical memory, I would argue, points in two directions: towards the memory of revolution; and towards the memory of atrocity. The future of the political will depend on whether, and how, we are able to think – to commemorate – the two together. It is in the light – or darkness – of atrocity that it ceases to be possible to think of the body in terms of sacrifice. Suffering is disjoined from redemption. To ascribe to it a purpose is obscenity.

What implication does this have for the presentation of the body as a political body? If the Western model of the body is based on the incarnation (suspending for the moment the parting of the ways that would be entailed by the different Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the incarnation), and the execution of the Absolute Monarch who incarnates power creates an empty space of power, as Claude Lefort argues,[ix] does this also imply the end of the model of the political body based on incarnation and sacrifice? That is to say, would the alternative be *that* body or no body at all, or would there be another kind of presentation of the body that would be a political body (not the metaphor of the "body politic", which suggests the people-as-one),[x] without that body presenting itself as an incarnation (a this that incarnates a that), and without offering itself, or a part of itself, for sublimating sacrifice?

It is perhaps the way in which Stuart Brisley's 1972 performance *And for today...nothing*

(Gallery House), where he sat for two hours a day in an old bathtub filled with water and rotting meat, recalls Jacques-Louis David's painting *Marat* that accounts for its emblematic status.[xi] It is the performance of Stuart Brisley's that people remember and associate with the artist, whether they saw it or not (I did not). But what does this association with the *Marat* tell us about Brisley's work? And, conversely, how does Brisley's presentation of the body as a political body relate to a problem faced, perhaps for the first time given the unprecedented modernity of the French Revolution, by David as a history painter. What operation does David perform on the Western "corpus"? How does Brisley displace or transform this

And For Today Nothing Gallery House, London, 1972 *(performance)*

operation? To anticipate: What happens to the idea of the political body when it is no longer possible to think of the body in terms of sacrifice? David's *Marat* seems to hang between these two senses of the body: a body that may be sublimated (he suffered for us), and a body that remains in its contingent facticity of rotting flesh, in a relation to a de-figuration that takes place elsewhere.

The art historian T.J.Clark captures something of this aporia in his discussion of the painting in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. Clark dates the inauguration of modernism to the day David's painting *Marat à son dernier* soupir [literally "at his last breath", usually given in English as *The Death of Marat*] "was released into the public realm" (15).[xii]

On 25 Vendémaire Year 2 according to the revolutionary calendar (16 October 1793), a few hours after Marie-Antionette was guillotined, having been sketched on her way by David, it was presented on a sarcophagus erected in the courtyard of the Louvre, past which there was a parade, bearing flowers to deck Marat's tomb. The original plan had been to stage a tableau vivant using the revolutionary martyr's embalmed body. However there was a problem, as David, who was responsible for the staging of the Revolutionary festivals, pointed out in a speech to the Convention:

> On the evening of Marat's death, the Jacobin Society sent us, Maure and myself, to gather news about him. I found him in an attitude that struck me deeply. He had a block of wood next to him, on which were placed paper and ink, and his hand sticking out of the bathtub, was writing his last thoughts for the salvation of the people. Yesterday, the surgeon who embalmed his corpse sent to ask me how we should display it to the people in the church of the Cordeliers. Some parts of this body could not be uncovered, for you know he suffered from leprosy and his blood was inflamed. But I thought it would be interesting to offer him in the attitude I first found him in, "writing for the happiness of the people."[xiii]

The next day David, as Clark puts it "admitted defeat": "It has been decided that his body be put on show covered with a damp sheet, which will represent the bathtub, and which, sprinkled with water from time to time, will prevent the effects of putrefaction."

Clark draws attention to the effects of literalness and contingency in these scenarios. The *Marat* is a turning point for him because with it "Contingency enters the process of picturing. It invades it. There is no other substance out of which paintings can now be made – no givens, no matters and subject-matters, no forms, no usable pasts. Or none that a possible public could be taken to agree on any more. [...] Modernism [...] is the art of these new circumstances. It can revel in the contingency or mourn the desuetude. Sometimes it does both. But only that art can be called modernist that takes one or other fact as determinant." (p.18) Later he adds "Modernism turns on the impossibility of transcendence." Through the contingency that enters picture-making, modernism in art is linked with the experience of the "disenchantment of the world" in modernity.

An art that involves the presentation of the body, or a substitute for it – and that is irredeemably situated, such that its circumstances provide its very substance – surely has its legacy today not so much in painting as in performance. Indeed, from Clark's citations of the circumstances of its genesis and first uses, it is clear that the *Marat* painting's mode of being was performative – it was meant to act on the people in a certain way in particular circumstances – rather than it being a representation to be contemplated.[xiv]

There is a further factor that links the *Marat* as an inaugural moment to performance art understood as a presentation of the body. The moment of the French Revolution involves "the People's entry onto the stage of power" (p.46). This posed a question of representation. Clark quotes Degar Quinet: the Revolution was a kind of "annunciation" that "was supposed to put the People in place of the King" (p. 47). Clark specifies, "That is to say, it tried to put one kind of sovereign body in place of another. And the body had somehow to be represented without its either congealing into a new monarch or splitting into an array of vital functions, with only an instrumental reason to bind them together." The meaning of contingency is thereby determined in relation to a problem of the representation of the people as a body: "'Contingency' is just a way of describing the fact that putting the People

in place of the King cannot ultimately be done. The forms of the social outrun their various incarnations," Clark writes. Therefore,

> From the point of view of those trying to represent it, that is, the body of the people was always sick. It needed some radical purging. And ultimately there was only one way to do this. It had to be killed in order to be represented, or represented in order to be killed. Either formulation will do. Marat is the figure of both.

Clark identifies the figuration of the People in the *Marat* not with representation of the body of the revolutionary himself, but with the unusually large area of empty scumbling above. "It embodies the concept's emptiness, so to speak. It happens upon representation as technique. It sets the seal on Marat's unsuitability for the work of incarnation." (p.47)[xv] Modernism as the pure presentation of technique emerges, for Clark, from the impossibility of incarnating the people in a body.[xvi] If incarnation fails, there is an ambiguity here, which is deliberately left open, with respect to sacrifice: is it Marat, or the People, that is sacrificed? Marat killed to represent the People; the People sacrificed in the representation of Marat; the body as an image of the people sacrificed in order to represent their (sublime?) unrepresentability? It is worth remembering that at this historical moment, 1892-94, the exposition of the body – the corpse of the revolutionary hero or its facsimilies – was linked to the Terror, which began between Marat's funeral and the completion of the painting: the display of the wounds functioned as a call for vengeance. Indeed, Antoine de Baecque suggests that Marat was presented as having been twice murdered: by his wounds, symbolizing the external attack on the revolution, and by his disease, which caused a rapid and visible putrefaction, symbolizing the internal threat to the revolution.[xvii] Thus sacrifice itself is doubled: the martyr sacrificed himself for the revolution; and the real presence of his remains is at once converted into symbolic meaning. The issue would then be whether painting – art – as well as abetting it, can resist this sublimation which in turn depends upon a sacrificial logic.

It would seem that, despite the presentation of the limits of a possible incarnation of the people, a logic of sacrifice entirely governs not only David's picture, but also Clark's schema.[xviii] The unrepresentability of the people is being associated with disincarnation and pure technique, providing a strictly political interpretation of the modernist turn to technique that is lost or repressed in later formalist theories of modernism, such as that of Clement Greenberg. However, there is a complication. Unrepresentability may be understood differently according to the two senses of representation, as copy and as delegation. A "pictorial" theory of representation as imitation conceals the difference involved in all representation. At the other extreme is representation as delegation, where the delegate is independent of that which she, he or it represents.[xix] The possibility of representing the unpresentable depends on representation being understood as delegation, as is the case not only with democratic politics,[xx] but also with the phantasmatic representatives of the drive in psychoanalysis.

It is clear that David's *Marat* is a key work in the transition from a religious-political discourse of sacrifice – which was at once how Marat's "martyrdom" was presented in the funeral organized by David – to a sacrificial logic governing the work of art and the artist's relation to it, a role which has something to do with the ambivalent status of the painting itself, which was both use-value as funerary replica (connected both with Clark's "contingency", and the Real of the corpse's putrefaction), and an aesthetic transfiguration

of its (abject) subject. The fascination of David's painting lies in part in the way these two dimensions are brought into a disturbing proximity in the stasis of this moment between life and death (the death that will have been a condition of Marat's assuming the symbolic status of martyr for the Revolution as David represents him). Performance art could be understood as having the potential to reverse the sublimating trajectory that David secularises and leaves in suspense: what Stuart Brisley seems to have understood is that such a reversal must also engage with the logic of sacrifice that made the movement possible in the first place.

Stuart Brisley's performances could be understood, in relation to Clark's argument, as a retrieval of theis repressed dimension of modernism, which we could describe as the defiguration of the body (even, and perhaps especially, where no body is represented). He subjects the body *itself* to this defiguration. If "*dis*figuration is to be understood as distortion in relation an ideal of the body, *de*figuration involves a relation of the body to that which cannot be embodied. This makes it possible to understand why, trained as a painter in the context of formalist modernism, he turned to performances that involved the presentation of his own body, and why, in turn, a number of those performance should involve painting – including painting his own head and body – and other forms of mark-making, which are not representational, or not directly so. Rather than being a break with modernism, Stuart Brisley's performances return to modernism its contingency, and could be seen as a mourning of its lost revolutionary possibility. If, as Clark argues, modernism is, as well as being the anticipation of the possibilities of immanence, already a (failed) attempt to mourn – contingency as a failure of representation – of lost transcendence, then this could be seen as a doubled mourning.

However there is more to be said. Clark leaves unresolved – indeed he doesn't even raise it as a question – the relation of "contingency" to the symbolic dimension of representation, which is so clearly apparent in traditional representations of the sovereign, from the late medieval period to that of absolute monarchy. Without an understanding of the relation between the Symbolic and the Real, it is not possible to appreciate what is at stake in the problem of the visual and bodily representation of the people, in the dimension of the Imaginary. Is it that the People *cannot* be represented as a bodily form, or that they *must* not be so represented, or a doubling, such that what cannot be must not be (which is, as Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, the very form of the Symbolic as un-natural Law)? Conversely, what happens when, after this break with the theologico-political body politic, the people is once again "embodied"? Is this embodiment to be still understood as a form of "incarnation"? In which case, what are its implications for an understanding of the "corpus" of the West? And what would a bodily practice of *dis*incarnation involve? Could we say the "re-embodiment" is an attempt to occlude or disavow disincarntion? Would it be an assertion of "contingency" as non-transcendence and disenchantment? Or is there a way of thinking what we remain forced to call disincarnation in non-negative terms, in terms that would not be determined by that from which it breaks away? Could we think in terms of a "carnation", to borrow Jean-Luc Nancy's term,[xxi] that is not a that "in" this, the body in its radical immanence?

Perhaps the real problem is not so much incarnation as sacrifice. Could it be that the task is not so much that of rejecting incarnation, whether in the name of the unfigurability of the people, or the empty place of power, as that of a "carnation that is not sacrificable? What this would mean is that the body is not the medium of a logic of "trans-appropriation" whereby the outside and the other are internalisedthe subject which expands – totalizes –

itself in this process.[xxii] Incarnation becomes, according to this model, at the same time the sacrifice of the corporeal in its finitude, as the equi-primpordial exposure to the others and to death. There is a hint of this in Clark's assertion of contingency, but it is not related to the transformation of the symbolic status of the body as political body.

The inaugural force of the French Revolution, according to Lefort, is that it reveals that the place of power is *empty* – and not simply contingent (a reversion to positivism).[xxiii] It is this emptiness of this "empty place" that destroys the illusion of society's self-immanence, it introduces a spacing or differentiation that allows for a self-representation of society without that representation incarnating power in the unity of an Other (divine Sovereign) or a One (the people as a fusional unity). The historical "contingency" of the Revolution, and the execution of the monarch, figures the condition of the Symbolic of democracy. "The reference to an empty place," Lefort writes,

> implies a reference to a society without any positive determination, which cannot be represented by the figure of a community. It is because the division of power does not, in a modern democracy, refer to an *outside* that can be assigned to the Gods, the city or holy ground; because it does not refer to an *inside* that can be assigned to the substance of the community. Or, to put it another way, it is because there is no materialization of the *Other* – which would allow power to function as a mediator, no matter how it were defined – that there is no materialization of the *One* – which would allow power to emerge as an incarnation. Nor can power be divorced from the work of division by which society is instituted; a society can therefore relate to itself only through the experience of an internal division which proves to be not a *de facto* division, but a division which generates its constitution.[xxiv]

In modernity the identification of the difference of the Real and the Symbolic with that of the visible and invisible world is removed. So Clark's thesis of the "disenchantment of the world" needs to be extended beyond the inflection he gives it towards contingency: only under the condition of such disenchantment does the Symbolic emerge as an "empty place". Totalitarian and religious fundamentalist movements then become ways of refusing this emptiness, and filling it with a figure of the source of power and the law, whether God, leader or people-as-one. The constitutive division between actual and symbolic power (held together in their difference in pre-modernity by the doctrine of the king's two bodies, mortal and immortal)[xxv] is collapsed into the idea of a social division that may be overcome. It is notable that Lefort identifies the operation involved in this overcoming as being that of "incarnation": power is incarnated in a being of some kind. Communism and fascism, Lefort argues, for all their differences, both seek "to deny social division in all its forms, and to give society a *body* once more" (p.233). The achievement of democratic modernity would thus be understood as a "dis-incarnation", or a movement away from the model of incarnation altogether. The significance of incarnation needs to be understood in relation to sacrifice as a retroactive movement relating the Symbolic and the Real. To push the Lacanian argument further than perhaps is the case in Lefort, a piece of the Real is sacrificed for the sake of entry into the Symbolic; the Symbolic is incarnated in a piece of the Real (the temporality of this is not the linear one of cause and effect). The monarch's body is a stupid piece of the Real that embodies the Symbolic order, as the penis is a stupid piece of flesh that embodies the Symbolic phallus.[xxvi]

It would be hard to deny that the model for the art of the West is that of incarnation. Indeed, David draws on Caravaggio's *Deposition of* Christ (1602-1604) for his presentation of Marat as the people's martyr. The artwork in general consists of matter that embodies Spirit. The subjective turn of Cartesian modernity doesn't change this structure even if it alters its ground: the formed matter becomes the embodiment of subjectivity, the "inner life" of the artist is "expressed". What, then, would be an art if "dis-incarnation" or "non-incarnation", if it is still an art at all? It is not difficult to conceive, or point to, practices of art that distance themselves from the body, by means, for example, or a turn to language. It is much harder to understand – given the enormous pull of the paradigm of incarnation – an art that is largely devoted to the presentation of the artist's body as an art that involves a rejection of incarnation and an attempt to develop an alternative mode of bodily being and communication. The distinction that needs to be made here is between the "body politic" and the political presentation of the body. If T.J Clark's analysis is right – and on this point I think that it is – already in 1793 the political can no longer be embodied (so we do not have to wait for the taking over of the political sphere by the economy, or for the hegemony of the network society of globalization, for that to be the case). Thereafter, the embodiment, or more specifically embodiment in the form of incarnation, of the political sphere will be a disavowing response to the social divisions of modernity. What I would say that Brisley's performances play on is the gap between the embodiment of the body politic, and the political presentation of the body. It is precisely the *failure* of the body to incarnate the body politic that is presented. Speech – as political discourse – emerges out of this gap, and therefore not as a triumphant sublation, but out of the loss and desuetude involved in the very experience of presentation.

Presentation here needs to be distinguished from representation, or at least needs to be understood as opening up the double sense of the "re-" in representation: the "re-" can be understood both as it commonly is as a repetition, such that the representation is a kind of image that substitutes for an absent object; but also as an intensifier, such that representation represents, intensifies or brings to consciousness the presentness in presentation.[xxvii] What is at stake here is the difference in representation of presence and representation. This difference – difference and not distinction because both different and the same – has implications for the relation of political representation and the presentation of the political as that which affects or takes place around a body. It is perfectly possible, and probably accurate, to argue that political representation has been colonized by the economic sphere, which would no longer be a sphere if it has been totalised. The art in which this would be reflected would be an art that takes place at the level of representation, where the "re-" is understood purely as the "re-" of repetition. The non-identity of that art with the sphere that it represents would be apprehended in the difference of its minimal repetition or doubling of that sphere. In relation to such an art, presence would function purely as illusion, intensification as the intensification of the simulacrum.

It would be tempting in the face of this to argue for a political sphere, distinct from the economic, in the mode of a Kantian regulative Idea. Such an evocation, however, maintains its purity at the price of its infinite deferral. What I want to hold open is the possibility of a presentation of the body in performance such that this presentation invokes not just the possibility, but the reality of a political sphere distinct from yet critically related to the economic. I would want to argue that Stuart Brisley's performances do just that. The presentation of the body is both an intensification of its presence, and a doubling, whereby the performance becomes a representation of itself.[xxviii] This doubling is the condition of the

relation – which is also a non-relation – of presence, or "life", or the real of the body, to language and to exchange. What needs to be thought here is a relation of presence, life, the body to language which is neither incarnational – the body as incarnation of the idea – nor allegorical, where the necessary relation of incarnation and idea is sundered, and the relation of the signifier to the signified "falls" into arbitrariness. It is in the movement between language and "carnation", to use Nancy's term, that the political takes place. What is the form of this taking place?

To try to answer this question, I want to return to the idea of the unsacrificable (which is the title of an essay by Nancy on Bataille, which will ultimately help us to get a sense of what is at stake here).[xxix] What does it mean to present a body as unsacrificable, and how does this relate to the performative opening in art of the sphere of the political? Sacrifice operates according to a double logic. On the one hand, it is a link with the wholly other, with the gods or with God, and therefore opens an impossible relation, a relation between incommensurable spheres or dimensions. On the other hand, sacrifice economizes that relation, which means making it a matter of exchange – the sacrificed animal, for example, is exchanged for the favour of the god. So sacrifice economizes that which is aneconomic. Bataille' s wager was that it could work in the other direction as well: that it could render the economic aneconomic as *dépense*, as excess or waste. It could be argued that the transgressive possibility of Bataillian sacrifice is closed off by the generalization of the restricted economy: *dépense* is resorbed into exchange. Lacan effectively covers both bases: the economizing sacrifice produces the possibility of waste; the sacrifice of the piece of the body for the sake of entry into the symbolic order retroactively produces the Real as that which falls away from the Symbolic. His account does not rely on an empirical distinction between restricted and general economies. Lefort's account, surely, follows a similar structure: the king's body – the actual body that stands for the body politic – is displaced by the empty place of power, which in effect makes possible the opening up of a political Imaginary to a political Symbolic. This process is homologous to the structure of sublimation in Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* seminar: the image falls away to reveal an emptiness circumscribed by signifiers.[xxx] Hence the importance, in Brisley's performances, of the relation of the defiguration of the body to speech.

We may approach the notion of the "unsacrificable" through another performance of 1972 at Gallery House, which took place before *And for Today Nothing*. The title of this performance, ZL 65 63 95 C has a triple function: as well as being the title of the work, it is Brisley's social security number, and for the duration of the performance he changed his name to that number by deed poll. The performance took place in a small room, off a corridor, into which there was a slit through which visitors could look. Outside there was a sign that said that "A man may occupy this room for 17 days," that "the outcome of this is to be seen" and that "this is a proposition that may or may not occur." The grammar of these statements places the emphasis on contingency, the possibility not to be. The room contained a wheelchair, in which the artist sat much of the time. The wall and window beside were smeared with paint. Apart from using the toilet, Brisley stayed in the room the whole time, or almost, since he decided, on the spur of the moment, to end the performance fifty-five minutes before the scheduled end, at which point the wall was torn down, opening up the room, and freeing him. A discussion with those visitors who were there at that time ensued. "It had to be a failure" Brisley has said. That it was a work at all needed to be thrown into question: "I didn't want to fulfil it in that genre". Effectively, Brisley is saying that he wanted to unwork the work.[xxxi] How are we to understand this

emphasis on contingency and unworking, specifically in relation to a presentation of the body?

By placing himself in view of a slit, such that he was aware of being looked at – he could also hear people approaching down the corridor – Brisley evokes both the prison, the disciplinary gaze of the panopticon, and the pornographic performance. Both serve to objectify the body, and the second reflects on the condition of art, the artist becoming a prostitute, the absolute commodity as subject (as discussed by Benjamin writing on Baudelaire). We need also to consider the implications of Brisley's turning his social security number into his name. To interpret this as a critique of bureaucratic society would be too simple. It is not an assertion of individuality against anonymity; rather, Brisley has said that this association of the presentation of his body with a number was to emphasise "being a human being but not a specific person." To this end, he painted his face and hands grey. He also attempted to do as little as possible, to move as little as possible. As the "director" of his own performance he is doing this to himself: he is at once subject and object, but rather than this relation reabsorbing the moment of passivity to produce the free autonomous subject, it results in a desubjectification. The "failing" of the work at the end is an attempt to prevent this desubjectified being from being re-appropriated in the name of art as good form, where the moment of closure asserts its autonomy. But like any attempt to produce an "open work" the result is paradoxical, since the non-closure or "failure" of the work remains a "willed" failure: the *unworked* work becomes a *work* of unworking.

The replacement of the name by a number cannot but recall the concentration camps. Brisley's description of the performance – which is only otherwise documented by photographs – is strongly reminiscent of the so-called "*Muselmänner*," the prisoners of Auschwitz suffering the physical and mental effects of near starvation, reduced to the lowest ebb, nothing but survival close to the end. Giorgio Agamben has taken up the *Muselmann* as a figure of what he calls "bare life".[xxxii] I propose to take two ideas from Agamben's books *Homo Sacer* and *Remnants of Auschwitz*, in order to focus on what could be understood as a second break, or rupture, in the political presentation of the body after the French Revolution. The first is that of "bare life" as life that may be killed but not sacrificed: life that is neither what the Greeks called *zoe*, mere life or animal life, nor *bios*, the form of life proper to an individual or group, whether this is political or religious life.[xxxiii] Bare life, according to Agamben, is the life that is subject to a sovereign decision or "ban", the life of the state of exception, outside the law (may be killed without the killer being punished) and religion (may not be sacrificed). According to Agamben, with the camp the exception becomes the norm, and the figure of this "bare life" is the "*Muselmann*".[xxxiv]

With his idea of "bare life" that "may not be sacrificed" Agamben is taking up the theme of Nancy's essay, "L'insacrifiable" in *Une pensée finie*, although his conclusion is rather different from Nancy's. Nancy's thesis is broad: the West rests on the foundation of a renouncement of sacrifice that has the paradoxical structure of a sacrifice of sacrifice. What is renounced is sacrifice understood as "economic", a barter or exchange with higher powers. This renouncement takes the form of a mimetic rupture, a "sacrifice or sacrifice" for the sake of a new sacrifice, an "auto-sacrifice", the name of which is nothing other than the "subject". The subject is the sublation of sacrifice which takes the form of an infinite "trans-appropriation": "appropriation, by the transgression of the finite, or the infinite truth of that same finite".[xxxv] The structure of sacrifice is that of the appropriation of exteriority by the subject. The Kantian sublime, for example, is the reappropriation of the subject's own disappropriation (the sublime as the "sacrifice" of imagination therefore of sensibility).[xxxvi]

However, there is a problem from the start, which is revealed by Bataille's return to sacrifice.

The economic idea of sacrifice is a phantasm of the West – we do not know what in fact sacrifice means to the other, what its lived experience might be. This fantasm acts as a defence: a defence against a fascination with the cruelty of sacrifice, an excess unsublated in the sacrifice of sacrifice. The photographs of the Chinese being tortured by having portions of flesh cut away, which Bataille first saw in 1925 and published in *Les Larmes d'Eros* in 1961, represents for him the enigma of sacrifice, since the face appears to have an expression that can be read as ecstasy as well as extreme pain – the point being the fascination the image holds for the viewer as an image of the ambivalence of sacrifice.[xxxvii]

What are the implications of this idea of sacrifice for art? Art, as the "transgressive exposition of the subject" who by that means "appropriates himself and lets himself be appropriated", according to Nancy, "comes to supplement, relay or sublate the impass of sacrifice." (p.89) Art – according to Bataille's model – is suspended between "the representation of ancient sacrifice, and the postulation of auto-sacrifice", that is between the expropriating spectacle of cruelty –in the form of appearance – and the subjective appropriation of the other or the outside. This places art in a double bind with respect to the gaze. The spectacle of cruelty is ambiguous: on the one hand, it restricts itself to the simulacrum or mimesis of cruelty, but on the other hand the cruelty that it makes appear only has value and meaning *if it is not simulated* (and is this not the structure and double-bind of all mimesis?) (p.89). For Nancy, this means that art is caught between *mimesis* and *methexis*, between imitation and participation. He writes that art "cannot sacrifice sacrifice except by sacrificing itself to sacrifice." (p.89) The expropriation, as aesthetic presentation, cannot but be re-appropriated.

This describes very accurately the dilemma of performance art, and why performance art must differentiate itself from theatre, above all from tragedy. The presentation of expropriation depends on the failure of mimesis, but if that failure is anything other than contingent, it would amount to a mimetic re-appropriation. Stuart Brisley's performances very precisely live out this condition. He doesn't act the situations like an actor – he didn't pretend to vomit in the film-performance *Arbeit Macht Frei* (1972), he really vomits for an unbearably long time, he didn't act a hungry person in *10 Days* (1973), he really didn't eat for ten days, as meals were laid out before him, and eaten by passers by, in the run-up to Christmas. And his performances are constantly teetering on the edge of failure, nothing is rehearsed, nothing can be predicted. As if to forestall the inevitable reappropriation. Which does not mean that the unrehearsed art performance is more "authentic" or more fully "present" than an actor's performance: it is equally affected by the structure of mimetic representation, internally divided from itself. The issue here is not the degree of authenticity, but the appropriation of the body's presentation by a logic that would sublimate a meaning from it.

To attempt to forestall reappropriation is to try to block the workings of the sacrificial logic as it applies to art, even if this confronts a double bind and inevitable failure. There are enough clues in Brisley's work of the 1970's – the replacement of the name by the number, the title *Arbeit Macht Frei* which was the slogan inscribed over the gates to the camps – to suggest that this worry about closure, and in the case of extreme performance about its being taken up into a sacrificial logic, is connected with the impact of evidence of the camps (Brisley, who was born in 1933, did his national service in the British army during the mid-1950's with the British Army of the Rhine on the border with East Germany). Jean-Luc Nancy too argues that the camps transform fundamentally the relation of the West to the sacrificial logic that constitutes it.

Sacrifice falls here into silence, into a contrary that is also its bursting: a revelation of horror that is accompanied by no access, no appropriation, if not that of this very revelation, infinite, or rather indefinite.[xxxviii]

Nancy goes on to argue that sacrifice does not in fact disappear, but migrates to one side: the Nazis understood the Aryan as being essentially sacrifice, the sacrifice of blood to the community, to the race – "he is by essence sacrifice, he is *the* sacrifice" – whereas for them the Jew "may not be sacrificed" for two reasons: first, because there is nothing of him that may be appropriated, he is entirely vermin; and second because sacrifice is entirely invested and accomplished by the Aryan race. These two reasons make up a single movement of appropriation and exclusion (a movement that Agamben will go on to complicate by placing the zone of exclusion *within* the space of appropriation, to the point that it takes it over altogether, whereupon the exception becomes the rule). Reading a statement of Himmler's to the SS, Nancy shows that for the Nazis it is not the Jews that are sacrificed, but that they – the SS – are sacrificing themselves by the mass killing of the Jews, a sacrifice that must remain secret.[xxxix] Thus the SS absorbs into itself the power and the fruit of sacrifice, and "it is already itself, in its being, the sacrificial secret".

For Nancy this marks the end of "sacrificial trans-appropriation" – of the Subject that, to echo Hegel, "penetrates into negativity, which maintains itself there, which supports its own laceration, and which returns to itself sovereign" (p.99). According to Nancy this means that existence henceforth has to be thought apart from sacrifice, and this requires, for him, a rethinking of Heidegger, such that "'finitude', thought rigorously and thought according to its *Ereignis*, signifies that existence is not sacrificable" (p.101). The problem that this poses is that the "inappropration" of being, being that "is" not, becomes "the most proper mode of appropriation" (p.102). For others, of course, this will require a break with ontology as such.[xl] Nancy, however, choses to remain with a philosophy of existence as exposure, and, in a rereading of Heideggerian *Mitsein*, being-with where being is "singular plural".

While Nancy in his discussion of the camps opposes the sacrificial structure of sovereignty to the unsacrificable, Agamben argues for their most intimate connection. If for Nancy the unsacrificable refers to an existence that may not be raised up by a logic of sacrifice, but remains exposed, for Agamben it is a category of life that exists in Roman law as an exception – an exception bound to the exceptional status of the sovereign power of the Emperor – and that becomes the norm in modernity. Drawing on Carl Schmitt,[xli] he suggests that the topography of the camps in relation to political space is that of the state of exception. "Bare life", life that may be killed but not sacrificed, is, as I have already suggested, as life that is subject to the ban of the sovereign, the counterpart to sovereign power. When the exception becomes the norm, "bare life" becomes the invisible presupposition of what life is for us, the concern of medicine, charities and NGOs.[xlii]

My claim is that Stuart Brisley's performances "produce" or bring to light "bare life", and they do so, paradoxically, in a form – art – that has been traditionally governed by a logic of sacrifice, of incarnation and trans-appropriation. This accounts, I think, for the aporia of performance art as he practices it: as a "mimesis" that must undo its mimetic character. How, in such performance, does the body become a political body? We have suggested that the problem of the political body in modernity is evidenced in David's *Marat*, as explicated by T.J.Clark: as the tension between the body as incarnation and sacrifice in the lower half of the canvas, and the defiguration of the scumbling which fills the top half, which Clark argues represents the impossibility of figuring the people as a body. If we take Lefort's

account as adding an explanation, in terms of the emergence of the political Symbolic as an empty space of power that must not, in a democracy, be occupied by a body, then the problem is posed as one of the "return" of the body into this space. Fascism and totalitarianism are not just aberrations, but indications of the impossibility of living with this empty space, reactions against the absence opened in the political space of modernity – as are, in various distinct ways, the religious fundamentalisms of the present. To return to the distinction between the idea of the "body politic" – which modernity brings to an end – and the "political body", could there be a return to the presentation of the body in relation to political space without a restoration of the body of incarnation and sacrifice? Nor could such a body be "representative" or "exemplary", given the impossibility of representing or exemplifying the multiplicity of bodies in configurations of gender, class and race that multiply to infinity. The passage from figure to defiguration, which for Clark is a passage to the pure technique of modernism as the acknowledgement of contingency, disenchantment and immanence, would need to be reconceived as a passage to the defiguration of the body itself. This defiguration is not a simple erasure. Rather, it is simultaneously the reconfiguration of the body in relation to a certain topographic relation between outside and inside.

The topological structure at work here is that of what has been called "extimity", an outside on the inside, an intimate alterity. The concept occurs in Lacan's seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, which is concerned with both ethical and artistic sublimation.[xliii] Sublimation is, effectively, sacrifice that sidesteps repression, or more accurately, a second-degree reappropriation of sacrifice. We have considered two historical moments in which a problem has been posed for the logic of sacrifice as a determining structure in and of the self-relation of the West. Both of these may be articulated in terms of a relation with the body. The first is the moment of the French Revolution: this results in the disarticulation of sacrifice and incarnation. The second is the moment of Auschwitz: here the model of sacrifice collapses, whether what emerges as unsacrificable is singular plural existence (Nancy), or bare life (Agamben). The question specifically posed by bringing together Nancy and Agamben – to my mind at least – is whether a relation with the extimate is possible that is not one of sacrifice and reappropriation. Agamben calls such a relation either poetry or testimony, and considers it in terms of enunciation as the place of the impossible relation of *langue* to life. What I think Agamben is doing in his account of testimony, which considers the relation between inside and outside of *langue*[xliv] (145) in terms of the relation of the sayable and the unsayable, is to attempt to use a theory of language – specifically of enunciation as the "performing" of language, the instantiation of a contingent relation of inside to outside – to attempt to overcome the problem posed in his account by the swallowing up of the norm by the exception, when the exception becomes the norm. In effect, the outside that is on the inside in the structure of extimity had effaced the very distinction between inside and outside, and become everything. In relation to this, the enunciation of testimony has a double role: it must create a relation to that to which testimony must be born that is not an appropriation, that is, that does not become a sublimating sacrifice, that remains a "*rapport sans rapport* [relation without relation]"; but in order to do this it must first materialize the topography of the extimate which has been effaced by the generalization of bare life. It is up to the enunciation itself – or the poem – to establish the limits in relation and non-relation to which it might take place.

We can rephrase this question with respect to performance art: Can the "extimate" be produced in and by a body without it collapsing back into the model of sacrifice? The problem is acute if art is characterized as the appropriation of the inappropriable, which is

perhaps to say nothing other than that art is the subject, and the subject is art. We can, I think, take this question in two directions. We could say that art is aporetic, and leave it at that. Or we could say that the locus of art is itself "extimate". Which is also to claim that it is much more than a sub-system of the social or the economic, but is not an entirely separate or "autonomous" space. However, what if the topological space of the extimate had indeed collapsed? The role or art would be to re-produce the extimate, to make the structure possible as a *limited* structure. In relation to the category of "bare life", a possible role for performance art would be to "de-generalize" it, to specify bare life as the life of *this* body exposed to the others. Bare life comes to be localized. The question for us has become not so much that of globalization, as of localization. An empty space is only an empty space if it is circumscribed.

In "circumscription" there is "scription". When we "inscribe" something we write it down in a material form, in this or that "script" on a determinate surface. "Inscription" therefore suggests a form of "embodiment", of putting a "this" into a "that". Illegible or indecipherable scripts are then understood as inscriptions where we do not have the key to unlock and thereby extract the meanings contained in them. The "circumscription" of extimity suggests a turning inside out of this model: instead of the material inscription embodying a meaning, the signifiers (which may or may not be meaningful) surround an emptiness, a non-meaning. What, then, of a body that re-entered that space, but without representing either itself, the people, or that emptiness itself? How would such a body extrude itself? How would it mark – indeed constitute – its territory? What would its "object relations" be like?

To accompany the idea of the "unsacrificable", Jean-Luc Nancy has coined the term "the excribed [*l'excrit*]." "Writing *excribes* meaning [excrit *le sens*] rather than inscribing significations".[xlv] Excription produces an "outside" that is not the outside of the referent:

> The referent is only presented as such by signification. But this "outside" – entirely *excribed in* the text – is the infinite withdrawal of meaning [*retrait de sens*] by which each existence exists. Not the brute given, material, concrete, supposedly outside meaning [*sens*] and which meaning represents, but the "empty freedom" by which the existent comes to presence – and absence." (p.61-2)

And a little later:

> In inscribing significations, one excribes the presence of that which withdraws from all signification, being itself (life, passion, matter...). The being of existence is not unpresentable. It presents itself excribed. (p.62)

For Nancy, communication is impossible without touching the limit where meaning reverses itself out of itself – playing on the double sense of *sens* as both meaning and sensation, "like a simple ink stain across a word, across the word "sense [*sens*]" (55). While "inscription" is the mode of writing of the subject that appropriates its outside, excription is the "scription" of exposure, where the subject is turned inside out to the extent of no longer being a subject. This withdrawal of meaning is not in the name of the incommunicable, but is the very condition of communication, which, however, can no longer model itself on the incarnation of meaning in a material medium, but is, rather, concerned with exposure and touch, the carnal sense of sense.

It seems to me that "excription" perfectly describes the relation to materials that takes – or makes – place in Stuart Brisley's performances. Take *Beneath Dignity* (Bregenz, Austria 1977).[xlvi] The artist passes through five wooden "frames" on the floor, larger than the span of his arms and legs when lying down (in a kind of perversion of the Renaissance "ideal man" who is squaring the circle), the first containing nothing, then chalk, flour, black paint and white paint. The last three are crossed with cords, under which he has to pass. He moves from delineating with the chalk the circles of his arms, and tracing around his feet as he passes from one frame to the other, to movements in the substance, passing through the heap of flour, plunging his face into the paint, so that as he marks the floor he too is marked. To excribe is to be touched by the outside. The specificity of the action here is that it has was inspired by hearing miners talk of hewing narrow seams of coal while Brisley was "town artist" at Peterlee new town, working on a project on the history and memory of previous mining villages.[xlvii] The outcome, however, is not a representation of miners at the coal face, but a highly formal, yet at the same time deformalizing, presentatation of ways of being in circumscribed space. In no way is the material transformed into an element that signifies, in the sense of being impregnated with meaning by the artist – which is why his approach is entirely different to that of Joseph Beuys, where fat, for example, via a personal "myth", comes to signify regeneration. Nor do the materials of the performance function allegorically, as the dead husks of lost meaning. They have no status outside the performance itself. This applies not only to materials used up in the performance, from the paint in ZL 65 63 95 C, to the blood used in the performance in Barcelona, where Brisley put his head in a bucket of it, poured it on precariously balanced tables, and mopped it up off the floor.[xlviii] It also applies to mark-making, such as the drawing produced during the performance *Sweating* (New York, 1996) that Brisley introduces with a story of killing a mouse, a performance during which, smearing medium on paper with his hands, it is as if he becomes a mouse making a hole. Eventually the paper itself is scrunched up and used to make further smears. When material such as the collected refuse in *Georgiana Collection* (1986) leads a life of its own, with Brisley acting as a kind of curator, as it rots and decays, it becomes a quasi-performer, the action of which is limited to the duration and space of the exhibition, although it continues to resonate afterwards in the minds of those who have seen it or read about it. This reluctance to allow the materials used in the performance and the traces that have been left to circulate independently is not in the pursuit of presence in the name of authenticity.[xlix] Nor, however, is presence abandoned to a critique of authenticity. Rather presence is accentuated as exposure. The exhibition becomes an exposition. The exposure of an existence in the process of excribing itself before others. But also the exposition of speech. This works in two ways. The exposition calls for speech: the performance is a manifestation, a coming into presence, that calls for speaking, it is itself communication, and demands an extension into the communication of speech, without linguistic meaning becoming the destination of its telos (as would be the case with incarnation and inscription). This is a communication without community, insofar as the community-as-one is based on sacrifice and incorporation, or else as art it is a measure of the absence of another possibility of community. If those gathered around or by the performance are to form a community, it will have been a community of waste.

Recently Brisley, in a series of performances and an extended text, has come to concern himself with ordure and its collection by a character named Rosse Yael Sirb, a character he – the artist narrator – claims to have first met while he was a corporal in charge of stores during national service, and R.Y.Sirb was a member of the Mixed Services Organization

employed as guards, and which included many displaced persons. The collection of ordure becomes the counterpart to a Museum of Hygiene in Dresden, started in the 1920s and continued during the War, where the artist narrator finds neo-Nazi graffiti in the lavatory.[l] Sirb is contrasted with another figure, Bertrand Vollieme, collector of junk and detritus. The two have somewhat different approaches to the collection. In Vollieme's view,

> the collection is made up of objects which could be assimilated into configurations as art works, taking in to account those already in the mix. This is in marked contraxt to R.Y.Sirb's position I think where the collection in its entirety would be considered to be an art work. I think Bertrand would be distressed by this notion.

The relation between part and whole takes on a political and ethical valence. For Vollieme, found objects are artworks *in potentia*, and the collection is their actualization. For Sirb, objects, including that which is as abject as shit, become artworks in and only in the enactment of the collection as a kind of performance, which is "site specific, or site sensitive". The kind of object is somewhat different in each case: Vollieme collects things from the street, whereas Sirb collects ordure.[li] The difference would be between that which is discarded or becomes obsolete in the march of progress, and needs to be rescued, and that which is subject to the transformation into an "absolute commodity" – "a social product that has rejected every semblence of existing for society"[lii] – that is the work of art. Desublimation meets rescue: once the residue of the model of sacrifice, and the logic of the internalization of the outside, is removed from Bataille's aesthetic of waste and expenditure, it is able to be allied with the "rescuing critique"[liii] of the rag picker. This turn to desublimation could be understood as another way of approaching the break with the model of sacrifice in the earlier performances.[liv]

In art, however, exposition becomes incorporation. Brisley's performances have always worked to create a gap, a delay – however temporary – between the two. One way has been to use failure, even if this itself must necessarily fail, insofar as it is the presentation of failure as work. There may, though, be a moment of uncertainty. Another way is to remind us that we are eating shit.

Michael Newman 2002

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Notes

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i Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Métailié, 2000), 7.

ii See note 54, on ?i?ek's argument against such a reading of Lacan.

iii Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 3-6.

iv Ibid., 200-09.

v Stuart Brisley spent 1960-64 in the US, and began his career as a teacher there.

vi Another distinction is that the bloodier Vienna Actionist performances appear to have been faked, bringing them closer to theatre than Brisley's work. See Amelia Jones, "Survey" in Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones, eds., *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 32: "Most notably, the violence of Rudolf Schwarzkogler's famous 1969 histrionic castration performance, documented by the seemingly incontrovertable evidence of the black and white photograph, was nonetheless faked, like most of the bloodshed in teh Actionists' works."

vii See Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*, trans. Michal Kobialka (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993).

viii Brisley shares this concern with Gustav Metzger, whose *Destruction in Art Symposium* (London, 1966) he attended.

ix See Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (London: Polity Press, 1986) and Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (London: Polity Press, 1988).

x For a critique of Lefort's account of the emergence of the political of democracy as an "empty place", and arguments influenced by Lefort, see Mark Neocleous, "The Fate of the Body Politic," *Radical Philosophy*, July/August 2001 2001. Neocleus argues that what emerges in the 18th century is not a disincorporation of power but a new conception of the social body, which is first articulated in Rousseau. He then claims that, rather than reverting to a pre-modern theological-political conception of the body, capitalist democracy and fascism share the same (modern) conception of the social body, and treat threats to social order in the same medicalized and biological terms. He suggests that Marx has an account of "socialized humanity" not based on the metaphor of the body. While Neocleus's insistence on the distinction between the theologico-political metaphor of the "body politic" and the modern conception of the "social body of the people", such that the *corpus* of the people, which is supposed to include the whole citizenry, embodies sovereignty (p.33), is an important distinction to make, he misrepresents Lefort's argument. Neocleus either fails to fully take into account, or refuses, Lefort's distinction between the symbolic character of power, and its "real" embodiment – it is not the empty place as such, but this distinction that is crucial. "The legitimacy of power is based on the people; but the image of popular sovereignty is linked to the image of an empty place, impossible to occupy, such that those who exercise public authority can never claim to appropriate it. Democracy combines these two apparently contradictory principles: on the one hand, power emanates from the people; on the other, it is the power of nobody. And democracy thrives on this contradiction...If the place of power appears, no longer as symbolically, but as *really* empty, then those who exercise it are perceived as mere ordinary individuals, as forming a faction at the service of private interests and, by the same token, legitimacy collapses throughout society." Lefort, *Political Forms of Modern Society*, 279 Moreover, according to Lefort, totalitarianism involves not a reversion to a pre-modern conception of the body politic, but precisely a historically distinctive, modern disavowal of the "empty place" of power, from which, as the preceding quote suggests, democracy is not immune. Rather than an argument concerning the appropriateness or not of the "metaphor of the body politic," the *philosophical* stake for Lefort is the very process of metaphorization, and the way in which its logic of substitution dependant upon an emptiness both appears, becomes explicit, in modernity, and is covered over. If anything, what needs further consideration is the *difficulty* of the relation to the nothing of the empty place.

xi This association was pointed out by Paul Overy, *Performance Stuart Brisley* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1981), 8.

xii T J Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 15.

xiii Quoted in Ibid., 32. For a vivid description of the funeral and David's involvement, followed by a discussion of the painting, see Simon Lee, *David* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 162-74.

xiv In this of course it functioned like an icon carried in a procession, or exposed on a particular occasion.

xv This may be considered in relation to the discussion of the Abbé Sieyès account of the Third Estate in Neocleous, "The Fate of the Body Politic," 32, where he points out that the logic of incorporation is pushed to the limit in an account of representation: "'The deputy is a member of the body of the Assembly and member of the body of the Nation for which he legislates." Representation is thus a projection of a symbolic social body onto a real institutional body..." This is of course the exact inverse of Lefort's argument, which concerns the substitution of a real body for a symbolic empty space.

xvi This scumbling looks forward to Pollock, discussed elsewhere in Clark's book, and a certain closure of the possibility of modernism. For a critique of Clark on Pollock, based on an account of sensuous particularlity from Adorno, see Jay Bernstein, "The Death of Sensuous Particulars: Adorno and Abstract Expressionism," *Radical Philosophy*, March/April 1996. And for a broader, sympathetic critique of Clark's book, from the perspective that modernism's failure is not epistemological (a failure of representation) but social (the absence of a just world in which sensuous particularity is not instrumentalized or repressed) – which give very different accounts of negativity and contingency – see Jay Bernstein, "Social Signs and Natural Bodies: On T.J. Clark's Farewell to an Idea: Episodesfrom a History of Modernism," *Radical Philosophy*, Nov/Dec 2000.

xvii Antione de Baecque, *Le corps de l'histoire. Métaphores et politique (1770-1800)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993), 356. Marat was not the only such "martyr" (see p.345). De Baecque's whole argument concerning the changing ways in which the people were embodied during the revolutionary period, including the Terror, complicates Neocleous's account, and justifies Clark's emphasis on the *failure* of embodiment, although the claim that the scumbling on David's *Marat* is evidence of this failure is retrospective projection from the later history of modernism, although no less interesting for that. The situation was perhaps more complicated than that since, as Tom Gretton points out ("Marat, *l'ami du Peuple*, David: Love and Discipline in the Summer of '93," Willian Vaughan and Helen Weston, eds., *David's* The Death of Marat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 34-55), the Jacobins needed to assert their control over revolutionary violence, so "the image had to demobilise Marat's supporters, rather than mobilise them, which an image exhorting to revenge, even to steadfastness, would have done" (p.43). For Gretton, this accounts for the rectilinear structure of the painting, its lack of movement, and the individuation and isolation of Marat: "His representation imposes silence and order. These qualities apply both to Marat and to the *peuple*, which

is inscribed in the painting only as a legitimating abstraction, not as a noisy and disorderly presence" (p.50). This provides a different spin to the non-figuration of the people to Clark's.

xviii Insofar as in his larger argument the contingency of abstraction involves a failure of the conditions for representation. For an extremely interesting discussion of the way in which Munch and Picasso's reworkings of the *Marat* bring out it's phantasmatic stucture of identification with the victim and self-sacrifice of the artist, which is linked to Bataille'e accounts of sacrifice, see David Lomas, "Staging Sacrifice: Munch, Picasso and *Marat*," in Vaughan and Weston eds., *David's* The Death of Marat, 153-78. Indeed it is clear that David's *Marat* is a key work in the transition from a religious-political discourse of sacrifice – which is at once how Marat's "martyrdom" was presented – to a sacrificial logic governing the work of art and the artist's relation to it, a role which has something to do with the ambivalent status of the painting itself, which was both use-value as funerary replica, and an aesthetic transfiguration of its (abject) subject. Performance art could be understood as reversing this trajectory –what Brisley seems to have understood is that such a reversal must also engage with the logic of sacrifice that made the movement possible in the first place.

xix For the political implications of this, see F R Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

xx It follows from Ankersmit's argument that the collapse of political space in its mediatization is precisely the denial of delegation by a "copy" theory of representation.

xxi Nancy, *Corpus*, 17.

xxii Jean-Luc Nancy, *Une pensée finie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 78.

xxiii See the critique of Foucault through Lefort in Bernard Flynn, *Political Philosophy at the Closure of Metaphysics* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ and London: Humanities Press, 1992), 83-84.

xxiv "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political" in Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, 226.

xxv See Ernst H Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

xxvi I cannot remember whether this suggestion came to me from Rudi Visker or Slavoj Žižek, so I had better thank them both. Whatever the case may be, the source in psychoanalysis is Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre VIII. Le transfert* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 277-337.

xxvii See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)* (Paris: Galilée, 2001).

xxviii For the "re" of representation as an intensification or redoubling of presence, see Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

xxix "L'insacrifiable" in Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 65-106. Where references to Nancy texts in translation are not given, all translations are by the author.

xxx See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 1992) and Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) on the fall of the object revealing the image as empty, thus articulating the Imaginary with the lack in the Symbolic.

xxxi For "unworking" see "Orpheus's Gaze" in Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Neb. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 171-76. There is an excellent discussion in Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 118. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community (La communauté désoeuvrée)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

xxxii Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Standord, California: Stanford University Press, 1998). Agamben's use of the Muselmann as a figure, indeed an allegorical figure, has been subjected to criticism, some of it devastating, in a recent book Philippe Mesnard and Claudine Kahan, *Giorgio Agamben à l'épreuve d'Auschwitz* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2001). Nonetheless, I consider the concept of "life that may be killed but not sacrificed" and its connection with the normalization of a state of emergency to be important.

xxxiii Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

xxxiv Agamben takes the figure of the *Muselmann* from Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Penguin, 1979):

> Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand.
>
> They crowd my memory with their faceless presences, and if I could enclose all the evil of out time in one image, I would choose this image that is familiar to me: an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of a thought is to be seen. (p.96)

In the current context, the implication of the designation of the "drowned" of the camps as "Muslims" needs to be questioned.

xxxv Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 78.

xxxvi Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 129.

xxxvii See Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), 204. Bataille was given one of the images of this incidence of "death by 1000 cuts" by the French psychoanalyst Dr Borel in 1925: "This photograph had a decisive role in my life. I have never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, at once ecstatic and intolerable. I wonder what the Marquis de Sade would have thought of this image, Sade who dreamed of torture, which was inaccessible to him, but who never witnessed an actual torture session." (p.206)

xxxviii Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 94.

xxxix Ibid., 96.

xl The preeminent other here being of course Emmanuel Levinas.

xli Carl Schmidt was a German philosopher of law and politics who was sympathetic towards the Nazis, in whose work Walter Benjamin also showed an interest.

xlii "When life and politics – originally divided, and linked together by means of the no-man's land of the state of exception that is inhabited by bare life – begin to become one, all life becomes sacred and all politics becomes the exception." Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 148.

xliii SeeLacan, *Ethics*, 71,139. See also Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher, et al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994).

xliv Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 145.

xlv "L'excrit" in Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 61.

xlvi Remade at the Whitechapel Gallery, 16th April 2002. I would like to thank John Wyver of Illuminations television for lending me rushes of his company's documentation of this performance, and his interview with Stuart Brisley.

xlvii Video taped interview with John Wyver, 5th June 2002.

xlviii One in the series 7 Performances Cicle Tangents. Entorn a La Performance at Sala Montcada de La Fundacao La Caixa, Barcelona, March-April 1992.

xlix Marina Abramovic makes the following comment in a discussion, referring to the performance *Tussen* by Stuart Brisley and Iain Robertson at de Appel, Amsterdam, 20-22 December 1979: "Another remark that I would make is that Brisley is always busy with kind of structures. He always needs to leave traces. After maybe 12 hours they decided to put water on the board, but before that he was licking his finger and his feet to make wet traces, and also from the body and from the sweating. He always carries something visible, physical, onto the material he is dealing with. Also in other performances when he uses chalk or colour, and leaves traces on the wall or on the floor. And then he leaves this after a performance, but this one I liked more because they destroyed the construction. The process is more important; the result is in you, in your memory, but not concrete. There should not be an object afterwards." "A discussion about the performance between Michael Gibbs and Marina Abramovic," *Artzien*, Vol 2, nos. 2/3, Dec 1999 – Jan 1980.

l For discussions of the Nazi discourse of hygene, see Robert N Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and Neocleous, "The Fate of the Body Politic," 33.

li For the political implications of ordure, see Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Koury (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2000).

lii Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 236.

liii See Jurgen Habermas, "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique" in Gary Smith, ed., *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1988), 90-128.

liv In Freud, as is well known, faeces are equated with gift and with gold. It could be said that shit points two ways: towards enjoyment, and towards its sacrifice. In the "Three Essays on Sexuality" Freud writes, "One of the clearest signs of subsequent eccentricity or nervousness is to be seen when a baby obstinately refuses to empty his bowels when he is put on the pot – that is, when his nurse wants him to – and holds back that function till he himself chooses to exercise it. He is naturally not concerned with dirtying the bed, he is only anxious not to miss the subsidiary pleasure attached to defecating." Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), Vol.8, 186. And in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis": "The handing over of faeces for the sake of (out of love for) some one else becomes a prototype of castration; it is the first occasion upon which an individual parts with a piece of his own body in order to gain the favour of some other person whom he loves" (Freud, SE , Vol.17, 84). The complexity of the articulation of shit and sacrifice in relation to *jouissance* in Lacan is discussed in Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 56-105, in a chapter entitled "You *Should* Give a Shit!" Against the standard account of sacrifice associated with Lacanian psychoanalysis ("the subject does not offer his sacrifice to profit from it himself, but to fill in the lack *in the Other*, to sustain the appearance of the Other's omnipotence or, at least, consistency" p.70), Žižek suggests that sacrifice is staged to conceal from the Other's gaze the subject's possession of the object of *jouissance* (p.72). Therefore, "sacrifice and castration are to be opposed: far from involving the voluntary acceptance of castration, sacrifice is the most refined way of disavowing it, i.e. of acting as if one effectively possessed the hidden treasure that made me an object worthy of love..." (p.73). The interest of this for us is that it provides a critique of the model of sacrifice from *within* psychoanalysis: "for Lacan," Žižek writes, "the ultimate aim of psychoanalysis is not to enable the subject to assume the necessary sacrifice (to "accept symbolic castration"...), but to resist the terrible attraction of sacrifice – attraction which, of course, is none other than that of the superego. Sacrifice is ultimately the gesture by means of which we aim at compensating the guilt imposed by the impossible super-ego injunction..." (p.74). However, for Žižek this still seems to be for the sake of sacrifice, so long as the sacrifice is "for nothing," a renunciation not out of guilt in relation to the super-ego but for the "paradoxical *jouissance*" that "characterizes the movement of the drive as that which finds satisfaction in circulating around the object and repeatedly missing it" (p.78).