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THE RELATIONALITY OF RESEARCH-CREATION AT THE END
OF EPISTEME: A SCATTERING OF BEGINNINGS WITH
EXCURSUSES FOR DISSENT

JONATHAN LAHEY DRONSFIELD

The beginnings that follow are not to be read linearly or causally, as if one leads into or is led into by another, nor as if one follows on from the other, not even additively, as if they can be brought together to form a unified whole. Instead they are to be read as beginnings again, each time differently, as if for the first time. Each begins in its own way. This does not mean that there are not repetitions from part to part. Each of these beginnings is itself about beginning. They are beginnings of the same thing, namely of how to begin to think about relation, to think with relation, and to think relationally. The relations of the human being to things, of human beings to art, of human beings to themselves as selves and as others, of art's relation to human beings, and of human beings to the more than human. Relationality has no origin; indeed, origin is something that relationality puts into question: relations proceed from, or begin with, division. Thus it is difficult to speak of relation between things, between parts, in the singular. The relation between the beginnings is as important as what each of them states. I do not say what those relations are or might be. Nor do I offer anything like a definition of research-creation. To my mind, it would be unhelpful to do so, and counter-productive. Instead, I offer some notes towards thinking what the relation between research and creation might be. These notes towards I have termed "beginnings" because before anything else they are attempts to clear the ground from different direc-

tions. Hence I take on certain basic claims made about research-creation which relate it to knowledge and knowledge-formation (in particular the work of Erin Manning), and begin to develop ideas about relationality that assist in doing so. It is the privileging of knowledge in conceptions of research-creation that I seek to put into question. As such, these beginnings can be taken as propaedeutic for re-thinking research-creation at the end of episteme, again and again.

BEGINNING ONE.

Before anything else the human being is a response, responding to being addressed in being-with-others, responding in language to how it is from the start interpellated as a subject by language. Responsivity is something we carry out in language before grasping our own I that speaks. That responding voice is pre-personal. We are in relation to others before we are one. Before having a relation to ourselves in the first person, we are responding to others. Before grasping ourselves as a subject we are being subjected to. Grasping oneself as a subject necessitates being displaced from the manifold ways in which we are being spoken. Modernity has privileged the I, the “first person,” as the beginning, the primary linguistic form. But if we understand the I as a response, then that to which it responds precedes it, namely the appellative, the giving of a subject position, the “you.” Grasping oneself as a subject entails, in an important way, retreating from or saying no to the form of address that is “you.” To begin to use the word “I” is to put oneself together from out of how one has already been spoken.

As subjects we are constantly relating to ourselves. But for the most part this is relating without relation, for we barely stop to question what this relation is. An unmediated relation to ourselves is something we assume in speaking, it is something that all philosophies of the subject assume, and even those philosophies

“Wouldn’t we like to know” responds Eric Cazdyn, when he asks “What is happening there?”, there in the blindspot created by his camera machine installed in a public park, four cameras shooting at 90° intervals rotating to-

which seek to deconstruct subjectivity take it as given in some way. How we relate to ourselves forms our identity, even if our self-relating is decided outside of us, be it by parents, family, peer groups, culture, society, ideology, religion, capitalism, social media, and history, in short by language. (I would also add by mental health, for mental health issues can affect us without our knowing it, as if from the outside.)

Coming to see how we have been subjectivised and determined as subjects historically, culturally, and socially is not a matter of self-knowledge. It is not the Socratic question of “know thyself,” not if it presupposes a self to be known or grasped as something knowable, nor a telos of self-knowledge or wisdom to be attained with any finality. Rather it is an ongoing process of awareness, where the self is the site for this becoming. It is self-creation, self-formation, the production of new relations to self, relations which are not reducible to or usefully describable as knowledge, neither in the sense of “self-knowledge,” nor in a theoretical sense.

The space “between” ourselves and what dictates or projects or assumes our relation to ourselves is foreclosed, covered over, repressed, or denied. Some might want to call this

gether on the same automated head of a single tripod (“The non-coincidence of the future”). He is voicing over his film *The Blindspot of Participation* (2013). I think we ask other things, and are invited to do so by the work, not about what we do not know, but about what we see. The gaps created by the film are, for me, not blind spots. What interests me about this work is not the blindspot, nor what we cannot see, or what the camera machine does not show us, but how what we do see is disjointed as a whole, creating spaces for us to see the park otherwise than how we have seen it before, allowing ordinary things to be seen newly, showing us that the whole contains within it the unseen or the differently seen or the co-seen or the seen at the same time or the same thing seen from different angles at different times or at the same time. If the “perfect sex” and the revolution being plotted take place there is it not in the blindspot but in the relation the four quadrants of the screen have to each other and to us and to the people in the park displaced from themselves and the actors staged by Cazdyn to perform. One of

alienation. I do not, not if alienation presupposes a givenness of self outside of all these things interpellating us as subjects, nor if it assumes an authentic self prior to them which is somehow distorted. There is neither a pre-given pre-formed self nor an authentic one. Others might want to say we are being reified as things rather than subjects. I do not, because reification retains positivity as a possible way of resisting how we are interpellated as a subject, insofar as we can make ourselves things or style ourselves as things—an obstacle, a question, a demand, a performance—to stand in the way of our interpellation, proposing alternatives.

The I is relational to oneself in that it is the process of retrieving or forming a self from its pre-personal relationality. This does not mean negating that pre-personal I. The process of self-formation is an ongoing one. One's self is continually being covered over or lost or habituated into or made comfortable with the everyday, the impersonal. The pre-personal becomes over time the impersonal and over time and in an ongoing way it is from or with the impersonal that one's I must be re-formed. The self is continually being repressed into a given impersonal, by patriarchy, by political ideologies, by theocracy, by authoritarianism. Art is a primary and ongoing way that human beings put these mechanisms in question and deconstruct them.

Grasping oneself as an I out of the ways in which we have been determined by our relations to others in our personal and cultural histories is to grasp how one may become an I.

those relations is the blindspot, but there are many others. It is not that the individual is “swallowed up” by the blindspot, it is that the individual is comprised of the different relations this work creates, and that there is always something to come from the individual, the individual is always becoming, including their appearances and disappearances. And if Cazdyn desires to see one day that film which he says the blindspot is, the film of perfect sex and utopic revolution, it is because he has already seen it, there in the film he has made, as an impossible desired political outcome.

The advent of mobile video technology in the late-1960s enabled

It is something that involves and necessitates our ongoing unquestioning self-relating being interrupted. It is in the space of interruption that another relation to ourselves emerges, offering possibilities of relating otherwise to the relations which are given or imposed. Art is one way, a primary way, in which relations to oneself can be undone and re-formed, tried out, experimented with, and allowed to emerge. Art can suspend or pause the flow of our responsivity, our unquestioning responding, allowing us to question and think the responding being we always already are, can make explicit the implicitness of our responsivity, offering it back to us in order that we de-appropriate ourselves from our positioning and interpellation in language, and re-appropriate possibility by language. Art can disarrange the relations at work in the flow of language by which we are spoken. Art can allow us to see how we are interpellated as subjects, can show us the workings of those things I have just mentioned which position us or project onto us or speak us, and how we as subjects are interpellating others, positioning others and projecting upon them a subjectivity not of their making or choosing. Art is not a way of knowing ourselves. Neither artworks, nor our selves, are first and foremost objects of knowledge; art is a way of changing ourselves, of giving form to ourselves differently. The relations to ourselves to be gained through art works may be describable not in epistemic terms, but

artists, in particular women artists—Joan Jonas, Lynda Benglis, Eleanor Antin, Carolee Schneemann, Hermine Freed, Nancy Holt, Valie Export, Shigeko Kubota, Marina Abramović—to stage relations to the self which interrupted and put into question the way women were interpellated as subjects, as embodied subjects, as subjects with bodies subjected to the male gaze or to patriarchy, to the extent that for at least a decade thereafter the body became the material of art making. Many of these works involve the voice put to work in processual ways. Many utilise the mirror to perform relations to self, to the face, to voice. It is no accident that much early video art was made in the privacy of the artist's studio, for it is where the artist can stage relations to self, to her body, and between her body and the camera impossible elsewhere.

processual ones. Art is one of the primary processes of the production of possibilities of self.

BEGINNING TWO.

We need to accord relation a primacy it lacks in philosophies of the subject. Relation needs to be understood less as that which connects autonomous selves, and more as something which itself has a certain autonomy. Relation as the between, but a between which is not reducible to the subjects and objects it relates. The between is not a relational concept in the sense that the essential part of its theoretical function is accomplished by putting distinct and substantial things into relation with one another. Instead, the between is something which itself has to be understood as something with its own reality. The between is a relation which intervenes and displaces things from their givenness and their identity and even their substantiality.

The relational is to begin with two, not one. On the one hand, “We must set out from the idea that an ‘autonomous’ between exists.” So Peter Sloterdijk (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 151). If there is an autonomous between, then those things which it is between no longer assume priority, either with respect to the relation between them, or to each other. On the other hand, “‘being-a-pair’ precedes all encounters [...] the number two, or the dyad, appears as the absolute figure.” So, again, Sloterdijk (“Against Gravity” 28). Being-a-pair, being-two, is inclusive of the relation between them. It is the relation between them which confers on the two its singularity.

Artists have always been at the forefront of how technology can be used to intervene in the ways in which human beings, and not just human beings, are positioned as subjects. For instance, in Iran, the car has functioned for decades as a form of mobile studio technology for artist-filmmakers to stage, under conditions of extreme censorship, relations of the body and its formation and presentation, relations between persons, relations between ideas, especially as these impact upon women or are performed by women, otherwise unshowable due to censor-

A relational pair is not “one plus one,” for that would be to begin with one. We begin with two, not one. We are first in relation, before we are one. Sloterdijk argues that being a pair “precedes all encounters.” He absolutises the pair, and sets out how the pair precedes all encounters in his theory of spheres. We will not follow him there. To absolutise the pair will take us away from relation, for it implies or presupposes that the pair is in itself unconditioned or without relation. Instead, we focus on the precedence of the pair and the relation, over what, on the face of it, the relation connects: two single units, two autonomies, two substances. We are interested less in establishing the pair as itself a separate thing, and more in how we begin in relation, and how the pair is itself connected. Sloterdijk asserts that making relation primary comes “at the expense of” substance. This implies that relation is hierarchised over substance, or that a de-hierarchisation happens, such that the existence of relation is considered the equal of that which it relates. If what we are after is a fluid ontology, a socialised ontology, an ontology that does justice to how we are socially formed, then the beginning number is two, “an ontology of minimal plurality” (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 151).

ship, for instance in the work of Jafar Panahi, *Taxi* (2015) with the human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, and *3 Faces* (2018) with the actress Behnaz Jafari; Panah Panahi, *Hit the Road* (2021) with the actress Pantea Panahiha; and Abbas Kiarostami, *Ten* (2002) with artists Mania Akbari and Amina Maher. However, it must be noted that Akbari and Maher have raised serious questions about *Ten* regarding authorship and consent. Nonetheless, the film explicitly addresses gender discrimination in Iran, for which it was banned. All these “car films” address the patriarchal and misogynistic policing and control of the female body, and they do so by unloosing the bounds of suppression, by ironising or mocking repressive subjectification of women (and often therefore of men in relation to them), and through performing creative self-formation or self-transformation, and by revealing conditions of change. Totalitarian regimes seek to subjugate the female through blocking the processual movement from an impersonal “I” (a “they”) to a becoming-I in self-formation. It is precisely *self-formation* that is denied

Indeed, it may be better to say that such an ontology begins with at least two. The two has its own interior space, the relational between, and this between is spatial. This between is dense, it is intense. It resonates, there is resonance between, a resonance which denies priority to the one or the other in relation. The task is to think this between, to find the right vocabulary to articulate relation, primarily the autonomy of the relation between two, and to move away from presupposing the primacy of one understood as an autonomous individual embodied as thing-like substance. In short, to think two over one, autonomy of relation over autonomy of individual, relation over substance, accident over essence, and situatedness, connectedness and context over sovereignty, the solitary, and the unconditioned. Art as research-creation

helps us in the task of thinking the two over one; indeed, it would be impossible to think this minimal plural ontology without art.

women and girls in theocracies. Theocratic and politically ideological totalitarianisms deny authorship of self to the female subject; she is prevented from becoming the author of her own self-forming actions. Authoritarianisms of this sort seek to impose both authority over and authorship onto the female body, making it responsible in ways only it deems licit and legitimate. In saying “no” to the censorship, the repression, the misogyny, all of which has been inherited by anyone under the age of 45 in Iran, artists and filmmakers are seeking to negate the pernicious effects of theocratic totalitarianism, and in doing so are constituting themselves as subjects.

BEGINNING THREE.

If we accept that one is in relation before there is such a thing as oneself as a subject, an individual, then should individuality be seen as derivative, because itself a response? This has implications for the concept of responsibility. The responsibility of the pre-personal I must be understood as response, and becoming responsible for oneself becomes taking responsibility for how one has always already responded in becoming a subject. We might say that our always already responding makes us responsible. But this pre-formed

responsibility is not the responsibility of a fully-formed I, as we say, it is the responsibility of an interpellated subject; it may be of the person, yet it is pre-personal. Responsibility is to be retrieved or rescued from the ways we are always already responding. Not that the I is ever fully-formed; I am emphasising that the I is formed after the fact of its having always already been interpellated as an I. Responsibility comes after responsivity, and to be fully responsible involves accepting this. But this always already responding— is it already an affirmation? Is it a “yes” as Jacques Derrida argues, and “responsible without autonomy” (“Eating Well” 100)? I hesitate to answer yes to this. If it is an affirmation then it is one which precedes the distinction between affirmation and negation. Becoming responsible entails accepting that one has always been a responding being, and therefore responsible, even before one has become a responsible “I,” and becoming responsible in this way involves saying no, saying no to how we have been positioned, determined, interpellated, already spoken, and made to respond. Only in saying no do we begin to appropriate ourselves as a being which becomes responsible and which can lay claim to the first person singular I. Only by retrieving ourselves as an I from how we are being spoken by others, by the language of being-with-others, can we become the I that we are. This is constitutive negation. Constitutive negation is at the beginning of the emergence of “I.” Saying no, resisting, leaving, is at the beginning of saying “I,” withdrawal is essential to becoming fully formed. There is a certain violence to it, for it is in an important sense a questioning how we are always already in relation. But at the same time, the saying no, the refusal, the leaving, would not be possible without relation, without being-in-relation with others.

There is one other implication of individuality which must be considered. Individuality implies an atomistic self in a neutral or empty space. But we can think individuality as a relation one makes with others, or as that which is joined with others. If the self is relational then it is divid-

Irani Bag ([کيف ایرانی]) by Maryam Tafakory, winner of this year’s Film London Jarman prize, is a split-screen video essay from 2020 inquiring into relational possibilities for undercutting censorship

ed by its relations, and its unity as a self is not the absence or negation of relations but the way in which relations are gathered or grouped, and how these groups or sets of relations move through the world and interact with other sets of relations one might have with others. Unity of self, then, could be understood to be a direction or a movement, or a repetition of relations or certain sets of them, across different contexts and concrete situations. When, in language, we address others we do so as these different sets of relations, we can deliver or offer or force particular relations or sets of them to or upon other people. This makes of our subjectivity something multiple rather than individual. Responsibility, individual responsibility, if it is one thing, is nonetheless something divided and itself relational. The feeling of responsibility then becomes a question of whether and if so how one keeps these relations together as a meaningful unity.

BEGINNING FOUR.

To begin with Erin Manning's first proposition in "Ten Propositions for Research-Creation," to say that research-creation "proposes new forms of knowledge, many of which are not intelligible within current understandings

of intimacy and the female touch. Working with scenes from Iranian films made under conditions of drastic censorship between 1989 and 2018, the work analyses the way the bag, "a simple prop," functions in them, how it becomes a character in them, something like a silent go-between, a sensuous mediator, a material operator of desire, a dispositif channeling affective intensity and intensifying flows of desire. All of these are relational possibilities revealed through a focus on "historical gaps, unspoken prohibitions and purposefully concealed queer stories" (Tafakory interview 2024). In *Irani Bag* it is the prohibition of touch which forms the motive for Tafakory's breaking open the relation between the visible and the sayable, driven by the conviction that censorship "can never get rid of" the thing it prohibits. It may try to remove it from sight, but the research-creation of Tafakory shows how it can be brought back evermore movingly, evermore affectively, evermore creatively. *Irani Bag* shows the possibilities for art to intervene not just in discourses about censorship but as a performative challenge to it, un-

of what knowledge might look like” appears to be contradictory, for where does the authority to lay claim, in the present moment, here and now, to its being knowledge come from? Better to stay with the more hesitant sentence that comes next: “new forms of knowledge [...] may have no means of evaluation within current disciplinary models” (133, my emphasis). Notwithstanding, is Manning saying that there is a

dercutting it, materialising its innocent everyday objects differently such that they become part of the body forbidden from touching and from being touched, to the extent that without such dispositifs scenes of non-touching are revealed as the monstrous acts of repression they are.

reality to the artwork behind its appearance, which will one day become known? Does she want to say that our “current understandings of knowledge” are inadequate to art and the ways art shows us how things really are? Or is she saying that there may come a time when this or that instance of research-creation will be re-describable in the future, more useful or more relatable, according to our needs and purposes at that time? If it is the latter then I do not have a problem with that. The problem lies in the former, the idea that research-creation is granted the status, here and now, as knowledge, without our being able to relate to it, or that there is something intrinsic or essential to it that is (currently) non-relational. If it is “unintelligible” then we cannot come up with anything useful to say about it, we cannot find the words with which to allow it to participate in self-formation or encourage its use in societal transformation. If we can relate to it then we can describe that relation, and that relation may or may not be useful or usable in processes of self-formation or societal transformation—or indeed re-evaluation of disciplinary models.

The archive is an important medium for research-creation. By intervening in archives, producing and staging relations between their elements and between archives, research-creation invites us to read them again, indeed obliges us to do so, for what they may have covered over or made invisible. This is what is proposed by Kvet Nguyen’s *(Un)official History: The Limits of Our Pain*, her winning submission to this year’s Novum competition in Slovakia (for which I

was one of the judges). Nguyen compares institutional archives with community archives, the centralised with the diasporic, the public with the private, the official with the personal, and by confronting one archive with another shows how one can reveal what is hidden or denied by the other. She disjoins elements in one archive by relating that archive to another, creating space for new relations in the cultural memory. The Vietnamese were Czechoslovakia's first official non-European minority. Its presence was intended to be temporary, but when it persisted over time it became characterised as "leftover." Bringing archives of the presence of the Vietnamese into an encounter with one another, Nguyen traces the emergence of the concept of race in communist Czechoslovakia. Nguyen calls her practice fictional documentary; it is to do one discipline through another, again confronting one with another. She repeats archival stories in the form of a fiction, giving space to those voices missing in the state archives, not visible in the subdued surfaces of its photographs, allowing a young Vietnamese girl to emerge from a newspaper photograph, the first such photograph in Czechoslovakia, to become the subject of her own story, drawing out the potential in today's Slovakia for decolonising central European culture. The work is as much educational as it is activist, and to be both requires it to be non-dogmatic. Rather than tell us what to think it must create a space for thinking which otherwise would not exist. Nguyen insists that to achieve this it is not enough to approach the matter epistemically, in terms of facts and knowledge. Instead, she works with emotions to produce an affective document. "Communist memory in reality is a way of not remembering," asserts Jorge Semprún, the great scriptwriter, "it is not a historical memory, a memory that bears witness, but an ideological memory" (*The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez* 182). Nguyen's work speaks to the imperative of what Semprún says is the only way of perpetuating memory in the face of its censoring by communist memory: to fictionalise reality ("The Art of Fiction"), something research-creation is exceptionally good at.

Contemporary research-creators seek to allow themselves as much space as possible in response to questions as to what their practice or their discipline is. Increasingly at the level of research-creation, if

artists do a discipline, then they do it through another, they practice one discipline through another. And with good reason. They do not want to be pushed into a corner. Instead they un-build the corner, and construct different possibilities of answering, by bringing into question what a discipline is. These possibilities will, they hope, and perhaps even argue, be useful to some people.

According to Manning, research-creation “generates forms of knowledge that are extra-linguistic” (“Ten Propositions” 133). I disagree. The knowledge produced by research-creation, by art as research, by art, is neither extra-linguistic nor non-linguistic, and for the most part not usefully describable in terms of knowledge. Rather than think in terms of knowledge and how a work might relate to the order of knowledge, it might make more sense to speak of meaning, for instance, and how this or that artwork creates meaning, and might mean something, or not. Or, if it is a matter of knowledge, then it is knowledge which is not knowable outside of a creative relational approach to it. Knowledge is always partial, and it is becoming. What this means is that artworks which approach a subject matter in terms of knowledge propose their own criteria for thinking about that subject matter. They provide both the way of approach, and the criteria for judging that approach. Research-creation does not propose forms of knowledge which are outside of language or beyond language. It proposes relations between things, often new relations, which is what language does. Art proposes new forms of language with which to relate things. Or does Manning want to say that there is some non-linguistic relation we can have to something which is intrinsic to art? Placing things in different contexts makes them thinkable differently. When something becomes thinkable differently, it becomes describable differently. If all thinking is, as I believe, a re-thinking, then all thinking is re-describing. If all feeling is a relation, to ourselves, to others, to things in the world, to something about the world, to historical events or “facts,” then that feeling is describable. The affective relations that artists and research-creators set up and try out and propose are not outside of language, they are not new feelings for which we do not yet have the words. They are proposi-

tions for new ways of relating to what we feel, new meanings to our feelings.

The vocabulary of “not intelligible” and “extra-linguistic” is unhelpful for discoursing research-creation. It is perhaps consequent of an emphasis on knowledge production and force-fitting the evaluation of art practices according to discipline-specific criteria derived from a time when, for example, there was not such a thing as a PhD in art. The relational forms of art and research-creation are not presented as knowledge, instead they are proposed as useful, or usable, or workable, and these may not necessarily be realisable in the present. Art works as relational forms are relational in a twofold sense: they set their elements into relation, and they are perceived from relational perspectives. There is nothing *intrinsically* knowable about them, it is not as if they await the discovery of their knowledge, it is a question of how we relate to them, and they to us, whether they can be related by us to something else, or whether they show us ways of relating. Art both takes advantage of, and radically expands, the relational contexts into which things can be put; art can produce the purposes to which things can be put; art can show us how things placed in different contexts can respond to our needs, for instance our political needs, and our desires, for instance our desire for freedom, freedom from suffering and repression, freedom for expression and movement and association, freedom for self-formation.

If something is knowable then we can describe it, we can set it into relation with other things. If it is a relation we have to the thing then we can describe that relation. If we cannot find the right words for such descriptions then that is a matter of time and cooperation and beginning again. Relationality is repetition. Descriptions of relation are themselves relational.

EXCURSUS

For her film *Landscapes of Resistance*, Marta Popivoda did the research “on the spot.” “We did the research,” she says, “and talked to people and visited the places... Artistic research on the spot” (2023). What does it mean to do “artistic research on the

spot”? It means to create at the very spot where the research is carried out. The film is an essay on a woman named Sonja, now 97 years of age, “one of the first women who joined the partisan resistance movement in Yugoslavia.” What the director seeks to do with this film is give space to Sonja’s story, the space to feel and think about what Sonja is feeling and what this means for the viewer. This involves producing what Popivoda calls verbal images, described as “scenes of memory,” scenes in which places are re-discovered, and what traces remain within them unearthed, and entails not just representing places and landscapes, but intervening in them, creating an opening in them for a different relation to them. For instance, by superimposing a drawing onto a forest. To intervene into landscape in this way is to de-naturalise it. It is to open another kind of space in that landscape where other aspects of it, memories held by it or meanings concealed by it, can be heard or seen. What makes the images of the film verbal is that the voices of people who once lived there or fought there, or died for that place, or are buried there, can be allowed to be heard and be seen. Verbal images, then, are images which allow words to emerge from such places, or which give space to the production of words within the images, words produced by the characters not shown, by the characters shown, and by those watching the images. I would also say that such work allows words to be found, or assists us in finding them, or inventing them, words which otherwise might be lacking, in any case words which we might not have had until then, to make sense of the events referred to. If Popivoda says her work is “artistic research on the spot,” it is because it works open a space for questioning there where it is made. It does not tell us what to think, but invites us to think, and to come up with words for what it is we think. Part of what is to be thought is our relation to historical time, mediated through testimony and witnessing, in this case the living testimony of a now 97-year old woman of her participation in the resistance when she was a young girl. Yet Popivoda’s film is not just the coming to the surface of a voice until now not heard or listened to, it is a visual relation to the “before” of historical time excavated through the “after” layerings of socio-cultural change in what a woman’s voice is and

how it might be listened to. Verbal images which do this work facilitate the becoming of a voice.

Popivoda's film is a work informed by theories of the image—for instance the image as stratigraphic or archaeological, or what it is to make images speak of resistance, or what would it be for a landscape to speak—and which is seeking to find new kinds of image with which to address issues of contemporary relevance, in material underpinned by, or rather weighed down by, so much foundation, so much historical significance and contestation. It treads a path between providing facts about past events and offering a renewing perspective on them and a different description of the reality of these events, between making claims about reality in terms of the facts about past events and an attempt to find just as valid a way of describing past events, especially if the already existing descriptions of these are considered set in stone or epistemically exhausted or already real enough. The real contribution works such as these make should not to be measured simply or even primarily epistemically in terms of the reality of historical fact, to which they nonetheless do make a contribution, but in the way in which they propose their own criteria for thinking about the past. They provide both the way

The archive is an important medium for research-creation. By intervening in archives, producing and staging relations between their elements and between archives, research-creation invites us to read them again, indeed obliges us to do so, for what they may have covered over or made invisible. This is what is proposed by Kvet Nguyen's *(Un)official History: The Limits of Our Pain*, her winning submission to this year's Novum competition in Slovakia (for which I was one of the judges). Nguyen compares institutional archives with community archives, the centralised with the diasporic, the public with the private, the official with the personal, and by confronting one archive with another shows how one can reveal what is hidden or denied by the other. She disjoins elements in one archive by relating that archive to another, creating space for new relations in the cultural memory. The Vietnamese were Czechoslovakia's first official non-European minority. Its presence was intended to be temporary, but when it persisted over

of approach, and the criteria for judging that approach. *Landscapes of Resistance* tries to create the way in which its relation to the past is to be judged, introducing a degree of diversity into history's accounts, in this case a woman's voice as authority over its representation, not allowing history as it is written to dictate to art how history should be shown and made, and it makes a work such as this a democratic work. This is not simply another opinion appearing on the scene, this is voice tearing through the fabric of words, allowing us to know otherwise.

Through its use of verbal images *Landscapes of Resistance* de-naturalises the landscape; this is to advocate for the argument that nature is itself a construct, something made. It is a kind of artistic research—or research-creation—which accepts that reality is only ever becoming, never fully known and real outside of humankind's creative relational approach to it. In this way, such artworks are always research “on the spot.” Reality can never be known completely, and artworks can both expose that fact, and enrich reality, giving us a more complete picture of it, or a better picture, a more informed one, or a more meaningful one, or more useful, one which might contest certain hegemonies of

time it became characterised as “leftover.” Bringing archives of the presence of the Vietnamese into an encounter with one another, Nguyen traces the emergence of the concept of race in communist Czechoslovakia. Nguyen calls her practice fictional documentary; it is to do one discipline through another, again confronting one with another. She repeats archival stories in the form of a fiction, giving space to those voices missing in the state archives, not visible in the subdued surfaces of its photographs, allowing a young Vietnamese girl to emerge from a newspaper photograph, the first such photograph in Czechoslovakia, to become the subject of her own story, drawing out the potential in today's Slovakia for decolonising central European culture. The work is as much educational as it is activist, and to be both requires it to be non-dogmatic. Rather than tell us what to think it must create a space for thinking which otherwise would not exist. Nguyen insists that to achieve this it is not enough to approach the matter epistemically, in terms of facts and knowledge. Instead, she works with emotions

representation, without implying that plenitude or completeness is possible. We can only ever know reality, historical reality, the reality of place, partially. And the form which art gives that approach repeats and is itself the process of the becoming of reality. If art seems to show something other than the reality of that place, or disjoins us from that reality, then this is how the reality of that place *already* is.

BEGINNING FIVE.

What makes art political? Let's start with something that Brian Massumi says in "The Thinking Feeling of What Happens," a conversation begun with someone else, then made into a semblance of itself by Massumi continuing the conversation with his interlocutor as his, Massumi's, fiction— a form to be appreciated in the present context as it makes explicit the relationality of singular subject positions, and presents a possibility of relational discourse and a possibility of discourse on relationality. What makes art political, he says, is that

to produce an affective document. "Communist memory in reality is a way of not remembering," asserts Jorge Semprún, the great scriptwriter, "it is not a historical memory, a memory that bears witness, but an ideological memory" (*The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez* 182). Nguyen's work speaks to the imperative of what Semprún says is the only way of perpetuating memory in the face of its censoring by communist memory: to fictionalise reality ("The Art of Fiction"), something research-creation is exceptionally good at.

"It can push further to the indeterminate but relationally potentialized fringes of existing situations, beyond the limits of current framings or regulatory principles. Aesthetic politics is an exploratory politics of invention, unbound, unsubordinated to external finalities. It is the suspensive aspect of it that gives it this freedom [...] Artistic practices that explicitly attempt to be political often fail at it, because they construe being political as having political content, when what really counts is the dynamic form." ("The Thinking Feeling of What Happens" 14)

Neither overt political content nor reference to external political or social questions makes art political. What makes art political is the way it opens still further the gaps between its elements, the between of its constituent parts. If the form of art is the relation between its parts then how it makes those relations more dynamic will create a space for the political and as the political. Art can take an existing situation, which need not in itself be a political situation, and open it up in such a way that one is displaced from it and back into it in the same moment of experiencing it. In finding oneself there, one can see the situation differently, be given a perspective on it, unlike we might have were we viewing that situation “in real.” Art’s inventive-ness is the way it can unbind everyday relations that things have, or suspend them, or even negate them, to potentialise and dynamise the situation. By pulling things back from everyday usage and disjoining them from conventional situatedness or withholding them from external finality art can make them available or offer them up for new ways of living and new forms of life, dynamised and suspended by the new ways in which the elements are put together: new possibilities of relation, new ways of orientation in the world. This is responsive to and creative of the world’s complexity. Peter Sloterdijk remarks on the paucity of means for situating ourselves with respect to this complexity:

“What is missing is an art of thought that serves as an orientation in a world of complexity. What is missing is a logic with enough power and versatility to accommodate complexity, indeterminacy, and immersion. If we want this logic, we must change the reading list.” (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 350)

But research-creators are changing the reading list all the time. The art of thought of the researcher-creator consists in precisely this. The sense in which Sloterdijk is right in saying that such an art of thought is “missing” is that it is forever needed. The relational forms that art works are are never fixed, never final. Art must again and again re-relate things. Art’s history is strangely cumulative. Unlike science, the developments of art do not build upon the advancements of art before it, the experiments of art do not refute or prove or cor-

roborate the findings of other experimenters. Research-creation is not “a contribution to knowledge” in this sense, the requirement that practice-based PhDs are ostensibly measured against. “Contribution to knowledge” is a symptom of the rules for their submission being an inheritance from the natural sciences. No, art is a making-indeterminate. The more art makes things become indeterminate in themselves, the more those things attain a potential for re-ordering and re-presenting and re-orientating. Rather than new forms of knowledge, art strives for new ways of speaking, a language with which to respond to the world, for new relations between the world’s elements art has loosened and undone. Art opens up the space for new ways of speaking, new relational vocabularies, by making things dissensual, both with respect to each other, and with respect to themselves. Art is dissensus at the end of episteme.

BEGINNING SIX.

The call for papers for this volume begins with an epigraph, an excerpt from the “proof” of Thesis 8 of Jacques Rancière’s “Ten Theses on the Political”:

“Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself.” (Corcoran translation 38)

There is an earlier translation of Rancière’s “Ten Theses,” in which the above second sentence reads: “It is the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself” (Bowlby and Panagia translation, unpagged). Taking both translations together, we can read them as saying a difference the sensible has with respect to itself. Thesis 8 is as follows:

“The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one.” (*Dissensus* 37)

Note how in the “proof” of the thesis, Rancière defines the political subject as plural: “the people, the workers, the citizens” (*Dissensus* 37). The task of politics is to create a space for the appearing of such subjects. The creation of such space is a re-figuring. The re- is a beginning again, it is a retrieval of space from its governance and rule by vested interests and powers, or by encultured habit, such as to allow for the appearing of plural subjects, the subjects of politics. The subject of politics is plural: communitarian, participative, relational. In getting them to be seen, the spaces of those who constitute these plural subjects needs to be re-qualified, again the re-, retrieved from how they have been kept unseen and unheard. The re-figuring, re-qualification of space as political consists in making space for the voices of the plural subject yet to be heard, not the “noise” they make under suppression but their articulated political speech. This is not the speech of a pre-constituted subject, but the speech of a becoming-subject; such speech is not heard in a pre-given space of political discourse, it is heard in a space which is constructed, which is made, which is *re-made*, re-made amidst those who normally do not see it, who cannot see it, who perhaps refuse to see it, or who do not want to see it. It is the construction of a space in a space which normally or usually or even legally is not given recognition. Hence Rancière’s saying that it is the putting together “two separate worlds” (*Dissensus* 39). There is no naturally-occurring space of the political. The space of the political has to be made in a world which forbids it, resists it, ignores it, or has no use for it. It has to be brought into existence. It is brought into existence by, in Rancière’s terms, partitioning the sensible world in which it is to be seen and heard, creating a gap in that world, making a difference in the sensible of that world.

In our terms, the political is the retrieval of something of the world from itself, making it different from itself, setting that world into a new relation it has to itself. The one is made up of two, or at least two. As Rancière puts it in Thesis 8, “two worlds in one,” where the one is internally divided, divided from itself yet remaining one. We can say it thus: for the world to become one, to become a truly political world, it must begin with the two, or begin again with the two, begin again as if for the first time. The process of doing so is called

dissensus. Rancière nowhere discusses either knowledge or episteme in his “Ten Theses” setting out the work of dissensus.

BEGINNING SEVEN.

Art can participate in dissensus. Art can make a thing different from itself, it can show a thing’s difference from itself. In that difference does politics take place. Art can re-mark the space internal to the one, the space of the two that the political is. It can point to it, and it can itself make it. Art can re-distribute the world, the sensible of the world, such that a space of the political can be seen, can be prepared, can be proposed, and can be conceived. This is a co-conceiving. It is not a question of knowledge or knowledge-formation. Or rather, if it is a question of knowledge, if the matter of knowledge is to be relevant here, it would be the making of a gap in knowledge, in the knowledges that re-enforce the space in which the political is unseen or forbidden, it would be to bring about a distance in the knowledges that enforce the suppression of voices, a distance from these knowledges themselves, one might even say from knowledge itself, given the primacy that knowledge has assumed in the suppression of peoples and repression of genders.

For Brian Massumi art is political because it pushes “further to the indeterminate but relationally potentialized fringes of existing situations, beyond the limits of current framings or regulatory principles” (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 14). Art achieves this through the dynamism of its form, as he puts it. For Jacques Rancière, art is political because it allows to emerge the dissensus of “two worlds in one” (*Dissensus* 37). At first glance it might look as though Rancière and Massumi are going in opposite directions, Rancière inward in creating two worlds in one, Massumi outward to the fringes of the one and perhaps even beyond. But there is no opposition here. Creating a gap in the sensible, revealing the “two worlds in one,” can be achieved by exerting force, perhaps even an explosive force, one that brings about a plastic difference rather than an elastic one, changing the borders, internal as well as external. The space of the political, as a space made within a world that would otherwise not

want it or actively seek to repress it, is a precarious space, continually at risk of being covered over again or negated, and always being made more difficult to bring about. Witness the constant action of the law constricting the right to protest. The more plastic the force that challenges this, the more resilient will be the change. With this comes the risk that the law will push back ever more violently.

What art can do, and does do, is constantly remark the precarity of the political, by partitioning the sensible again and again, allowing order to be confronted by dissent. The necessity of repetition is part of the reason why the term “knowledge-formation” is in my view not appropriate. The task of partitioning the sensible is without end, in the sense of never having a point at which it is no longer necessary, and without end in the sense of never being allowed to reduce to a particular political ideology or a desired final political outcome. Nor is it the case that we can *know* how to make art dissensual. Making the world different to itself will entail remaking art again and again, each time differently, in response to the closing down of the space for dissent. Not only is there no final know-how in art, there is no finality to its forms. Know-how is plural and in need constantly of renewing, responsive to the materialities of need and desire consequent of being-with-others as much as to the material worked with. No form is fixed or even stable, because it tends towards making indeterminate the material it works with, in the name of the re-determination of the relations internal to it and the relations it participates in. If form is dissensual, which it must be if it is to be political, then it is constantly in need of responding in turn to how the law seeks to constrain the space of protest.

Art is relational in that the viewer is in a lived relation with art’s form. Form capacitates the body, artworks participate in the dynamic unfolding of life, the event of art is constitutive of affective life. Art interrupts the interpellation of the subject. Art interrupts the unquestioning relations we have to ourselves, art participates in becoming-I, it potentialises the voice. Massumi is right to say that art “brings back out” the fact that form is always dynamic form (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 7). Where I disagree with Massumi is in his emphasis on art’s immediacy, whether that be presen-

tational or affective. The event of art cannot be reduced to the experience of it in the present moment. Part of that dynamism is what Massumi calls art's "self-abstraction," the way in which it withholds something about itself, retains a difference to itself (10). The creative self-abstraction of artworks is another reason to question the value of immediacy. Art's self-abstraction is part of the process by which art can bring about a difference of the sensible with respect to itself.

BEGINNING EIGHT.

If we enjoy or gain meaning from a work of art it is not because we have somehow gained knowledge of it as if of an object, it is because we have been taken out of ourselves as a subject, we have been related to that work and found ourselves in relation to it. This is a relation to our self, but it is not reducible to the self, for it involves a relation to the work. In being drawn out of ourselves by the work, a space is created in which to think. Thinking begins in this space. This is when we become I, when art takes us out of ourselves, the self presumed or interpellated in language or covered over in the everyday, and returns us back to ourselves, a self being realised as an I, one which we can lay claim to as our "own," each time as if for the first time, with each experience of art each time again as a renewed I. This is the case whether the art work be a painting on the wall, or an installation in which we are being asked to participate. With the latter kind of work it is not that there are more relations to be had with it or are performed or staged within it than with or in a painting, it is that there are different relations; but the way the space for thinking is created in participatory works is no different to how it occurs in relation to paintings. What of formless works, or works which have no discernible form? There is no reason why a conceptual work—take Lawrence Weiner's "Statement of Intent": "The piece need not be built"—cannot take us out of ourselves, towards an experiencing of the effects of the work, the work's words, towards how we feel ourselves affected in ourselves in wondering what it would be for there being no "need" for the work to take the form of an object, opening up relations to ourselves in which to think, being made to think by the relations the work produces, even in its not being re-

alised—but the statement “the piece need not be built” is a realisation—being made to feel powerless, or its opposite, finding ourselves with a power to articulate feelings or experiences not had hitherto, in the absence or withholding or negation of the rule of the object.

Art is relational in that form is in relation to concept, including the non-form proposed by the “need not be built.” Art works open the gap between form and concept, easing form away from subsumption by the concept, away from objectivity, away from knowledge. Yet it is not a question of completely disjoining form from concept, nor of maximally distancing one from the other; it is, rather, the creation of a space between them. The separation is reversible; a route back to the concept is retained or suggested, held open in some way, or the rules for re-relating form to concept is held in visibility, which can be achieved by language, that is linguistic form, as much as by visible form. But this route back is not to the same, not to the concept definitionally fixed. The concepts of object and form have been changed by the kinds of statements formulated by Weiner and Sol Lewitt and Joseph Kosuth and *Art & Language*. The concept will change, or will have changed, or may one day change, through form, the concept itself is re-figured through the work of the form of art and our relation to it, including the non-realised form of “need not be built.” This is the historicity of concepts and how they develop over time, in which art plays a leading role.

Distancing is a matter of dissonance, and it is a question of dissent. The more dissonant form is from concept the more it dissents by provoking the understanding. And the more it asks of the understanding, the more we respond by thinking the work that the artwork is doing. The more an artwork makes dissensual the relation between things, or the relation something has to itself, the more one is obliged to come to a decision about it, or go along with the speculation or proposition, or not go along with it, to stay with it awhile, to allow it to unsettle you or to question you, or not.

Distance is achieved by disarranging the sensible of the world, partitioning it (Rancière), making assemblages of it (Manning), re-giving it form and making formations (Massumi), and in creating distance

between parts or elements art sets them in new relation. For Massumi, as new possibilities of world these relations are virtual: “There is really no such thing as fixed form – which is another way of saying that the object of vision is virtual” (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 7). It is a virtuality which is not in opposition to reality, because virtuality is lived. Massumi sometimes adverts to the term “actual-virtual configurations” to point to the ways in which each work bears a different distribution of potentials (18). The hesitation is in part due to the causality that actuality tends to bring with it. Causality would be at the expense of creativity:

“It is only because relation is virtual that there is any freedom or creativity in the world. If formations were in actual causal connection, how they effectively connect would be completely determined. They might interact, but they would not creatively relate. There would be no gap in the chain of connection for anything new to emerge from and pass contagiously across. There’d be no margin of creative indeterminacy.” (23)

But at the same time it’s the sensible world that is intervened in and re-made different to itself, the one sensible world shown to be constituted of two worlds in relation. It is in the “gaps” created by the distancing of the sensible that “reality” is to be found (26). Setting the world into new relations with itself demands new conceptualisations of it and new vocabularies of sharing, putting not just the world’s knowledge of itself into question but knowledge as such, its value and its status, and its relation to the knowing subject. This is the knowing subject on the way to its deconstruction.

If art is relational in its re-conceiving relation, then re-conception is co-conception. Relationality demands a re-thinking of thinking, where thinking is no longer the possession of the sovereign subject, no longer the heroic work of the autonomous individual. “In participation-in-situation, things look completely different” (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 349). Peter Sloterdijk is right. In a world of participative relations rather than appellative ones, the endeavour of coming up with a language for shared situations is itself shared, a grammar of collaboration is a grammar collaboratively arrived at. Autonomy is

of the between. “The main project of the aesthetic politics I’m talking about would be to rethink autonomy in qualitatively relational terms” (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 26). Brian Massumi is right. Autonomy is relational. “What is at stake is the shift in the idea of autonomy, as it is linked to that of heteronomy” (“The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes” 136). Jacques Rancière is right, autonomy is heteronomously constituted, right at its origin. The I becomes a speaking subject by grasping that the first person singular is a function of the two, born of being in relation to another, and of occupying the shared space between, including the space internal to oneself formed by being in relation to others. Language is relational, and our vocabularies of self are always already shared and not the property of one.

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