

Haptic Performativity: Exploring the Force of Bodies and the Limits of  
Linguistic Action in Silent Protests

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Bachelor of Arts (with Honours), University of Exeter, England 2020

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We acknowledge and respect the lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the  
university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose  
historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Supervisory Committee

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## Abstract:

This thesis engages with the tension between political action and political speech in political understanding. This tension arises in a context whereby speech is represented as the *sine qua non* of being political *and* the way to change the conditions of being political; specifically, this thesis explores this tendency within a *linguistic* account of performative action (where action is understood *through/as* language effects). Against this backdrop, the thesis develops a notion of haptic performativity—performative action where the action (or doing) occurs without or *in spite of* linguistic (de)legitimation. Here, haptic performativity begins answering how marginalised populations act politically when defined by a lack of voice. To develop this notion—centering forms of action that occur *in absentia* of linguistic legitimation—the thesis: 1) reveals the disjunctive relation between deeds and speech with linguistic Performative Speech Act (PSA) theory; argues that 2) PSA theory reveals the inability for speech to convey the full force of bodily deeds within/through language; and, thereby, explores 3) how bodies or actors defined by a lack of social standing (or linguistic efficiency as a subject) remain politically impactful. Thus, while linguistic performativity gestures to the assembling power of speech (the power of already assembled subjects), conversely, haptic performativity testifies to the disassembling force of bodies who revolt *without* speech (the force of actors who are yet to be subjects). The thesis ends by bringing this haptic perspective into a contemporary context: the place of the body in the Black radical tradition of thought and the force of silent protests in the Black Lives Matter Movement.

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## Dedication:

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Introduction: Haptic Performativity: Exploring the Force of Bodies and the  
Limits of Linguistic Action in Silent forms of Protest

My thesis seeks to engage with a central knot of political understanding: the tension between political action and political speech. The following introduction will set the stage for: the contemporary relevance of this issue; the broader historical debate that surrounds the topic within political theory; the dominant problem with present understanding; the individual contention of the present thesis; the implications of its argument, and finally; the structure of the following chapters.

I Broad issue: Those Without Voice – Mute Potentiality

The issue of speech and action within political community is brought to the fore due to its relevance to a much broader and more contemporary phenomenon: the potential of marginalised political subjects to participate in, and alter the existing reality of, political communities. In the wake of movements advocating for speech and speaking as *the* way to address exclusion/marginalisation alongside the prevalence of stateless and marginalised subjects *within* political orders, the question of how one best alters the conditions of one's existence—the community of which one is part—becomes pressing. In this context, we have movements that are mobilised on behalf of the silenced or those rendered illegible by the violence of the present. Instances of this abound, both historically and in the present, made especially visible by the following: the rise and swathe of populists who claim to answer the question of who speaks for the silent majority (Follert, 2021; Lassiter, 2011); the protests undertaken by the #MeToo Movement, which expose the costs of silencing while also making space and supporting women to speak out against said silencing (Notably, in 2017 TIME magazine's person of the year were “the silence breakers” of #MeToo) (Lau & Zuo, 2017; Zacharek et al., 2017); protests that “break” or “shatter” the imposed silence on refugee and

asylum-seeking populations (University of Notre Dame, 2015); or, the actions taken by Extinction Rebellion, which mobilise around the need “end the silence on climate change [...] end the silence on animal extinction [...] end the silence on suffering unheard”(XR, 2019).

Further, and more specifically, one can point to, at the broadest level, the wash of parties, movements, organisations, and actors that seek to jostle for, and indeed, use, speech as the way of being political *and* the way to *change* the conditions of being political. Whether the protests are undertaken on behalf of, or by the exploited, what remains a focal point of these mobilisations is the emphasis on the need for subjects (human, or otherwise) to speak, and therefore act as political beings through this medium of voice, that is to say, act politically through linguistic participation. Yet, alongside the causes that rally against silence through forms of speaking, equally there are initiatives whereby: people within the XR movement “play dead” or march silently so as to “fuse” art with politics (see , especially, the red robed protest and “invisible circus”) (Benjamin, 2019; Invisible Circus, 2017; Yahoo, 2021); within the #MeToo movement there is a call for letting “silence have a voice” (Backe, 2018); in the context of refugee and asylum seeking populations there is the deliberate use of lip sewing and silent protest as a form of political activism (Bargu, 2017; BBC, 2015). How then, on the one hand, do we reckon with the need to break, or speak up about, silence, and, on other, make sense of how silence becomes a part of rebellion or group activism?

It is at this juncture that this thesis seeks to stake its intervention: just as the obviousness of the need for the marginalised to be emancipated from the subordinating conditions of their existence becomes visible and globally diffuse as a political issue, the question that motivates this thesis returns: how can the marginalised act politically when they are denied voice or are

defined by being silenced?<sup>1</sup> As the caucus of protest on behalf of the oppressed rise into a cacophony of calls clamouring for the need to give voice, what other possibilities exist for marginalised, excluded, and exploited subjects who are defined by *not* having a voice that can be politically efficacious or effective—whose very political status *is* this voiceless reality? Just as it becomes important to give voice and space to subjects robbed of and denied voice and, therefore, political standing, the major concern of this is: how fully can political community, and the world of speech it promises, meet the political demands to include and emancipate the exploited? More accurately, this is a concern with the ability of politics, as it is presently organised, to fully overcome the conditions of exploitation that gave rise to the stateless subject, the voiceless actor, and the faceless figure that presently haunt the contemporary political landscape and social imaginary.

In light of the above, this thesis inserts itself into a moment in which the need for the voice of the exploited needs to be heard more than ever. Yet, the question of the alternative means by which exploited and marginalised subjects can be heard, become politically relevant, and, indeed, change the conditions of their existence remains unasked and under-conceptualised: this is to the point where the notion of acting *without* speech is, in most accounts, not only apolitical but anti-political.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, it is this thesis's contention that this is due to the

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<sup>1</sup> As will become clear throughout the thesis the emphasis is not on a lack of voice as a total state; indeed, as will be seen in Chapters I and IV, the notion of completely lacking any voice would be as impossible to imagine as a body lacking any social definition (Butler, Chapter I), or a body that is completely beyond narrative (Walcott, Chapter IV). For our present purposes, voice, within the context of performative speech act theory, denotes a criterion of articulation (authorship) and communicability (expressability) to be effective; voice in this linguistically performative frame is intimately connected to being recognised as speaker, a full political subject, and secondly, an ability to communicate with others. Here, the point of explicating this perspective on voice, is to show how the attention PSA theory gives to performative speech requires that the voice of the speaker has conventional authority (so as to be felicitous/effective)—that is speech, that does something—and that this doing can be communicated to others (so as to be expressible). What this focus does, most obviously, is obscure the possibility of understanding how people do things without being authoritative (lacking conventional authority) or can do something without it being communicated in speech.

<sup>2</sup> The prescience of this point becomes most apparent when one considers the weight and value given to speech and the dearth of political potentiality that exists when thinking through silent action as a *form of* politics; see chapter one, for a more specific evocation of this point.

historic, and ongoing, privileging of speech as the ground(s) by which political community becomes formed.

Significantly—and before we delve into the theoretical backdrop and reasoning for this privileging—the concern that dogs present movements for emancipation, which ground their liberatory claims on the promise of speech, is that such valorisation side-steps the more pressing and timeless issue of how subjects who are denied a public voice act politically. Thus, while a lack of political voice usually acts as sign of political oppression, the corollary—the potential of acting *without* or despite the lack of a voice—remains an anathema for dominant accounts of how the exploited can and do act politically *in absentia* of their own voice. In other words, the present emphasis on the significance of spoken words, as being that which carries the individual into political subjecthood, radically de-emphasises the significance of subjects who, *ipso facto*, have no voice and yet *remain politically operative and significant* despite (or because of) this alleged lack.

## II – Theoretical Context: Subjects Who Speak – Deeds, Words and Mute

### Subjects

Against the backdrop of the common-sense response to give voice to the exploited, the more precise theoretical issue that is spoken to in this moment is the relation between political subjects who speak, and political subjects who are defined by their lack of speech, that is, their mute bodily existence. As the empirical manifestation of this point—the confrontation between the haves and the have-nots—becomes painfully obvious, the theoretical counterpart of this issue becomes increasingly acute: namely, what is the relation between deeds and words in politics? Such an abstract formation is not as removed from the élan of the present as it appears, for what we are facing is how to understand the political existence of those who, in present terms, exist outside of politics, beyond the common world of human sociality. Against this

perspective on what politics is—an activity defined by the exchange of words—the more obvious theoretical conundrum is precisely in what manner are the actions of subjects who lack speech politically relevant? How can politics beyond, or without, speech be understood? What possibility for being politically active is there for those who are thrown beyond the pale of words (and therefore, allegedly, human sociality)? In this we have one half of the dominant tendency: to see politics as an activity that occurs *in* words first and foremost. From this perspective—where politics is essentially occupied with how words do things in the world—the other half of the dominant tendency results in us continually coming-up against political subjects who do not yet have political standing in words (whose words do not *yet* do things politically).

Conventionally, the response to this issue—of understanding subjects who do not *yet* have political standing—has been, as this thesis will show, to double-down on speech as *the* means by which politics becomes possible, that is, to posit speaking, and the possibility of speech, as action (or the authority that makes political action possible). The present moment in this respect attests to two trends that can be seen within political theory: 1) the predominance of speech as the way by which one *is* or *becomes* political (speech as being the *sine qua non* of political mobilisation) and 2) the inadequacy of speech alone to be that which conveys and carries over (translate) the grievances of the body politic (in its varying forms).<sup>3</sup> In the face of this, this

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<sup>3</sup> In relevance to point one, one can turn to Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the *vita activa* in *The Human Condition* (see Chapter I); in relevance to the second point, one can also turn to Rancière whose understanding of politics revolves around the repetition of grievances, see *The Shores of Politics* (see ‘Chapter III’). More broadly, in terms of relevant works beyond this thesis: for the first point, see the work of Habermas, or more broadly work that attends to political power/potential as synonymous with communication/communicative power, see Flynn, Bohmann, and Ferguson as illustrative of this tendency (the latter of which is articulating the negative side-effects of this tendency) (J. Bohman, 2010; Ferguson, 2003; Flynn, 2004; Habermas, 2018). With regards to the second point, see the article by Vieira et al. for a perspective on how the turn to communication/voice fails to address the grievances that emanate from the political community (or how the turn to communication may not actually address the grievance held by political subjects) (Vieira et al., 2019a). Specifically, see Rollo’s article, where he talks of a “linguistic ontology of politics which presupposes that norm-bound communities are constituted through language- use”, the problem is that “the privileging of voice as the primary solution

thesis thus seeks to understand: 1) how speech has attained supremacy in being the conductor or medium of all things political; and 2) how this diminishes or forecloses other avenues by which exploited, marginalised or excluded political beings can participate and change their political world.<sup>4</sup> Understanding these above points is with the purpose of more clearly grappling with the historic primacy given to speech within political theorising which has resulted in the proposition that it is by giving speech that one is given the potential to be politically active— this is, indeed, ironically, an unspoken assumption (such that speech and politics may as well, effectively, be synonyms). As such, this thesis finds its academic focus with recent thinkers who are researching the relation between silence and political agency and seek to make known a wider tendency of political theorising, that of logocentrism regarding the politics of speech (Ferguson, 2003; Jungkunz, 2012; Rollo, 2017; Vieira et al., 2019a; Vieira, 2021). This “logocentrism” refers to the process of how change occurs and has resulted in a privilege accorded to voice in accounts of how politics operates and how one acts politically (Vieira, 2021). Significantly, it is contended that this historical privileging results in a poverty of understanding when considering what precisely is at stake politically thinking of action without speech and the antecedent politics it brings. Specifically, the thesis seeks to spell out this broader tradition within the context of the more specific work done by theorists on Performative Speech Act (PSA) theory, theorists such as Butler, Fisher, Lawy, Tulke, and Fleetwood among others (Arlander et al., 2017, n. see for a compilation of theorising on performances and performatives-see especially chapter 12; Butler, 1988, 1997, 2011, 2015a;

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to the problem of domination promotes ongoing deliberation that often defers or abjures action on urgent issues. In this regard, the voice model of silence and agency is seen to offer an insufficiently critical depiction of both agency and institutions, one that is in tension with a robustly effective, inclusive and legitimate democratic politics” (Vieira et al., 2019a, pp. 436–437)

<sup>4</sup> Significantly, this latter point is not meant to stand as a novel interpretation that explains how change is occurring or has occurred beyond speech; more accurately, it seeks to underline the truth that many movements conducted by oppressed, subordinated, or marginalised subjects, are so significant precisely because key aspects of these movements and actions occur at the behest of action before speech is even a possibility.

Fisher, 2017; Fleetwood, 2011; Glass & Rose-Redwood, 2014; Lawy, 2017; Lyon, 2015; Tulke, 2021).<sup>5</sup> This academic context is chosen as it best exemplifies the effort to situate language as the (prime) actor of politics, as the way by which political change comes about, and represents, as will be seen in the first chapter, the closest attempt to parse out speech's ability to transform and alter political reality. In this regard, PSA theory represents the vanguard of wider efforts that seek to explain why speech has this special place while also continuing to justify its centrality when considering how the oppressed can alter the political community of which they are part.

### III Theoretical Genotext– Speech without Action

Before situating the central argument of the thesis, I first spell out the issue that PSA theory faces when facing actors defined by a lack of voice. By showing the inability of PSA theory to reckon with the political significance of voiceless actors (or actors that we cannot hear as having a voice) we will therefore be being understanding how voiceless actors can do things with words when performative forms of speaking are absent. Specifically, PSA theory focuses its interest on performative utterances, instances of speech that do not just describe reality but alter it. While this formula has its roots in the work of J.L. Austin, it finds its modern-day relevance from Judith Butler's recent work, 'Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly' (Austin, 1975a; Austin & Warnock, 1962, 1970; 2015a). Here, for Butler, "performativity is a way of naming a power language has to bring about a new situation or to

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<sup>5</sup> In brief, PSA theory emphasises the "illocutionary force" of speech; this force is the ability of speech to actually do something; the full discussion and nuance of this notion is provided in Chapter I. For the context of this chapter, what is significant is what will come to be termed the linguistic account of PSA. Within this framing, PSA theory is occupied within emphasising the power of speech acts in a way that the "illocutionary force" of speech depends on diminishing the significance of non-uttered actions to speech (actions that come to be known as ritual-ceremonial and exist in the periphery of speech's doing). It is within this context—whereby PSA is conventionally occupied with how speech does things—that this thesis seeks to radicalise the converse political potential: how acts that are unaccompanied by words do things other than what speech says. Going forward, performative speech (PS), herein refers to speech that acts performatively (does something through illocutionary force).

set into motion a set of effects” (2015a, p. 28). Butler confines her analysis to how performative speech allows political action; the paradigmatic point being that it is through speech that one is, and one can continue to be, political. Significantly, and these are the issues which set the context of discussion for the first chapter, this thesis contends that PSA: 1) overlooks populations *defined by* a lack of voice or ability to speak, and; 2) over-emphasises how weightless speech is as a means of conveying the demands of the exploited.<sup>6</sup> To this second point, this is concerning precisely because it is the liberatory potential of speech that is over-emphasised while its disciplining and, indeed, arresting aspects are diminished. In short, while notionally PSA speaks to (literally) the liberatory potential of speech as the means to participate politically, this thesis contends that this takes for granted the arresting possibilities that are coeval with speaking itself. This, more specifically, results in the devaluation of the liberatory possibilities that are coeval with action *bereft* of speech; this point will be seen in Chapter IV when we cover the significance of ‘silent’ protests undertaken by the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM).<sup>7</sup>

This is one side of the concern—the potentially less than liberatory aspect of a valuation of speech as the *sine qua non* of being political, and its weightless configuration within contemporary accounts of political emancipation-cum-participation; the other side is in making space for understanding forms of political action that occur *in absentia* of performatively felicitous ways of doing or speaking. Attending to this latter concern—understanding the possibility of being political and acting politically when one lacks a voice—is not to imply that

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of weightless theory is developed by Lois McNay; for her a lot of recent radical democratic theory is weightless theory in so far as it underemphasises the constraints that exploited actors face (indeed, this could be the grievance others have vis-à-vis the potential of communication alone to be the solution to political problems). As such, at the broadest level, weightlessness refers to a tendency to abstraction that, this thesis contends, is equivalent to the attempts of theorists to rid speech of the material weight with which it exists (2012, 2014); for a counter argument against this charge, see Henderson (2017)

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 9 for justification for this study selection alongside pages 10-11.

the insights of PSA theory are completely irrelevant to understanding how political change is possible. Critically, this thesis will argue that conventional accounts of what makes performative speech liberatory are limited because the emphasis on the value of speech occurs at the cost of subjects who remain without speech. More precisely, PSA theory understands the disjunctive relation between action and speech as one that is conjunctive; this is an assumption that leads theorists to acknowledge and welcome in distinct modalities of being political yet subordinate these alternatives to speech. The notions of conjunctive and disjunctive will become clearer later on but, in essence, the authority of speech in the PSA necessitates the subordination of non-uttered action to speech—where action is significant to speech, it is only so at a distance, as being secondary to the *act* of speaking. Significantly, it is this thesis's wager that this situation within the PSA—the relation of action to speech within it—is expressive of the relation of marginalised, and voiceless, political subjects to constituted political subjects and orders. Critically then, present accounts of PSA emphasise the value of speech at the cost of the significance of action to speech (and, more broadly, the emphasis on the value of speech for the marginalised does not attempt to face the broader of issue of how the voiceless, nonetheless, exist politically).<sup>8</sup> In this regard, while PSA seeks to demonstrate how speaking is coeval with acting in politics, this thesis seeks to develop the possibility and potential of political action without speech.

#### IV Phenotext — Action Without Speech and Haptic performativity: Acting,

##### Postscript

In the context of this theoretical milieu—the primacy given to speech as the means of mobilising politically and the under-theorisation of how one can be political beyond this

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<sup>8</sup> In 'Chapter I', this point will be articulated in the following terms: PSA's seek to account for speech as homogenous in effect (occurring beyond the mute world of the body and its actions) but, what PSA theory actually reveals is the heterogeneity of speech, that is to say, the necessity of actions, and the mute politics they bring, to speech.

ecosystem of words—this thesis will seek to innovate a form of what will be called *haptic performativity*. This term is deployed in contrast to the dominant understanding of performative speech, *linguistic performativity*, which primarily occupies itself with the verbal force of language and the effects that this has on political bodies, subjects and communities. In this, while conventionally PSA is exemplary in the attention it gives to the power of verbal language to alter, order, and change reality, this project seeks to develop the semantic importance of bodily performance(s) to (or in the absence of) speech. Specifically, the thesis seeks to do so via the analysis of instances of ‘silent protest’ undertaken by the BLM movement (the subject matter of Chapter IV).<sup>9</sup>

To be clear, this case is chosen by an author who does not face the violence that black people are forced to endure in the American context or more broadly. As such, it is necessary to note my position in relation to this movement, the motivations and limits of my analysis, and the purpose of my intervention within the context of BLM. Notably, as a white, British, student who is not from the continent of North America but is still implicated in the racial structures of violence that provide the context of these struggles, I am at once removed but also related to the present struggle. Thus, this attempt to do justice to the political legitimacy and force of the protests of BLM is not simply to avoid the charge that silence is violence. Rather, I am seeking to think through the stakes of the violence immanent not only within silence but also the violence of speaking for others. This specific concern is therefore one that relates to the

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<sup>9</sup> The Silent Protests of the BLM were chosen because of the context of the group’s founding (see Chapter IV for greater detail); namely, the fact that what has sparked the group’s formation, and recent activism, is the continuation of anti-Black policing practices in the United States and more broadly. More specifically, the movement has become more recently synonymous with the last utterance of George Floyd: ‘I can’t breathe’. In the face of this—the suffocation of Black people by state authorities, and, equally, the call to speak out against said injustice—why is there a withholding of breath in demonstration against the denial of breath, how do we figure the use of silence in the context of suffocation? BLM was chosen in this sense because the use of silent protest *against* silencing presents a relevant viewpoint to encourage thought about how silent acts do things without words (or indeed, how one can do things by refusing words in public).

role privileged subjects have in supporting the movements of exploited peoples as well as the dangers of doing so despite well-meaning intentions (obscuring and delimiting the radicality of their demands and the full extent of their grievances). In reference to this last point—the dangers of one being overbearing in one’s analysis of others to such an extent that those one makes space for become spoken for—I would like to be explicit about my purpose in this political context.

The purpose herein is thus not to contribute to the cacophony of voices that may speak over those who are protesting, but to think through how our voices may well take away from the political force of what these movements are achieving or trying to achieve. In seeking to pay respect to, and be conscious of, the fine line between speaking with and speaking for, the choice of the BLM movement is because this thesis is asking for others to resist the urge to narrate the struggles of others by making known the dangers that inhere in this attempt to *give* agency or voice to others who allegedly lack it. It is for this reason, as will be seen towards the end of the thesis, that the choice of this movement is to make known, ironically, the danger of speaking for the political lives and existence of others. As such, this thesis is not just an attempt to simply make known the political energy immanent within the movement (underlining the already existing agency that we witness). Rather its aim is to make known different forms of action that can support exploited people by giving them space to speak. It is with the naïve hope that by making space for those whose voice is denied in the present (by well or ill meaning people) that we can learn and understand the structures of violence that caused such exploitation or inequality in the first instance. This paradoxical intervention—speaking about the BLM movement so as to make space for others to speak—is the limit of what this thesis intends to do. As such, the thesis is in no way trying to provide a definitive narration or definition of what the black movement towards freedom is, nor is it an attempt to smother the voices of those

within the movement. It is rather asking us to withhold our speech so as to make space for those others who have, as of yet, not been heard nor respected as equals within society.

Moving on from this statement and underlining the importance of silent protests we are to come back to the theoretical thread. As such, where a speech act refers to the verbal importance that speech has to action, instances of ‘silent protest’ lead us toward seeing the converse as important: namely, how bodily action makes speech acts meaningful and thus expresses a form of *haptic* performativity. That is to say, it demonstrates the significance that action has to speech, and therefore, the importance of giving those as of yet unheard people a space to talk or act in another way. In this manner, if a lot of ink has been spilled over the question of the subaltern’s possibility of speaking (the ability for excluded subjects to come into the fold through speech), my project has a different focus: how can the subaltern act within political communities despite being denied their place in the realm of speech, that is to say, the realm of legible political subjectivity or formal figuration (Spivak, 1988)?<sup>10</sup>

The reason for this shift—from speech to mute bodily action—is that, for a PSA to be efficacious, that is, to alter reality, it must make explicit *what is already being done*. Significantly, the promise of performative speech specifically, and speech more generally, is that it can alter reality; yet, necessarily, PSAs, and speech more generally, remain wedded to the previous regime of authority. In this manner, the action of speech is retroactive and relies on conventional legitimacy. This, as Chapter I will show, results in PSA’s being liberatory to the degree that action conforms to the convention of speech (and thereby, becomes synonymous with speaking); what makes *haptic performativity* a generative way to move

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<sup>10</sup> In this manner, while Spivak’s concern is with how subjects speak with their body when denied linguistic representation—or, the possibilities we have to hear those others whose forms of speech are submerged by conventional modes of understanding—this project is not so much concerned with the possibility of enunciation in the case of silence but the second implicit concern within Spivak’s work: the possibility of action, mobilisation and resistance, beyond the terms of linguistic community (or, translating across, the possibility political participation despite linguistic exclusion).

beyond this impasse, is the fact that it helps articulate/demonstrate how non-uttered acts have performative force precisely in the absence of previously sanctioned, or legislated, linguistic felicity. What was the blind spot of previous accounts (the (im)possibility of action without speech) thereby becomes the basis for how one can and does act politically in the absence of pre-existing political standing. Hereby, what is generative in thinking of performativity in haptic or bodily terms is precisely the very fact that, even when not being a speaking subject, one's body, and the haptic politics its actions bring, has political effect despite the lack of speech or formal political presence.<sup>11</sup> The implication that gets worked through in Chapter I—and which stands as the guiding point of this thesis—is that through PSA theory we get the insight that bodily actions can be politically forceful, and thus significant, even in the lack of a previously existing community or conventional authority. It is this latter point that makes understanding haptic performativity pressing. It demonstrates how subjects who have no voice or standing in political community can, and do, alter and change its reality without being ushered into speech, that is, they can act politically *before* coming to speak of their political community. To make possible this haptic reading—wherein the status of the non-uttered has to be clarified *and then* put into a political vocabulary—the chapters of the thesis provide a milieu of linguistic accounts of the power/force of language (how it does things) in conjunction with a parallel reading of putting this doing into a political vocabulary or theoretical perspective (how this doing relates to political community). It is for this reason that, in Chapter I, Austin is read alongside with Arendt and Butler, or that, in Chapter II, Derrida, Felman and Lyotard lead into a more obviously political discussion with Nancy and Rancière in Chapter III.

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<sup>11</sup> In other words, the criteria that one must speak, have a voice that is recognised, in order to be political is removed; in removing the criterion, it is hoped that a wider space whereby the brute fact of action can be seen to have been politically significant, not only to speech, but in its own right.

## V – Chapter Break Down

### Chapter I: How to do Things With Acts: on Political Acts in Worlds of Speech

Chapter I will begin by unpicking the contents of PSA: It will do so through a close exegetical reading of Austin, Arendt and Butler so as to expose the wider tension between speech and action within political community and thus, the tension between speaking subjects and acting bodies (the tension that is the present issue we see reflected within contemporary political movements). The chapter turns to these thinkers for the following reasons: 1) Austin heralded what comes to be understood as PSA theory; 2) the interior logic of Arendt's argument gives clarity to the wider tendency of other Arendtian and non-Arendtian theorising to value speech to the denigration of understanding the distinct political sociality of action itself; and 3) Butler helps put Austin's linguistic insights and Arendt's political tongue into dialogue with the issue of how the exploited—or those who have no voice—can participate by acting *without* speech. The chapter aims to set the stage of the issue of perceiving of PSA's as homogenous; this homogeneity is the notion that, in the PSA, it is actually speech that is acting. It is through revealing the heterogeneity internal to performative speaking—the disjunction of action within speech—that this thesis will open up the limits of the linguistic account of performativity and situate the potentiality of a haptically performative account of political action. By coming to the edge of Butler's attempt to sketch an account of haptic performativity—limited in so far as she replicates the tendency to value bodily action *as a form of* speech or semiotic entity rather than understand how the body acts even in the absence of a speakable presence—the chapter will note that the emphasis of the liberatory potential of speech forecloses and censors the possibilities of political action beyond speakable discourse, that is, action stripped of words (Vieira, 2021, p. 289).

In coming to this point, the chapter will gesture to the flipside of what PSA theory reveals, the possibility of action in the absence of there being a speaking subject/having a political voice. In doing so, the chapter will achieve two things through its invocation of a notion of haptic performativity: 1) making evident how actions are performative even in the absence of speech and 2) situating the centrality of the *body*—its actions, the rituals and ceremonies surrounding it—as the key means and locus by which the possibility for exploited populations to act politically in the absence of speech can be rethought. This latter point will be the beginning of Chapter II’s concern, namely: how can the body be politically effective if it is not a figured subject or symbolically present in language? How can the body be political if it is not spoken of (or, at least, circulated linguistically)?

## Chapter II: The Unconventional Force of the Body in the Space of Communication

Picking up from the ending of Chapter I, the second chapter will give space to answer: what does the body do if it does something other than what speech acts say? Here, if Chapter I covered the issues internal to the linguistic account of PSA, Chapter II will, therefore, attend to how bodies exceed what speech does and act in ways other than what speech intends. To do this, the chapter will turn to Derrida and Felman to situate the centrality of intention (Derrida) and failure (Felman) as elements that are internal to, and central for, the possibility of performative speech. By doing so, this chapter will show that what a linguistic account of speech acts reveals is: 1) how speech is excessive (does things in excess of itself); and, 2) how acts unaccompanied by, and divorced from, words affect language and the meaning of political communication. By charting this inability of speech to mean exactly what it intends, and therefore its capacity to fail to do something, we come to Lyotard, who allows us to understand that language is met by a twofold inability: 1) to be constitutive of the political subject and 2) to contain the force of the body within its own terms. These insights will enable us to see that

language is structured by a paradox of promised failure: that is, the power of language to do something with words is dependent on bodily acts that exceed it. The crux of the chapter is thus occupied with demonstrating how linguistically performative forms of speaking are unable to figure or represent how silent acts can be impactful and forceful beyond language, that is, be meaningful beyond the terms of “language effects”. By demonstrating how the paradox of language’s promised failure—its inability to inscribe the body’s totality (failing to reduce its excess)—opens language to other meanings, the chapter sets up the implied concern of chapter III. That is, if the power of language comes through assembling bodies *within* words, how do we give space for the force of bodies (those things that exceeds language’s intention) to do things *without* words.

### Chapter III: Signification, Gravitas and Bodily Disorder in Communication—

#### Undoing the Narrative of Assembled Community

In having exposed the disjunction internal to the PSA (Chapter I), and how the body exceeds speech (Chapter II), the concern of the third Chapter is thus: how does the force of the body become felt in words? In seeking to give sense to the force of bodies that—without words or linguistic felicity—still do things without words this chapter turns to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Rancière. If the second chapter charts the point that the body exceeds performative speech, the purpose of this chapter is to understand *how* the body, bereft of words, nonetheless moves. Nancy is turned to as his thematic of weight/gravity allows us to make sense of the body that is forceful and impactful in politics before words have been written (or before the utterance of it has been spoken). In this, whereas previously most theorising attempts to figure the presence of the body after it has been written about or spoken of, this chapter articulates how the weight of the masses is not an after-effect of writing or speech’s doing, but those things which impress upon us *before* words. Through this we see a limit in previous theorising, which tries to attest to the force of the body in the terms of what it articulates in

speech. This limit, as we will see through the work of Rancière, happens through a logic of articulatory enclosure. This chapter, thereby, will demonstrate that what actually makes speech act (or PSA felicitous) is that it assembles into a form of narrative (enclosing the force of bodies within it through articulation). To reinforce this, the chapter ends with the point that the force of the body is felt in resistance or revolt against this performative assembling of words that do things *with* bodies. Having established that the power of language or linguistically performative forms of speaking comes through assembling bodies, and that the force of the body becomes felt or sensed in disassembling this narrative, we come to the concern of the final chapter: how does the body, then, haptically do something political?

#### Chapter IV: Black Lives Matter and the Body's Movement Within Forms of Silent Protest

In answer to the above question, the thesis ends by putting its theoretical insights within the context of the BLM movement so as to demonstrate how action occurs before there is a written text or significant imprint. Doing so allows us to expose how haptic performances open the existing narrative to the possibility of a dialogue about words or language itself. Thus, if Chapter III clarified how the force of the body does things with words, Chapter IV's concern is with making clear how this "doing" has a political effect in making possible a space of dialogue about what words do. This chapter thus directly, and most concretely, engages with our starting question: how can the marginalised act politically when denied voice? To answer this, the chapter provides a haptic reading of the body in the history of Black theorising; doing so allows the chapter to demonstrate how, in this tradition, the body occupies a paradoxical place politically. This paradox's significance is that words assemble around bodies but what words actually testify to is how bodies express a political life beyond what is said of them. Understanding the body in this way is with the purpose of comprehending how the political force of the body within this theorising is in its capacity to stand against those authoritative

narratives and structures of spoken discourse. This point becomes grounded theoretically by showing how the body revolts against its narrated place within the archive and, ultimately, something that exceeds its confinement. In a more empirical and contemporary vein, we will then see how the body stands against words through silent forms of protest within the context of the BLM movement. This demonstration will allow us to see how a linguistic account of PSA misreads the political effect of silence in these moments (reading it as a rhetorical effect/use of speaking); this will allow us to glimpse, through a haptic account of performativity, that these protests are politically forceful because they expose us to that which exists beyond the grasp of language and thereby that which makes dialogue *about* language possible.

### Implications: The Haptic Beginnings of Politics

The wider purpose of pointing out how a linguistic account of performativity misses the haptic and political force of these protests is to bring us back to where we started. Namely, if the conundrum that lay at the root of this investigation was the tendency to represent speech as the way of being political and the way to change the conditions of being political, the thesis ends by making space for the opposite: demonstrating how action without speech can be the *sine qua non* of being political *and* the way to change the conditions of being political. In this sense, the wider points raised by Chapter IV and the conclusion circle around demonstrating this point, namely how those subjects whose speech is ineffective or infelicitous can still effect meaningful change. It is through the silent forms of protest enacted by the BLM movement that we see how bodies can act without words, and push us toward a new mode of relation beyond the present genre or definition of what the human is, and, therefore, what politics means for subjects (especially for those who are yet to be given a voice that does things). The fourth chapter thus, necessarily, pushes the body to a context wherein it has, without words, the capacity to change the meaning of words themselves and therefore brings us to the importance

thinking of politics haptically, so as to attend to 1) how language holds bodies—and the deeds they do—captive and; 2) how bodies, through silent forms of protest, open language in a new way. It is in this fashion that the rest of this thesis attests to how the movement of bodies opens up new spaces of political dialogue and new forms of political participation that, as of writing, are unspeakable.

## Chapter I: How to do Things With Acts: on Political Acts in Worlds of Speech

I cannot unlearn a proposition [...] if I never learned it as a proposition—that is, if I learned it, not in the form of hypothesis that could be proved or disproved, but as part of a world-picture that I inherited and on the basis of which I judge, that is, *act*—*Zerilli 1998, p. 452 (emphasis added)*

How can I speak a language without knowing I can? – *Harry Potter, The Chamber of Secrets*

### Introduction:

To begin unearthing the possibilities of political action beyond the pale of words I will expose the tension between speech and action within political community. This tension is one that has its clearest expression in accounts of performative speech acts (PSA) as elaborated on by Austin, and brought into the contemporary, political, fold by Judith Butler. To clarify why political communities are unable to fully, linguistically, meet the political demands to include and emancipate the exploited through the power of speech alone, we will be turning to Butler because of her acute interest in the performative potential of speech, and Arendt because of her trenchant advocacy of (spoken) action as the *sine qua non* of politics. Critically, it is by following these thinkers—who, it will be argued, are representative of a wider tendency in political theorising, a logocentrism which regards “speech as the hallmark of reason”—that we can situate the grand claim of this chapter: the emphasis on the liberatory potential of speech forecloses and censors the possibilities of political action beyond speakable discourse, that is, inarticulate action stripped of words (Vieira, 2021, p. 289).

This claim, as will become clear, is following from the project of Judith Butler, and aims to challenge the historic privileging of performative speech within accounts of political change—as evidenced in the work of Austin, within a linguistic frame, and Arendt within a political

frame. To do so, the chapter will attempt to formulate an account of haptic performativity: a parsing out of how actions are performative even in the absence of speech. Thus, this chapter follows Butler's line of inquiry so as to radicalise her position regarding the position of the body and bodily action in political community. Significantly, where Austin identifies a separation between action and linguistic representation—between uttered speech acts, and *non-uttered acts*—and Arendt makes known the attempt to circumscribe political action *by* political speech, Butler articulates the disjunctive place of action within speech.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, while Butler gives name to the operation of censorship that happens in the scene of performative utterances (Austin), and thus in the speech of political movements more generally (Arendt), she misses the radical potential offered by thinking of action in fully performative terms, that is, with a *haptic*, rather than *linguistic*, sensibility. As such, the chapter will argue that while Butler demonstrates *how* acts become significant through speech, this obfuscates the more interesting degree to which the body acts beyond political actors and *precisely in the absence of speech*. In this light, what the previous analysis forecloses is exactly the most obvious insight offered by thinking of political action and community in performative terms: even when denied linguistic presence the actions of the body are still politically forceful, or, stated otherwise,

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<sup>12</sup> To be clear, non-uttered acts would refer to instances whereby the meaning or force of an action or doing (individual or collective) is not *primarily* due to verbal utterances, but bodily performances. These, therefore, would be instances in which the body and its actions are the primary means of political participation when one's utterances fall on deaf ears or are not heard as speech or articulate demands as such. An example of this would be the non-uttered acts of Chloe Cooley which are exemplary because she, Chloe, is chiefly known not through the words she spoke but that actions she took and the effects that those actions had (indeed, Cooley is ultimately, unknowable through her verbal and articulate utterances). The clearest demonstration of this being when, "resisting her transport [...] witnesses testified that "she screamed violently, and made resistance, but was tied...": Chloe's action here became part of the story Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe would use to agitate and mobilize Upper Canada's growing abolitionist community, an agitation that resulted in The 1793 Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada (Aladejebi & Moyer, 2017; Huron Student Projects, 2021, 2021). Thus, while there was a directly audible component to the act undertaken (a screaming), what is central in the scene is the movement the body effects, that is, the centrality of the physical effects of doing that resonate beyond this moment. Indeed, through Butler in this chapter, and Felman in the next, the notion of a completely non-uttered act is as unimaginable as a body that is yet to receive social definition; nonetheless, this does not foreclose us understanding the potential of bodies to act in ways that words cannot capture (as Chapter II will show).

precisely in the absence of the conventions that renders political speech efficacious and felicitous the body, nonetheless, acts. In opening this understanding, the chapter will close by ushering in the concern of Chapter II: which seeks to answer *how* the body can be significant when it is rendered mute by speech itself.

### Austin – Speech’s Untraditional Actions

We will begin with explaining what makes speech so politically efficacious before reconsidering the place of action within contemporary political community. This will be done first, by understanding speech’s performative dimension, and then, the relevance of performativity to political theory. Before we bring the issue of speech into explicitly political terms, we turn to Austin’s understanding of what performatives are. Austin’s interest begins by paying attention to the use of utterances beyond the scope of traditional grammar (1975b, p. 3); utterances which are not simply describing reality, or as Austin puts it, are not simply constative. For Austin, constative statements are utterances which purport to describe reality as a statement of fact; however Austin notes that there are utterances that: A) do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all; and B) are partly, the *doing* of an action (1975b, p. 5). To these latter clauses of A) and B) Austin denotes the quality of being a performative utterance (a performative for short), the paragon being the utterance “I pronounce you man and wife”. In these instances, to “utter the sentence is not describe my doing ... it is to do it”, and it is an utterance that cannot be simply true or false but, rather, felicitous or infelicitous (1975b, p. 6). The definitional quality of these utterance is that the “issuing of the utterance *is* the performance of an action—it is not *normally* thought of as just saying something” (1975b, pp. 6-7 n. emphasis added). Before jumping into the necessary discussion about convention—alongside the distinction between speech and action and the role of context in the governing of political speech—we need to ground the particular relevance of this account of language’s performative ‘force’ to politics itself.

Austin is concerned about the ‘force’ of an utterance and how the performative speech act alters the very reality it describes (1975b, pp. 72–75). In a broader frame of thought, the relevance politically is the possibility of language changing the terms of how one is figured in political community and the very grammar of how one *becomes* an active political subject.<sup>13</sup> In blunt terms, performative utterances are politically relevant precisely because they refer to the ability of political subjects to actively change the conditions of their political status through altering the reality of which they are a part. In essence, performatives hold the capacity to produce *revolution* in political community.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, this is precisely the function that motivates Butler’s analysis: namely that, “performativity is a way of naming a power language has to bring about a new situation or to set into motion a set of effects” (2015b, p. 28). Thus, while performatives are revolutionary in a philosophical sense for Austin (altering the grounding of the metaphysics of reality), for Butler they are a way to explain the process by which language and speech usher in new subjects within the existing reality of political community (altering the grounding of community relations and political assembly). While this—the political power of language, its ability to alter reality and reconfigure the lives of others—is what occupies Butler, and others, the interest that occupies us first is a more precise conundrum: the heterogeneity of the speech act itself (something that becomes painfully obvious and unavoidable through Austin, Arendt, and Butler) (Lyon, 2015; Tulke, 2021). Before we

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<sup>13</sup> While this will be parsed-out later, the language of figuration will be the subject of Chapter II; for the present, ‘figure’ and ‘figuration’, at the broadest level, refer to the passage whereby one attains political standing and the ability to alter one’s political existence. As such, the process of figuration refers to how one can alter one’s social status in political community and thereby generate new possibilities for political participation.

<sup>14</sup> The use of the word ‘revolution’ here is Austin’s own language (1975b, p. 3); further, Austin states that the realisation of *how* performative utterances are “producing a revolution” in philosophy, one whose “beginnings have been piecemeal, with *parti pris*, and for extraneous aims” (1975b, p. 4). The question that guides us is whether this revolution is one that is simply philosophical in nature, or, more accurately, one that is political in nature, and, if so, in what manner? Critically, later on, Austin, refers to how we “have merely felt the firm ground of prejudice slide away beneath our feet”; the concern that is raised in thinking of performativity in haptic terms is how the prejudice may still remain immanent within the value accorded to speech as *the medium* of politics, or that speech alone is what does political things (1975b, p. 13).

articulate the limits of speech in accounting for, and facilitating, political change—that is, the discovery of performatives as *that* which reveals speech alone as the revolutionary subject or actor in community—we must account for what Austin names the “total speech situation” (Austin, 1975b, p. 52; Butler, 1997, p. 3). In doing so we will note not only the dependency of language upon a larger structure of social convention, but its disjunction with, rather than complementarity to, conveying the actions of political subjects. It is by noting this disjunction, that this thesis seeks to demonstrate the limitation in Arendt and Butler’s thought—wherein *speech* alone is considered the revolutionary subject within the total speech situation—and thereby revealing the hidden implication of the fixation of speech within performative theory specifically. As will be made clear, what is of utmost importance in the total speech situation is, ironically, the act that is occurring within the speech, the element that remains un-uttered (the transposability of this point from an oral to written context will be considered in more depth within Chapter II).

### The Total Speech Situation: Revolutions, Conventions, and Authorities

We will now more fully expound upon the total speech situation within which the utterance becomes enunciated; doing so will allow us to note *how* speech and act part company, the importance of convention and ritual, and its relation to political authority. We note that within a page of introducing a “revolution in philosophy” Austin states that “it is possible to perform an act of the same kind [a performative act] *not* by uttering words” (1975b, pp. 3–4, 8 n. original emphasis). This oddity within Austin’s account opens up consideration of the wider ambiguity of non-uttered acts within PSA. To clarify, for Austin, this does not mean that there are simply “inward and spiritual acts” that our speech makes explicit or performs, such that speech becomes simply the outward appearance of an interior truth/false reality (1975b, pp. 9–11). Rather, it means that while the performative utterance may act and alter reality, *do what it says*, the speech and the act (or accompanying actions) must correlate in order for the speech to be

efficacious, that is, to mean for the speech to act *as it says*.<sup>15</sup> Austin's revolutionary contribution here is as arresting as it is liberating: as we can appreciate, Austin at once radically opens up the force of language in political terms—its ability to alter reality and the existing constraints of (metaphysical, linguistic, or political) grammar—while duly noting the radical conventional restraints under which speech operates, its conditioning within social convention, or as Austin tentatively puts it, the “general character” of it being “ritual or ceremonial” (1975b, pp. 18–19). It is at this point that Austin elaborates several vulnerabilities, potential infelicities, or dependencies, that the speech act has in being uttered such that “it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*” (1975b, p. 8). Furthermore, the speaker himself or other persons *should* also perform *other* actions, whether ‘physical’ or ‘mental’ or “uttering further words” (1975b, p. 8). In a more precise passage, Austin spells this out, “we may accompany the utterance of the words by gestures (winks, pointings, shruggings, frowns, &c.) or by ceremonial non-verbal actions” (1975b, p. 76). In connecting us more explicitly to a political sensibility, as Butler puts it, the “Austinian subject speaks conventionally, in a voice that is never fully singular”, a voice whose enunciation is always dependent on governing social conventions that ensure that the speech is not infelicitous, and thus actually does what it says and *acts* as it says (Butler, 1997, p. 25).

### Infelicity in Situ; The Heterogeneity of the Speech Act

Austin terms instances in which the speech act does not do what it says as moments of infelicity due to A) misfires (where the procedure invoked is botched and the act is without effect) and

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<sup>15</sup> His example of this is ‘effecting marriage by cohabiting’ and by betting with a totalisator machine by putting a coin in a slot; as will come clear, this chapter’s interest is in what Austin’s labels as “some other way” by which it is possible to perform an act without speech being the enabling condition of said act (1975b, p. 8). *N.B.* Austin himself resolves this possibility by discounting the fact that one could ‘do’ the performative without uttering words, namely he discounts this possibility by bringing an equivocation between ritual actions and performative speech so that the distinction essentially collapses and non-uttered acts become synonymous with semantically meaningful speech (1975b, pp. 84–85).

B) abuses (where the act is achieved, but insincerely, a promise that is made but not kept is the basic demonstration of this formula—the act is made but with no intention of keeping it) (1975b, pp. 17–20).<sup>16</sup> In this manner—and we are following Butler here—there is heterogeneity *internal to* performative speech; more importantly, it is not just that speech is subjected to circumstance, but speech can only be uttered *due to* circumstantial and, in a more political register, conventional authority. That is to say, the felicitous character of speech, its ability to alter reality, is always-already bound within a ritual or ceremonial context that exceeds the spoken moment (or historicity, as Butler calls it) of the utterance itself (Butler, 1997, p. 3). To underline this point—conceded by Austin, and highlighted by Butler—we note the distinction between perlocutionary and illocutionary acts: the former being speech acts that do what they say in that very moment, immanently; the latter being speech acts that produce a certain effect as a result of their utterance, latently (1975b, pp. 98–103; 1997, p. 3). Within this frame of thinking, the differences between the two are differences in kind, defined by the extent to which the speech act itself manages to be duly governed, but dictate and authorise the operating convention that constitutes speech’s autogenetic-cum-performative character. Put simply, the difference between per- and illocutionary acts is related to the significance that ceremonial, non-uttered, actions have in constraining or constituting the speech act.

In this sense, the correlation between speech and its felicity, its ability to do what it says, is intimately connected to speech governing ceremonial ritual and non-uttered acts, while performatively erasing the significance of non-uttered action in speech itself.<sup>17</sup> Here as much as Austin ushers in a fuller account of the power of speech, he does so by paradoxically

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<sup>16</sup> Austin welcomes us to the sub-definitions that exist within infelicities; misinvocations; where there is no procedure or ceremony—misapplications; where the procedure cannot be applied to the case in question—and, misexecutions; where the (speech) act is vitiated by a flaw or hitch in the conduct of the ceremony.

<sup>17</sup> As a side note here, this argument has resonances with what Banu Bargu calls sovereignty under erasure, an exercise of political authority that is effective, that is, acts, primarily through erasure (2014).

welcoming in the importance of non-uttered actions *within* the act of speaking itself. As such, what Austin actually notes is how non-uttered actions may actually delimit the possibility of speech itself to the extent that they—non-uttered acts—are not only vital to but resistant against said speech; the whole class of ‘misfires’ (misinvocations and misexecutions) actually speaks to this fact (1975b, pp. 17–19). The relevance going forward is the similarity of Austin’s account of speech “that does” to the prerogative given to speech in accounts of democratic action. This, as will be argued, is a prerogative that is always enacted, or performed, through delimiting the significance of non-uttered, mute and silent, actions to speech itself. To get a fuller grasp of the primacy given to speech as the *deus ex machina* in political accounts of change we turn to Arendt to draw out: the political operation of speech more fully, the role of speech within the space of appearance, and thus the limitations of understanding speech as ground of political subjectivisation and mobilisation. Arendt not only translates Austin’s thought into a political register, but exemplifies the wider tendency of present political theory—this is especially true of most work on deliberative democracy—whereby speech is proposed to be the *a priori* and only means by which (further) political participation is possible (J. F. Bohman, 1990; Gaines et al., 1991; Habermas, 1984, 1987; Reunanen & Kunelius, 2020; Susen, 2018).<sup>18</sup> As we shall see this ‘logocentrism’ (Vieria, 2021, 289)—that constitutes speech’s primacy as the *sine qua non* of political appearance, as the *doer* of politics—becomes theoretically congruent and explainable only because it misreads the relation between speech and action as one that is complementary rather than disjunctive in nature, a misreading that Austin all too consciously makes explicit in his “philosophical revolution” (Vieira, 2020, 2021).

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<sup>18</sup> A notable, and recent, exception to this trend is the work of Mendonça et al., who try to attest to “the crucial role of non-verbal communication in expressing and exchanging arguments” (2020, pp. 153–154).

## Arendt – The Life of Action, Natality and Being Unique

At this point we turn to Arendt to quell the notion that this account of political change of the terms of figuration is an esoteric oddity that only comes from Austin's linguistic understanding being superimposed onto a political stage. That is to say, the argument that is being made only has import due to it being a political argument attacking a linguistic argument that rests on the basis of a difference of philosophical orientation. The point here, as will become clear, is to clarify how the primacy given to the uttered speech act (over the non-uttered acts) in Austin, and the primacy given to speech (over action) by Arendt are one and the same: a delineation of the significance of the 'non-uttered' in accounts of political change and representation more generally (that becomes reflected in Butler and the wider calls for the oppressed to speak in the political movements of the present). Indeed, moving forward, the task at hand is to make it clear that what Austin says in a linguist register *is* the very argument Arendt is making in a political register, an argument that gets carried forth by Butler more explicitly. In this line of thinking, as we turn to Arendt, what will become clear is that the very disjunction that Austin reveals—the heterogeneity of the speech act—is what Arendt attempts to consummate into a conjunctive relation *by* the means of speech such that speech becomes *the* exemplary form of action (as the homogenous authority over what actions mean politically). It is in this way that speech is what allows action, in its non-uttered forms, to have lasting and significant presence. Further, and conversely, action stands as the foundation that allows speech to have political meaning and authority by being that which outlives the necessary flux of the life of action—the ever present coming and going of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers—the *vita activa* (Arendt, 2018, pp. 8–9). To make these points apparent, we must first begin with the divide between speech and action that Arendt typifies in *The Human Condition*. Her work stands as representative for the wider tracts of political theorisation whereby action becomes

collapsed to/as a form of speaking in accounts of political emancipation, movements, and actions more broadly.<sup>19</sup>

In turning to the *Human Condition* we can wed Austin's and Arendt's purpose and understand the natal capacity for beginning anew, which, for Arendt, becomes synonymous with the life of action. For Austin, this capacity is contained within the performative speech act (which ushers in outside and non-uttered acts for performative speech to be possible). Yet, for Arendt, this capacity comes from the human condition within which speech helps us overcome and begin anew. Here, notably, Arendt does not usher in outside, mute, actions as the enabling condition which makes speech possible, but instead refers to the possibility of creating a future to come, an outside, *through* the action of speech (2018, p. 9).<sup>20</sup> Arendt's concern in the human condition is twofold: 1) understanding how the activity of politics has been mistaken as *making* the world (a process of 'fabrication' rather than a process of "acting in concert"); and 2) establishing the freedom of the *vita activa* in contrast to the *vita contemplativa* (2018, pp. xxx, 220–230, 288, 294–304). Before we can delve into the relation of speech to action, and the preference given to the former, we must first establish what the activity of politics is for Arendt. Being a "theorist of beginnings" Arendt's concern is with public disclosure of the plurality of men; that is to say, how the capacity of beginning anew, through the activity of action, is the "only activity that cannot be imagined outside the society of men" (2018, pp. xix, 22; Canovan, 1995; R. H. King, 1984). In this manner, the split that occurs before speech and action is the distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, the former being concerned with the life of men and the potential immortality that comes through the "great deeds" performed

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<sup>19</sup> For specific examples of this tendency see Picard, Schrag, Vainiomäki—most broadly, those who work towards a *communicative* theory of action or political participation more generally (Habermas, 2018; Mitchell, 2018; Picard, 2002; Pocock, 1973; Schrag, 2003; 2004).

<sup>20</sup> The significance of this spatial language will be clarified in Chapters II and III wherein the argument is established that what PSA theory is preoccupied with the interior operation of speech (how speech does things to the world) rather than looking outside of speech (how things divorced from words impact speech). The continuity between Austin and Arendt is thus their perspective and to the degree that both seek to attest how an outside, or effect, is produced as a result of (performative) speech.

in the society of “man”; the latter, however, has its focus on the experience of the eternal, which can only occur *outside* the society of men—its defining features come to be its inability to be transformed into any activity, thought, or word, due to the latter’s inadequacy to render the experience to the world of human sociality (more precisely Arendt refers to this human sociality as the ‘world of men’ and the subject of politics as men/male— see footnote 59 about Sylvia Wyner in Chapter IV for thoughts about the overrepresentation of ‘Man’ within the general category of the ‘human’) (2018, pp. 18–21). It is this division, and the fact that the *vita activa* has become the hand maiden of the *vita contemplativa*—the life devoted to “highest state of which human beings are capable”, contemplation—that drives the rest of Arendt’s analysis which centres on *how* men can achieve immortality through their political deeds and communicate human experience through the common realm of speech (2018, pp. 291–292). As will come clear, this teleological end strictures her whole analysis.

### The Action of Speech: a Disclosure of Mortality

It is in this framing that the notions of permanence and disclosure become central in understanding how “men” (for Arendt), or people, can begin anew, that is, act. Important in this next section is the consideration of action by means other than those of the preauthorised/conventional world of speech.<sup>21</sup> Here, the mortal life of action receives its distinction from the eternal life of contemplation due to “the fact that individual life [...] is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement” (2018, p. 19). Here, the potential greatness of this mortal life is the ability to produce works, deeds, and *words* (2018, p. 19). It is due to this focus on the *potential* permanence that Arendt turns to the polis—“the most talkative of all bodies politic”—to situate, and make contemporary, the ancient divide between *praxis* (action) and *lexis* (speech) that stems from Aristotle (Arendt, 2018, pp. 25–26).

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<sup>21</sup> The importance of doing so becomes apparent when we re-consider the introduction of this thesis, whose concern is with populations who are defined by statelessness or by not having a voice.

As Arendt notes, “speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal” such that “most political action [...] is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that *finding the right words [...] is action*” (2018, p. 26 n. my emphasis). Of note is the symmetry to Austin, that is, the necessity of the appropriate circumstances for speech to act, to be performatively efficacious. More substantially, the question returns; what distinguishes speech’s phenomenal character vis-à-vis action (or non-verbalised utterance)? To answer that we have to turn to the space of appearance and Arendt’s notion of “reification” to fully appreciate the gravity of the divide between speech and action that she tries to render consummate. As Arendt puts it, “human plurality”, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. It is by virtue of this equal distinction that “only man can [...] communicate himself and not merely something [...] *speech and action reveal this unique distinctness*” (2018, pp. 175–176, n. emphasis added). For Arendt, it is through speech and action that man *distinguishes* himself from the state of being merely distinct, and reveals his unique mark as a “man” in contrast to the masses of indistinct matter that constitute the world of things (Arendt, 2018, p. 176). What renders speech and action as distinct unto themselves is twofold: 1) the manner of their appearance (their outward phenomenal manifestation); and 2) their permanence within the human artifice. In both instances, speech becomes the exemplary form of political action through removing the heterogeneity of action that Austin revealed as internal to the speech act, or the action of speech. Going forward, Arendt’s conundrum becomes that of parsing out the distinction between work, fabrication and action, rather than appreciating the heterogeneity of the speech act itself, a heterogeneity that she tries to overcome through insistence on the prerogative of speech in the moment of political subjectivisation.

### The Fragile Life of Politics and the Persuasive Effects of Words

To clarify the argument we must note the phenomenal, and temporal, distinction between speech and action before remarking on how speech receives its phenomenal character as the

medium of politics through liberating itself from the sheer bodily existence of action. Doing so allows us to put Austin's observations—of the heterogeneity of performative speech—into a political frame, that is, to spell out the political operation whereby action is subsumed, or spoken for, by speech. The point of making this connection will be to make clear how this forecloses a more diffuse iteration of the *vita activa*, that is, the possibility of action beyond the world of discourse, *before* one is a legible political subject. Here, as we meet the distinction between perlocutionary and illocutionary speech acts we see the same difference mirrored in Arendt's account of political speech and political action. This difference is the degree to which non-uttered acts/life has an effect on the uttered world of human sociality, which Arendt tries to render inoperable, as a non-sequitur.<sup>22</sup> To understand the place of speech in Arendt, and political thought more generally, we have to oppose it to its supposed corollary, that of force or violence. The hallmark of political life for Arendt, in the classical polis, is that everything was decided through words and persuasion (*lexis*). While this reasoning is not always explicitly named by wider thinkers, the tendency to understand politics as some form of discourse is a pillar of how political life comes to be imagined as something that begins, or is born, in words (Acheson, 2008; Arendt, 2018, p. 26; Ferguson, 2003; Vieira et al., 2019b). In this evocation, which is not Arendt's alone, force and violence come to be what inhibits the possibility of persuasion and thus politics (Arendt, 1970; Menge, 2019; Nussbaum, 2016; Srinivasan, 2018). Thus, if the *vita contemplativa* is a turning away from the mortal life of politics, violence is an eradication of the space of appearance that makes possible the society of Man, and thereby extinguishes that which makes man a political animal, that is, speech itself. Thus, for Arendt,

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<sup>22</sup> Inoperable in this sense refers to the fact that Arendt, akin to Austin, seeks to account for speech as having the authorising, that is to say, political, power for political subjects – what this renders inoperable is the very real sense in which, despite the fact that acts do not, as will be seen, have a presence in the world of discourse (in their naked, bodily form), they do, regardless, very much shape the world of men, even if this is done illegibly (what is rendered inoperable is this observation, the illegible, non-appearance of action within speech, by making of this point Arendt, like others, all too readily that action and speech are consummate rather than disjunctive).

what makes speech and action vital, and distinct from mute violence, is the fact that “in acting and speaking men show who they are [...] and thus make their appearance in the human world” (2018, pp. 178–179). In this argument, or classical revolution, Arendt is trying to overcome the dominance of the *vita contemplativa* and the mute terror of violence as forces that diminish the potential for human sociality and thus politics. In an attempt to value the fragile mortality of the life of politics—the *vita activa*, the life of action—Arendt remains wedded to the persuasive power of the word in the space of appearance.

For Arendt the possibility of the space of appearance, of distinguishing one-self, is premised on the possibility of mortal action, the “rectilinear movement of an individual life” (2018, pp. 18–19).<sup>23</sup> This movement is marked by the necessity of the “surrounding presence of others” and is parsed out in two phases; 1) the beginning, made by a single person; and 2) the achievement, made by many “seeing it through” (2018, p. 188). This “setting into motion” of action for Arendt has three outstanding characteristics: unpredictability boundlessness, and irreversibility. These characteristics are a result of the fact that action’s “full meaning can reveal itself only when it has ended” (2018, pp. 189, 191–192). In other words, while action is a necessary part of the human possibility to alter reality and begin anew—whereby “with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world [...] like a second birth”—it is not sufficient due to the “frailty of human affairs” (2018, pp. 176–177). As Arendt puts it, “no other performance requires speech to the same extent as action” because “speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor [...] the doer of deeds, [who] is only possible if he is at the same time the speaker of words” (2018, pp. 176, 178–179, 188–192). It is at this point that action’s space of appearance necessitates speech. This is because, while the “fleeting moment of the deed” is outstanding in its appearance it only becomes

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<sup>23</sup> Notably on page 199 the space of appearance comes into being before the public realm; it thereby is, in a certain sense, a precondition for the formal, authoritative, realm of politics to be made possible.

relevant to the world of human affairs through the total speech situation—that which ensures that it is speech that has meaning, *is* what acts—which was called ritual/ceremony by Austin and is now termed as “the human artifice” by Arendt (and will be termed as “speakable discourse” by Butler) (2018, p. 192). That is to say, what makes it possible for action to be political and have lasting significance is, in the first and last instance, “the spoken word” (2018, p. 179). As Arendt says, “without the accompaniment of speech, action would lose its revelatory character and its subject” (2018, p. 179). The distinction comes down to the fact that acts disclose ‘what’ you are (your distinctness), whereas speech allows the disclosure of ‘who’ you are (your uniqueness); as such, Arendt is introducing a grammatical criterion within the realm of action (not just speech, as Austin had): the necessity of a subject, a doer, who “is possible only if he is at the same time, the speaker of words”, that is, an articulate and legible subject (2018, p. 178). In this manner, strangely, action only has a *retroactive* significance for Arendt; while deeds appear without words, they are only revelatory due to the storyteller, “that is, the backward glance of the historian”. As Arendt all-too-revealingly puts it, “even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and ““makes” the story” (2018, p. 192).

### Reification: Legislating Speech and Worldless Deeds

It is at this point that the significance of reification comes into the fold: in her thought, Arendt belabours storytelling as an attempt to legislate the action of deeds and words and insulate them from their frailty in the realm of human affairs. Accordingly, it is hard not to notice how Arendt’s own conception of speech and action is the foundation of this possibility (and thus replicates “the Greek solution” to the issue of human frailty within the *vita activa*). Equally, much in the same way, it is hard to ignore how Austin’s revolution in philosophy about performatives is, more accurately, a revolution about the place of action *in* speech (Arendt, 2018, pp. 192–199). This means that, as the deeds of someone are taken to fully disclose ‘who’

they are and not just ‘what’, speech—even in Arendt own account of the *vita activa*—cannot help but possess the legislative character or authority of storytelling. Thus, action’s force, its political power to give (second) birth to the space of appearance and make possible human plurality, is a derivative power. It is a proposition that comes at the behest of the authority of words (which in turn only gain their authority due to the larger ceremonial context of the human artifice). Here Arendt exemplifies and heralds a wider political tradition that tends to retroactively value non-uttered acts through uttered speech and, in this move, diminishes the significance or force of action *to* (or *within*) speech by over emphasising the retroactive authority or power of speech *over* action (a move that was made clear by Austin, and becomes more explicit through Butler). In this frame, it is not hard to note the pains to which Arendt goes to try to “forbid something that is already impossible”, namely, a bodily action that speaks, discloses the ‘who’, coeval, with the ‘what’ (Zerilli, 1995, p. 172). Thus, for Arendt, it is one thing to note that the doing of great deeds and the speaking of great words will leave no trace—and hold that, historically, “speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal”—but another to duly insist on the importance of speech as that which propositionally discloses the ‘who’, the subject of action (2018, pp. 24–26). In this mode of thinking, it is hard to see how speech, politically, is anything but a form of storytelling, derivative from, and latent to, the space of action itself. In a sense speech always has a latency vis-à-vis nonverbal forms of action. Significantly here, what Arendt is to reveal is that there is a disjunctive temporality in the scene of political action, within which speech is always the referring *back* to deeds already done. The question to be raised is, if story telling is really distinct from speech and action, why is the unspeakability of action, and the bodily existence it implies so scandalous and indecent for Arendt?<sup>24</sup> Further, if speech is distinguished by its phenomenal manifestation—yet coeval

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<sup>24</sup> A reflection on the mute horror of the body, or action beyond the space of words, to politics becomes glaringly obvious on page 51 where Arendt equates death to a form of disappearance; on page 63 Arendt

with action due to its essentially frail character—why is speech so worldly while the life of bodily deeds so worldless?

### Bodily Deeds bereft of World

To clarify these remarks, we must establish the wordlessness of the domain of bodily action and bodily existence. Doing so will help us clarify that while speech and action are essentially of the same domain, they are distinguished for Arendt—in similar fashion to Austin—to the extent that speech is rendered consummate with action rather than that which sanctions actions' inherent wordlessness. Here, both accounts of speech as a *doing* involve misreading the place of non-uttered actions within the realm of speech. It is a misreading that helps explain how speech operates outwardly through persuasion, but, at the same time, enforces the realm of the body and the work of deeds with an authoritarian, indeed, tyrannical, guise (speech, here is that which acts as captor of the body much as it is that which liberates the subject of politics). To appreciate how the relation of speech to action is rendered consummate—a rendering that reduces the political significance of actions that occur *without* speech, which have a political life despite not being subjectified/reified within human sociality—we must turn to how the body appears for Arendt. Notably, its first appearance is in connection with the experience of pain, which is remarkable for its lack of communicability, and thus its unfitness for the public appearance (2018, pp. 50–51; Scarry, 1987, pp. 3–5). The specific point about pain is expressive of a more general point of view towards bodily existence which Arendt treats as a taboo subject, as “mute and shrouded in secrecy, the Arendtian body exhibits the curious mixture of uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and sacred attributes” (Zerilli, 1995, p. 171). Bodily

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then goes on to talk of the household as being the realm that must be hidden because it “harbours the things hidden from human eyes and impenetrable to human knowledge”—namely, the mystery of birth and death. Interesting here is the syllogism drawn between death, mystery and the unspeakable, and most importantly, their unsuitability for matters of all things political, that is, things common and pertaining to the social world of man, the animal who speaks; this is not insinuation, for, as Arendt says “the mysteries concerned the unspeakable, and experiences beyond speech were non-political and perhaps *antipolitical by definition*” (2018, p. 63, n. my emphasis)

existence alone for Arendt, and the necessary deeds that stem from it, stands as a potential threat to the plurality, the paradoxical distinction, which constitutes speech's political character. This point is best explained through Arendt's fears of the polymorphous body, which stands as the ground of the speaking embodied subject for Arendt. This body, in and of itself, is wordless without the aid of speech; the actions of the body, its non-utterance within the world of men, without some domain of speech, remain wedded to the biological movement of life and death (it can have no rectilinear course of movement); as such it is only in speech that the body, and its adjacent actions, become distinct, distinguishable, and therefore, part of the world of men (Arendt, 2018, p. 176; Zerilli, 1995, pp. 175–184). In action alone there remains little chance of immortality; bodily deeds are perceived by brute physical appearance and only become relevant through spoken words, which impart their unique distinction to the previously indistinct (Arendt, 2018, p. 179). In Arendtian terms, actions, and bodily existence remain unrealised, they must be reified by speech; the concern that returns is the prerogative given to speech in *making* (indeed legislating) actions, a prerogative that continually insists on delimiting (or, forbidding) the significance of the non-uttered, mute and silent, utterance to speech itself.

In light of the above, where Austin acknowledged the role of the body, its embeddedness within the conventional authority of ritual and ceremony within the total speech situation, Arendt understands this heterogeneity within speech as a necessary transgression that can only be overcome, and therefore come to be politically significant, through further speech. As such, through Austin and Arendt we get two sides of the same coin; the former noting the arresting features of speech; the latter attempting to point to its liberatory character. This is a move from recognising how speech is arrested by outside conditions to how speech performatively enacts an autogenesis, possible only due to the subjugation of mute action. Regardless, what Arendt helps us with here is showing how speech becomes realised through the removal of the

heterogeneity of non-uttered acts to speech's constitution. Evidently, what Arendt makes us acutely aware of is the tendency to understand action as the hand maiden to speech (similarly to understanding the *vita activa* as the hand-maiden to the *vita contemplativa*), such that, speech and action are rendered in concert and speech appears as that which allows action to have worldly existence rather than something that actually dictates and authorises the world of action. What Arendt thus presents to us (or proposes to us) is the political world in which speech and action are in one homogeneous, consensual, existence, coeval and contemporaries in the most immediate sense; what she unintentionally reveals is the degree to which action and speech are phenomenally disjunctive and resistant to one another—such that action can only be recognised (made legible) through the backward glance, and legislation, of speech: bluntly, while the world of action only becomes understandable *through* the world of speech it occupies a derivative and yet paradoxically central place within politics or the polis.

### Thinking Haptically: the Linguistic Foundation of Political Movements

Ironically, the result of such argumentation situates the teleological aim of speech as rendering mere—mute and non-uttered—action as an insufficient criterion for political change alone. Speech itself only becomes significant to the degree that it can alter action itself, not merely describe action's reality but in its very utterance, alter and performatively enact it. In this sense, if Austin reveals how force operates in a linguistic setting, Arendt is politicising speech *through* the depoliticisation of the mute and unspoken *within* the speech act. This (trans)mutation and legislation of the indistinct mass(es) of the world thereby—for Arendt, among others—becomes the foundation that makes politics possible. What Arendt allows us to articulate is not just the political vocabulary of Austin's observation, but, more generatively, how the performative force of speech, its ability to communicate and reify human plurality, is dependent upon a propositional force, a prerogative that involves that subjugation of the performative force of action, that is, the *haptic* side of performativity (the way in which action does exactly

what is *not* said, that is, enacts the world without legible speech). In this manner, we are brought to the more general operation of censorship, or logic of closure that Butler identifies performative speech as operating within. Resultantly, what performative speech act theory helps us account for is how performative speech is only efficacious to the degree that it has conventional authority, whereas great deeds, and other (lesser) bodily actions, can have political clout precisely in the absence of a conventional political grammar, in the absence of a ‘who’, a subject who is grammatically present within the previous authoritative regime, the existing political community. What we will see with Butler is that where Arendt saw the limit of action—its inability to disclose a discrete ‘who’, or ‘doer’—as a negative, Butler opens this crevice of possibility that clarifies *what* haptic performativity is and how it radicalises the potential of the *vita activa* positively.

### Butler – Linguistic Performativity and the Edges of What is Speakable

At this point, by engaging with Austin and Arendt in tandem we have come to unpick the ambiguity that is revealed by a performative account of speech, the ambiguity between the uttered speech act and its non-uttered accompaniment within the total speech situation. Through Arendt we have seen the propositional character that speech takes in relation to bodily action, that is, its prerogative force that forecloses the ability of a subject to act politically beyond the strictures of language and discourse, a prerogative force constituted by a misunderstanding of the speech act, and action in general, as conjunctive rather than disjunctive in nature. As we turn to Butler, we see how this disjunctive relation opens us into an account of haptic performativity, and how the non-uttered actions of the body are, themselves, performative in nature. Butler allows us to rally and clarify the teleological aim of performative speech—its aspiration towards sovereign performativity, a tendency that Arendt unintentionally underlines in her account of the *vita activa*—alongside the censoring logic of speech. The logocentric tendency internal to performative speech, then, is to propose that the

body acts to the degree that its presence is consummate with, or identical to the world of, speech itself. Butler makes these two moves clear namely: 1) the tendency of speech to try and free itself from the heterogeneity of the total speech situation from which it arises, further she notes how speech 2) censors the realm of action as a purely conventional space of subjectivisation (a space that occurs within and at the behest of speech). However, we are to show how her attempt to account for how the body acts linguistically—altering the constative reality of speech—is a short-sighted endeavour. Namely, we will see how Butler’s own attempt to account for the presence of the body in political assembly, its non-uttered character, comes full circle by proposing the significance of the body with regard to its speakable character (despite her best explicit intentions). As shall become clear, while Arendt focuses on conventional force of speech on *non-uttered* action, Butler focuses on the conventional force of the body and its non-uttered actions *on speech*. In this, neither considers how the potentially liberating effects and, indeed, promissory nature of bodily action is precisely due to the lack of its immediate phenomenal manifestation and latent reification in speech.

This lack of immediate verbal or textual significance means that, even when denied linguistic presence (that is, existing political authority), the actions of the body are still politically forceful, precisely in the absence of the conventions that render political speech efficacious and felicitous. As we close the chapter, it is this conventional limit of political speech that will become clear, by which the body is only relevant due to its signifying, and thus linguistically efficacious, character. To start disentangling this web, we must begin with the presence of the body in the world of speech that constitutes the political community. Doing so will clarify the fantasy of sovereignty internal to the speech act action (Austin and Arendt) alongside the concomitant logic of censorship it presupposes (Butler). This will enable us to expose *how* the body is not just disjunctive with, but disruptive to, the world of speech in a way that linguistic performativity fails to figure (the latter of which constitutes the ground of political community).

Further, we will touch on how the haptic performativity of the body is always presupposed by, and at the prerogative of, the linguistic performativity of language itself to the extent that the silence, or insignificance of the body, is always a propositional matter that is, to use Arendt's own phrasing, "political by definition" (2018, p. 3). In making this clear we will then be able to clarify how Butler's account itself unwittingly falls in-line with the very political regime it is arguing against and thus underscores the tendency of language to performatively supersede the haptic performativity of the body through practices of linguistic figuration.

### Excessive Speech and its Embodied Blindspot

To begin with the most direct representation of the disjunction between speech and action within the total speech situation—that is to say, the political community—we must engage with *Excitable Speech*. As noted previously, for Butler, the scene of the speech act is blurred; the extent to which one can locate the utterance, the "right word at the right time", within the total speech situation is met with an unending challenge of delimitation. That is to say that, immediately within the scene of speaking there are a myriad of (uttered and non-uttered) conventions that constitute the possibility of speaking in the first place (1997, p. 3). In this sense, the speech act is riddled with ritual so that what enables the utterance is not restrained to the present moment of said utterance but the "condensed historicity of ritual, or conventional context" which pre-dates and *exceeds* the moment of enunciation. (1997, pp. 2–3). As Butler argues, "the moment [of enunciation] in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future direction, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of [the] utterance" (1997, p. 3). As such, the temporal 'moment' of speaking is never really total, nor able to achieve a totally closed and thus sovereign or self-signifying, state such that speaking is all that happened, that speaking *alone* was the *doing* (Bourdieu, 1999; 1997, p. 3-n. see footnote 14). In this manner, and as Arendt more generally wrote, the propositional character of language, its insistence on self-disclosure and delimitation, is,

ironically, what sustains the body and makes its “social existence” possible. What Butler brings us to realise is that the significance of the body or non-uttered actions to speech is proliferated though the very explicit denial and censorship of the significance of the act alone *within* speech (1997, p. 5). Butler asks us to imagine the “impossible”, the unspeakable and scandalous, scene of a body that has not yet been given a social definition (see footnote 12). In doing so, two avenues are opened: 1) how speaking itself is a bodily act; and 2), the ironic alley where the body itself, its actions, are a “blind spot for speech” such that the relation between speech and the body is scandalous and consists of incongruity, inseparability, and is marked by the fact that the “act cannot know what it is doing” (1997, p. 10-see footnote 18; Felman, 2003, p. 97). Thus, if, for Butler, “the writer is blind to the future of the language in which she writes”, equally, language is blind to the body of which it writes to or speaks of (1997, pp. 8–10). In the moment of enunciation, performative speech speaks to a world of which words alone cannot alone speak; here, “the violence of language consists in its effort to capture the ineffable”, that which must remain elusive for “language to operate as a living thing” (1997, pp. 8–9). In this, what is hinted at by Austin—and clarified in Arendt’s *vita activa*, and made explicit by Butler—is the incommensurability between how the body *acts* and what the body *says*. In Butler’s words, “a speaking body signifies in ways that are not reducible to what such a body says” (1997, pp. 10–11).<sup>25</sup> Here, it is not just that speech extends the force of action, but it further aims to overcome and censor the latter’s significance politically.

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<sup>25</sup> Worth noting here is the language that Butler uses to describe the body in her book, *Bodies that Matter*. The book stands as a reflection on how “the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (2011, p. xii). There is however a limit to this avenue of inquiry; this is because, in so far as Butler quotes Spivak, who says “in this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect”, we come to the edges of Butler’s preoccupation: a perspective that is preoccupied with seeing how power systematises the body such that the body becomes a language effect (Ibid, p. xi). Generative as this is to understand “performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into

If the total speech situation makes known the fuzziness of the speech/act distinction, it is the body and its conventional-cum-ritualistic actions that makes known the temporal latency between how one acts (*what* one does) and the communicative possibility or felicity of speaking about such action (*who* does such acting). As Butler puts it, the act is redoubled and recirculated in the moment of speech: “there is what is said and there is a kind of saying that the bodily “instrument” of the utterance performs” (1997, p. 11). Butler, here, observes what is made explicit by Arendt and implicitly admitted to by Austin: the speech act, that is, speech that performatively *does* and acts as it says, has an open temporality and “is always in some ways out of our control”(Butler, 1997, pp. 15, 28–29). The propositional power of speech thus confronts the incommensurable force of the performative actions of the body. In such a context, the unbounded and unpredictable character of non-uttered action meets its opposing number, the totalising council of speech (Butler, 1997, p. 15).<sup>26</sup> We are hereby returned to the anxiety by which it is insisted that *it is* the speech that acts, and actually does what it says and is felicitous. But, as is all too obvious and acknowledged by Austin, the speech act is itself riddled with infelicity and open not only to the possibility of natality, beginning anew, but failing, not beginning at all (closing down the possibility of conventional linguistic, political, subjectivisation). Here, Arendt—who, at a broad level, speaks to the wider logic whereby the entry into speech is construed as the entry into and the beginning of what allows one to participate in politics—saw this latter possibility as curtailing the liberatory potential of political action and the *vita activa* itself. However, Butler sees that this vulnerability of the

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being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” the focus remains on the production of “cultural intelligibility” rather than a form of political action that moves beyond articulate discourses (it is, in short, a focus on how bodies are produced as intelligible rather than escape intelligibility and exceed the delimitations of language) (IBID, p. xii).

<sup>26</sup> The performative actions of the body, or what will generally be termed haptic performativity are actions which are performative in the sense that they alter reality precisely in the absence of speech, without conventional authority, acts that do without an authoritative doer, in the absence of authorised subject; they performatively do but without the council of speech.

speech act, its *non*-sovereign aspect, is exactly what opens language to the possibility of beginning anew, of doing what it says *differently*. This latter potential is what Butler names as language's transitivity, that is, its active (or, acting) potential (1997, pp. 1, 44–49).

### The Border of the Unsayable: Sovereign Speech and Action without Subjects

The chief focus of Butler's analysis is to make clear the following: 1) the fantasy of sovereignty internal to the performative speech act; and 2) the possibility of agency that occurs through censoring the actions of the body and foreclosing them within the terms of a speaking subject (1997, p. 41). As Butler seeks to work at this "border of the unsayable" and make apparent the "the risk of being cast out into the unspeakable"—thereby exposing how the logic of censorship works within language as something inherent in the constitution of the distinguished subject from an indistinct body—we come to see the significance of the body for Butler, or how haptic performativity refers to a certain ability of bodily actions to expose the boundaries of speech and act irrespective of speech's authority (1997, pp. 41, 139). In this vein, the subject of the body, and its disjunctive presence in the space of politics, is significant precisely because, despite its impossible and unspeakable presence, its plural nature yet singular character—the radical plurality of potential what it can be/do, without a singular identifiable *who*—the performative force of the body is traceable in altering the constative reality of speech and language itself from *without*, from beyond the pale of words. What is significant in Butler's analysis is not simply the enunciation of what was already present in Austin's account of speech and Arendt's account of action—namely the disjunction between the speech act and action itself—but the logic of censorship or closure by which linguistic action and performative speech operates. To clarify, the body finds its existence within the realm of language while also exposing the vacillating limits of speech. The negative criterion by which Arendt attributed the body, its lack of phenomenal distinction, is the very positive criterion by which, for Butler, the possibility of (un-spoken) agency *within* language and speech is opened. Thus, the limitations

that performative speech acts expose is their liability for failure and thus their non-sovereign character. The ideal that Arendt works towards, the superseding of praxis by *lexis*—the inscription of the unspeakable actions of the body within the domain of speech—is readable as the “fantasy of sovereign action”, a “certain kind of saying is at once the performance referred to in that saying—one that immediately does what it says”, which is also readable as an illocutionary speech act that erases the distinction between speech and action (1997, pp. 11, 71–103).<sup>27</sup> As such, where Arendt tries to express the agentic possibility within the *vita activa* she instead legitimises the sovereignty accorded to speech, a sovereignty dependent on overcoming the enabling constraints of the actions of the body through censorship and legislative authority.

### Censorship in Action: Speaking without vulnerability

For Butler, this movement of speech towards a fantasy of sovereign action that renders the disjunction between what speech says and what speech does is best readable as operating by a logic of censorship. The significance is thus: when accounting for the total speech situation and the moment when the right words do what they say—when *lexis is praxis*, especially for the backward glance of the historian or storyteller—there is an operation of censorship. This operation at once forecloses the vulnerability of the speech act itself, affirming its sovereignty, while dually rendering the speech act itself as incomplete, exposing its vulnerability. That is to say, the movement from the action of the body, *what* the body does, to the speech of the subject, *who's* speaking, who *does* the action, involves a logic of closure, or, what Butler terms censorship: this is what linguistic accounts of performativity make apparent. For Butler, this censorship, the enabling constraint of language that renders bodily action as legible to political subjects (metamorphosing the *what* as a *who*, a grammatically legible subject), occurs in two

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<sup>27</sup> The difference between per and illocutionary here is translated into a political register to the degree by which the significance of action to speech is rendered inoperable, ironically, by speech itself

forms: 1) as implicit, where the “operations of power that rule out in unspoken ways what will remain unspeakable” and 2), as explicit, where the form of censorship is more legible by being a “regulation that *states what it does not want to be stated*” (consider Arendt’s thoughts about the polymorphous body) (1997, p. 130-n. original emphasis). Butler’s driving point is that “the subject’s production [the ‘who’] takes place not only through the regulation of the subject’s speech, but through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse” (1997, p. 132). This is, as Butler notes, exactly what Arendt tries to make apparent; that it is “as linguistic that human beings become political kinds of being”, an aim which Butler herself explicitly says she is working towards (Arendt, 2018, pp. 25–27; 1997, p. 133, see fn. 9, p. 179). Critically, what limits Butler, as will become clear when considering her more recent work, namely, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, is the extent that, while she recognises the disjunction between bodily action (haptic performativity) and spoken action (linguistic performativity), her critical move is to demonstrate how the body acts within speech and eventually becomes consummate with language and thus politically legible.

### Action Without a Who: Linguistic Censorship

What is thereby missed in Butler’s otherwise exquisite analysis of the scandal of the body and language’s logic of censorship is the degree to which the body, and its varying acts, are significant even in the absence of being a *who*, that is a constituted, legible, subject. Thus, what this critical approach—useful as it is to expose the operations of censorship by which the performative force of speech proceeds—circumnavigates and occludes is how the *unconventional* acts of the body come to alter the discourse of the sayable (speakable discourse). As will become clear, Butler concerns herself with how language censors the body, and thus *enables* (performative) agency. However, she is limited to the extent that she considers that the body is significant (literally, a signifying, and thus, political, presence) to the degree

that it speaks in a certain way, rather than *acts in another*, in an *unspeakable* way.<sup>28</sup> It is in this sense that, while Arendt exposes the conventional force of speech *on non-uttered action*, Butler exposes the unconventional force of the body and its non-uttered actions *on speech*. Thus, while the body for Butler is revolutionary, it is because of its ability to come into the fold of language and become a political subject, that is, be felicitous through speech. As we come to the end of the chapter, we are to consider how an unconventional body, despite being denied linguistic or textual presence, subjective belonging, inarguably still has political force within the political community in which it is allegedly denied significance.

### Speech and Retroactive Limits: Citation and the Past Community of Speakers

Moving forward, and before we get to the limits of Butler's account of haptic performativity, we need to at least tackle how Butler, who avowedly criticises the limits of language in conveying the demands subjects have within their community, manages to foreclose the promissory nature of haptic performativity. To do so, we must wed Arendt and Butler in their focus on the retroactive character of speech. Butler's main argument must first be clarified: the power of performativity is derivative (following Arendt) and is provisionally felicitous only because a particular performative action echoes, or resignifies, prior constitutive conventions, gestures, rituals, and actions which it draws on and covers over in its momentary utterance (1997, p. 51). To make evident the temporality of performative speech acts we must follow Butler when she says, "the speaker who utters the racial slur is thus citing that slur, [and so is] *making linguistic community with a history of speakers*" (1997, pp. 51-52-n. emphasis added). With reference to the temporality of performative speech acts the significance is thus: Butler's approach is conventional in that it is concerned with how speech acts retroactively, that is, by doing what it says through bringing into legible existence previous actions that *have* existed

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<sup>28</sup> In short, Butler reads the transitivity of language through the body, rather than appreciating the transitivity of bodily action beyond/without language.

(for Butler the performative act is only such to the extent that it is a *re-enactment*). Put more simply, the act of the speech act, for Butler, is significant precisely to the extent that it refers back to, and makes legible, previous action and speaks in *this* way. While Arendt made clear how speech is always phenomenologically *after* action and thus was concerned with the phenomenal reification of action—referring back to action so as to do what it says and give non-uttered action linguistic, political, presence—Butler’s approach is identical in its temporal orientation but opposite in its interest: she is concerned with how the acts of the body cite a previous linguistic community for legitimation (action itself is given legitimacy *via* previous acts which *become* the speech of present political communities). In either approach, the performative erasure of the body, and non-uttered action beyond the fold of authority more generally, is not just a secondary consequence of the performative speech act but its *enabling* condition. Thus, in similar fashion to Arendt, Butler’s analysis is limited to the extent that haptic performativity only becomes politically significant to the degree that it can be rendered operable *by* speech. In other words, past action becomes significant politically to the extent that it is indistinguishable from present speech. Even in Butler’s account of action’s performative character, being politically active is defined by a linguistic sense of performativity such that political agency is synonymous with the linguistic ability for one to *say what they do* (not simply do what they say).

In this framing, for both Butler and Arendt, non-uttered acts become significant to the degree that they possess conventional legitimacy *qua* forms of speaking. What is obfuscated by both is the positive dimension by which bodily action is politically significant precisely due to its lack of (explicit) phenomenal manifestation and latent reification in speech. In this sense focusing on the retroactive character of speech misses the proto-political character of non-uttered action itself. Herein, what Butler opens for consideration—but overlooks herself due her focus on how the body *becomes* linguistically legitimate—is that, even when denied linguistic presence,

the actions of the body are still politically forceful, precisely in the absence of the conventions that render political speech efficacious, felicitous, and, ultimately, powerful (precisely in the absence of the conventional constraints that censor the emancipatory possibilities that exist beyond the action of speech within Arendt's realm of persuasion and Butler's realm of speakable discourse). It is this that the second chapter will tackle; namely the emancipatory, open, possibilities that exist when considering the political significance of the body, and non-uttered action, not with reference to its conjunctive relation to language—its contribution to constative reality and conventional presence—but with an eye to its *unconventional* force and the unsayable risk it brings to language. In this regard Butler has helped finalise the account of performative speech acts; she has demonstrated one side of the story: how un-uttered actions become linguistically efficacious through speech's retroactive force. What has been neglected is how non-uttered acts have performative force precisely in the absence of previously sanctioned, or legislated, linguistic felicity. In this light, the fact that the body speaks, or more precisely, is censored *into* speech, is just one aspect of how haptic, non-uttered, performativity acts. As such—and with reference to the retroactive temporality that characterises the political world of performative speech—bodily actions can be politically forceful, and thus significant, even in the lack of such a previously existing community.

## Chapter II: The Unconventional Force of the Body in the Space of

### Communication

Attempts by the slave to order or forbid will always be unhappy in Austin's sense. Such acts are *unspeakable* for the slave. Something has silenced his speech, *not* in the sense of rendering his spoken words inaudible or written marks illegible, but in the sense of depriving those sounds and marks of illocutionary force: of preventing those utterances from counting as the actions they were *intended* to be. – *Langton, 1993 –emphasis added*

The true riches that languages conceal remain buried. - *Urmson, 1962*

In moving from situating the place of non-uttered action within the performative speech act we now have to parse out the unconventional force and unsayable risk the non-uttered acts of the body bring to language. This chapter aims to develop in further detail the insights of the last, namely, to explore whether, if there is heterogeneity within the speech act, what exactly makes the body bereft of speech significant politically? How, in other words can the body, and its accompanying actions, be significant beyond this speech situation? In answer to these questions, this chapter will be investigating the significance of actions that *do*, without speech saying so, and thereby open up the possibilities for forms of action that lie beyond the boundary of community, the common world of speech itself. As will become clear through this chapter: 1) haptic performativity implicates reading non-verbal bodily action as a forceful movement that is always in excess of the power of language; and 2) the power or meaning of language is dependent upon ‘inscription’, that is, of grasping that which occurs beyond words and is *improper* to them. Here, Austin worked backwards from the power of language to understand the force of illocutionary utterance (the action of speech). However, we are working in a reverse order, by seeing how bodily actions—the corporeal doing within the speech act—have a force

that must always carry over in excess of the power of the utterance and it is this that *gives* language its political meaning (or ‘*energia*’). It is this excessive, non-uttered, aspect of bodily action—its non-linguistic force—that the chapter seeks to explicate so as to expose how language is met by a twofold inability: 1) to be constitutive of the political subject and 2) to contain the force of the body within its own terms.

To make these points apparent the chapter will proceed in three stages: 1) demonstrating the limits of language, or the action of speech alone, to guarantee the meaning of politics and political subjects (Derrida and Felman); 2) the paradox of language’s promised failure that opens language to other meanings and other (uncivilised) bodies yet to be incorporated (Felman); finally, 3) how does the uncivilised body come to figure or be present within the terms of language, and what is the force of this thing that fails to have meaning in the way that language intends (Lyotard)? As such, the chapter will expose the operation of incorporation and inscription that guarantees language *alone* power in linguistic accounts of performativity and thereby gives form to the politicising power immanent in performative speech act, namely, that of assembling bodies into a speaking community. Resultantly, the central point of this chapter is that what the body does in language is proto-linguistic and, as a result, our possibility of acting politically—thereby changing the constitution of what it *means* to be political (the meaning of politics in language)—is always a potential for those excluded from discourse or those buried within it.

### The Limits of Language: Incorporation and Illocutionary Disablement

In what follows we will take Austin at his word, that he would simply like to mean “what he says”, and therefore will focus on the speech act performed rather than the content of said speech act (Austin & Warnock, 1970, p. 233). To do so, we are clarifying how thinking of performativity in linguistic terms—accounting for the significance of acts by way of speech—allows consideration of how the body plays and acts within the terms of language. As will be

seen, however, this linguistic account of performativity fails to open enquiry into the force of bodily action beyond the meaning inscribed to it within language. In this endeavour, Performative Speech Act (PSA) theory brings us to a conundrum: how, given the omnipresence of language, can the body not be captured/conveyed/act through speech? How, in other words, does speech fail itself? If speech acts and does things how can the body be proto-linguistic? How does the ability of the body to be unhappy, to misfire and fail within speech, open us to a sense of haptic performativity that *acts at* the limits of language? How, in a word, does the very action of speech bring us to the bigger question of language's limited ability to speak for the actions or conduct of its subjects? These various ways of phrasing the specific issue of performative speech bring us to the wider conundrum of the ability of language to convey the political force and meaning of the body politic. Significantly, as will be seen, linguistic performativity reveals that what makes language felicitous or active is the fact that it always speaks at the limit of its own referentiality, always speaking of what 'it', speech, is doing.

Here Rae Langton attempts to situate this point—language's limited ability to speak for the actions, or conduct, of its subjects—by noting how illocutionary utterances can be performed in unintentional ways to the extent that such utterances can be acts of subordination which effect (that is, cause) the silence of other speakers (1993). Accordingly, where an illocutionary utterance may do *something*, it may also have a perlocutionary effect of doing something *else*. As Langton puts it, “speech can do more than break bones” because the authority immanent to the utterance that “does things” may reduce others to silence (have silencing perlocutionary effects); this, as Langton says, becomes tantamount to the “failure to act” and can be termed a “perlocutionary frustration” (where one's act does not have the meaning/impact one intended) (1993, pp. 302–314).<sup>29</sup> This may be a more precise clarification of the censorship that Butler

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<sup>29</sup> Notably, in next the chapter, it is worth considering this phrasing in line with how Rancière characterises the position of exploited subjects as those “who are separated from [the] meaning of their own practice” (2007, p. 85).

mentioned at the end of Chapter I, but, critically, it raises the point that performative action can be understandable in terms of frustrating the intended effects of others (not just the felicity of one's own speech). Thus where, previously, the liberatory dimension of speech has been highlighted—its ability to do things through words and act as intended—what Austin welcomes, and Langton notes, is the negative, disabling, dimension of linguistic performativity. It is this dimension that we are helping to build on as a positive capacity for political actors who are denied their voice or the potential of having an 'illocutionary effect'. The implication is thus that there are potentially unintentional effects of subordination, frustration and, ultimately, 'illocutionary disablement' immanent with a linguistic account of performativity (1993, pp. 320–325). Paradoxically, performative speech acts may be linguistically felicitous by disabling the linguistic *or* haptic force of others, as Langton puts it, "speech that silences is bad, not just because it restricts the ideas available on the shelves, *but because it constrains people's actions* (1993, p. 328-n. emphasis added). Thus, and this point guides the rest of the chapter, where previous thinkers and performative theorists saw the authority speech had as a generative avenue for change, we are to shade-in an implication of this valorisation. In other words, authoritative speech that acts as intended may have unintentional perlocutionary effects that deny other forms of speaking as having performative effects. While this last point is Langton's concern, ours is about how we understand performative 'effects' beyond the homology drawn between speech and action, as something that can exceed simple 'language effects' and thereby something that can never fully be given meaning as an effect of language.

Within the above context, for linguistic performativity to be felicitous—for the speech act to do what it says—it must always circulate and signify the body, that is, a world beyond discourse, a world that it must reference as something done *by* speech itself (speech, in this sense, is always reaching for the body of the other while being self-referential to its own body).

In this manner, what performative speech acts reference is a world beyond speech which become felicitous through the incorporation of these referents into a linguistic reality (and, in the last instance, the determination of linguistic reality as reality as such, as *the* thing that acts; linguistic force, authoritative speech, in fact relies on this mechanism of illocutionary disablement to be felicitous speech). This logic of incorporation brings us to our conundrum and the question that linguistic performativity cannot fully take into account: if the felicity of PSA's is that they succeed in incorporating a referent that *was* formally not acting—and, in this very incorporation, this authoritative inscription, make it act through a form of disablement—how can it be claimed that body remains unspeakable? To situate the significance of this specific action of performative speech *qua* language we must first ground how PSA's alter our perception of what language does when it says things. Crucially, in doing so, we will come to see how, as much as linguistic performativity circulates the body *as* language and undermines the word/deed distinction (as was seen in chapter one), the wider shift this inaugurates is an altered locus for the potential of linguistic modification. Significantly, this is a potential that linguistic PSA theory can only understand as a language effect rather than something that exceeds what words can say, or something that can be forceful beyond language.

### Language and its, Excessive. Non-Semantic Moments

In the first stage of the chapter, we parse out the above points and figure what language is, and what it does politically. In relevance to this, PSA theory changes the conventional function of language within political understanding—the function of simple communication of meaning—and instead brings us to appreciate language's excessive, forceful, and self-referential manner, that at once constitutes its power and limits its force. Thus, if, conventionally, speakable discourse has been marked by its purpose of communication—as a vehicle for transmitting meaning of the world, and, in relevance to politics, the substance of political subjects or the

meaning of the political state itself—PSA is exemplary in its focus on *how* language designates non-semantic movements; it is this frame of thinking that occupies Derrida in his engagement with Austin, namely, the tendency for the semantic field of signification to govern the non-semantic with total intentionality (1988, pp. 1–2).<sup>30</sup> Here, speaking is of prime importance to politics because it refers to the domain where meaning is communicated in the form of statements, dialogue and discussion; speech is vital herein because it “serves as a passage, transporting and transmitting something, rendering it accessible” (Derrida, 1988, p. 2). Classically, as Arendt and Butler made clear, the need for speech, for a unique and distinct place in speech, is a definitive criterion for being political because it is how one communicates and address one-self to others (speech is the medium by which one communicates or references oneself in reality to others). Bringing this point forward, we are to note that PSA is plagued by the place of the non-semantic as it (speech) does things, the concern now becomes how do speech acts communicate this non-semantic element that is within their very doing?

Crucially, and this is what Butler picked-up as politically generative, this addressal—the communication of *who* one is—is excessive with PSAs such that it says more than it intends. This notion comes through Felman who, following Austin, makes the point that the performative does not produce a symmetry between meaning and reference, statement and

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<sup>30</sup> As is evident, the notion of a totally non-semantic world—a world without semantic meaning—is hard to imagine in the terms of language (or as Butler said in the first chapter, it may be equal to the task of imagining “the scene of a body that has not yet been given a social definition”). Nonetheless, it is not a stretch to pay attention to the fact that the “language of the body” has its own specific terminology precisely because it is not simply language or a semantic realm but more accurately a realm of gestural communication, one that is definitely semantically meaningful, but equally has no *natural*, or resting, meaning (Mauss, 1973). In this manner, the non-semantic aspects of bodily movements are interesting precisely because they call to attention the (lac of) alignment of bodily movement with traditional forms of communication and, as such, makes known the capacity of inarticulate bodily action to semantically mean something in excess of what spoken forms of language say; this point means that there is another possibility of bodily movements, gestures, and actions that are not quite captured in terms of their traditional semantic meaning because they are not simply an experimental language but an experiment at the edge of semantic meaning and non-semantic excess (that is to say, they are movements that have no natural or resting meaning).

utterance wherein “the act would be identical with the utterance of that act; rather, it produces an asymmetry which is “the *excess* of utterance with respect to statement” (2003, p. 53).<sup>31</sup> The unique significance of the utterance, for PSA, is not just in its intelligibility or communicability (its constative and communicable function), but the fact that the performative has the property of subverting the opposition between referentiality and self-referentiality. This point means that the function of communication, in the right circumstance, is not just a mere saying—of referring oneself to others, a felicitous self-referentiality (Benveniste, 1973, p. 236). Rather, it is a self-referencing that functions to not only communicate itself but also at once refers “to a reality that it itself constitutes”, a reality that is excessive in so far as it subverts the oppositions between referentiality and self-referentiality and exceeds the reality of language (Ibid). This is how we come to appreciate that the unique moment of a performative utterance is in this subversion: what the utterance refers to is not language as a system of intentional or communicative meaning, but rather, one that always exceeds the terms of its own reference and sustains itself through this asymmetry.

Where conventional communication is concerned with the exchange of statements—the production of a symmetry between referent and meaning—the utterance of the performative is unique in the fact that it is in excess of the statement it is speaking about. This means that, for Felman, it comes to produce a sort of referential residue; it is in this sense that the performative is distinct, not *just* referring to itself, but to a “performative excess” of itself that creates an *asymmetry* between meaning and reference (2003, pp. 53, 56) . This is the distinct shift, or “festivity”, that Austin brings into the world of communication. Namely, when a performative utterance acts it is by virtue of an *excessive* self-referential capacity *internal* to the possibility of communication “in that it denominates the act performed”; critically, however, this

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<sup>31</sup> This, in the final analysis, would be the aim or “promise” of deliberative democracy.

enunciation *is not* equivalent to a statement about that reality (the act performed) (Benveniste, 1973; 2003, pp. 53, 70–71). Thus, previously, where communication is defined via a certain symmetry between referent and meaning—communicating the meaning of a reality beyond itself—the performative utterance is excessively self-referential in that it “refers to a reality that it itself constitutes” (Benveniste, 1973, p. 236). In this account, linguistic performativity exposes how the possibility of language communicating meaning—the power of communicating oneself—stems from the fact that the reality referenced to is itself produced by language and has its *own* language effect: language makes itself part of what it refers to and not only refers to itself but something more (Felman, 2003, pp. 51–52). It is in this manner that PSA alters, and subverts, what language does when it speaks; it not only creates an authoritative and meaningful world, but it is excessive in its creation of this world. Paradoxically, as speech acts, it makes the distinction between speech and action less determinable than is supposed by unintentionally blurring the distinction between what or who is acting by transmuting the effects of action into “language effects”.<sup>32</sup> Thus, according to Felman, performative action is felicitous precisely due to this force whereby language becomes self-referential, subverts its

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<sup>32</sup> Langton, notably, points out that, for Austin, “*all* speech acts are actions” and yet Austin’s approach “does not help us to distinguish conduct from speech” (1993, p. 297). As such, “actions, whether speech or conduct, can be protected or unprotected by law” and so “if there is a line that divides speech from conduct in the law, it does not divide speech from action in Austin’s philosophy” (Ibid). What occupies Langton here—in his discussion of whether pornography is a kind of action—is the potential for actions to be protected or unprotected by law. The example he brings forth is “expressive conduct” such as libel, which is protected and yet, even in the court ruling protecting this conduct, it is noted that “the trouble with the distinction between speech and conduct is that it has less determinate content than is sometimes supposed” and, further, the supreme court has not argued for such a distinction because “any particular course of conduct may be hung almost randomly on the ‘speech’ peg or the ‘conduct’ peg as one sees fit” (Tribe, 1988, p. 827). Thus, while Langton says “speech-act theory gives some grounds for being dubious about the distinction” between speech and conduct he does not give us a sense as to why: should we be dubious about the ability of speech to convey or, indeed, protect, the meaning of conduct, or should we be dubious about a notion of conduct that is separate from speech (1993, pp. 297–298)? As we will become clear, dubious as all the distinctions are, the meaning of language—its power of inscription—rests upon this ability to delimit the force of conduct that may be *something* other than what speech intends it to be: what concerns us in this chapter is the extent to which language’s doing, its conduct, exceeds itself and its own “language-effects” such that what is done (or denominated) is not that of language’s doing alone but a broader haptic force that language (or performative speech) gives name to.

communicable function, and thereby effects something significantly by modifying the real itself; as such, the force of the performative lies in referring to a world that it itself creates, a non-semantic world over which it claims authority and gives meaning (this is the insight Derrida tries to bring to bear in looking at performative utterances in writing).<sup>33</sup> Going forward, to sketch out the gravity of the body, we are to figure how linguistic performativity not only ushers in how the question of force operates within language, but, crucially, shifts the locus of what/who has the potential to modify the meaning of what we are communicating. In this manner, if linguistic performativity is notable in attempting to undermine the word/act distinction—showing how words referring to themselves do something in excess of communicative speech—the greater significance is in showing how acts unaccompanied by, and divorced from, words effect language and the meaning of political communication. Linguistically, PSA gestures to both the presence of that which exceeds it, and, as will be shown, an inability to convey the full weight of those things which are meaningful beyond being a “language effect” (or an effect in language).

### Derrida: Performatives Written Out Loud – Speaking Intentionally

To develop this latter point we are to come to answer the conundrum that linguistic performativity fails to figure: namely, if its force comes from its excessive self-referentiality—from the incorporation of the non-semantic into language—how, on the one hand, can the body fail to be signified and, on the other, still be politically impactful? Here, if the communicative function of language, as a vehicle for deliberation, shades in how the meaning of politics and being political comes to be shared, linguistic performativity makes apparent how the

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<sup>33</sup> The relevance of contrasting the PSA as a written contra bodily act will become clear soon, but suffice to say that, for Derrida, for the spoken word to have performative force it must “must be subject to a logic of iterability that belongs to the transposability of the written word” (Butler, 2003, p. 114; Derrida, 1988). This transposition from written intention (Derrida) to the bodily speech (Felman) allows us to understand how bodies can be excessive in—and indeed, *between*—speech and writing. Making this clear is to underline the point that if the “speech act “says” more than it can ever intend or know” it is because of its lack of sovereign (or intentional) authority over the body (IBID).

communication of meaning can only occur within the context of its organic foundation of the body, something that delimits the sovereignty or authoritative meaning the speech act claims for itself. In this sense, the body is not internal to the referential world of the speech act, but must, in some sense, be contextual and surround it in so far as the utterance of the speech act happens surrounded by the context of non-uttered action (a non-semiotic exchange which is given meaning through the retroactive power of the performative utterance itself). Here, if we walk through Derrida's analysis of communication, situated in a written modality, we are brought to Felman to extend Derrida's thoughts about performative communication beyond the body of writing to the body of speech. For Derrida, "for a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written"; writing, as such, has an iterative structure "cut off from all absolute responsibility", from consciousness, it is "orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father" (Derrida, 1988, p. 8). Thus, for Derrida, a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context at the moment of its inscription; the possibility of communication results from the force of the rupture that gestures towards the endless possibility of grafting that which can never be entirely enclosed by the governing context—in sum, the written mark must exceed the author's signature in its referential capacity (1988, p. 9).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> As we will see (via Felman), while it is the absence of the referent that constitutes the possibility of writing's performative character, in speech what makes performative utterances interesting is that they are opaque to their own intention, that is, the governing inscription is underwritten by the possibility that it is other than what the author intended; significantly, the performative utterance blurs the domains of oral-contra-written communication. Thus, if a written sign "is a mark that subsists, one which does not exhaust itself in the moment of its inscription and which can give rise to an iteration in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it", the potential failure that is immanent to performative speech means that while oral "communications are supposed to confine themselves to the element of a determinate, "natural" language", they may fail to do so, and this failure may subsist beyond the moment of its utterance (1988, p. 9). In short, their unintended effects may be disseminated as signs beyond what is spoken of and thereby muddy the whole field of intention in a manner that is, strangely, *anti*-logocentric.

In this, writing is marked by an absence of a determinate signified, that is, the original intention of communication—in this way the written text has lasting meaning, outlives the governing inscription and intention of the author. Thus, for Derrida, what writing marks is difference such that there is no (linguistic) “economy without *différance*, without supplementation, without division” (Ormiston, 1988, p. 44).<sup>35</sup> This is what makes spoken language and interlocution a positive possibility; the spoken utterance becomes possible due to its “capability to be formed and to function as a reference that is empty or cut off from its referent” (1988, p. 11). As such, for Derrida, language—as a system that communicates intentional meaning—is plagued by its separation from its paternal meaning, that is, the consistency of its words. To clarify the placement of paternal here, Derrida notes that in so far as writing is “orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father” it is this orphaning, which gives writing its “drift” as an iterative structure, and is what opens writing to subverting consciousness (Derrida, 1988, p. 8). This subversive character—as we will see as we turn to Felman and how the body (rather than author) acts within the PSA—is precisely that which performative speech emblematises. Namely, how the scandal of performative speech is that of *failing* to keep a promise that reveals “the discontinuity between intention and act”, and welcomes a “rupture and [...] gap between paternal consciousness and paternal performance” (Felman, 2003, pp. 23–24). Iterability is thus

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<sup>35</sup> It is at this moment that we come to Derrida’s distinction between difference and Derrida’s own “neographism” of *différance*; this concept, to be clear, “is literally neither a word nor a concept” but rather that which “seminal dissemination” that “cannot be comprehended” (Derrida, 1982, p. 3; Ormiston, 1988, p. 44). Differences, for Derrida, thus are “produced”--deferred--by *différance*”, the always-already “supplement of (at) the origin” (Derrida, 1973, p. 88, 1976, p. 313; Ormiston, 1988, p. 44) . The sign thus comes to be that which “represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence” (Derrida, 1982, p. 9). The point is that “*différance* interrupts the play of supplementarity at the scene of play, the play of nominal concretion or representation, the *play itself*” such that “the mark of *différance* (is) becomes self-effacing” (Ormiston, 1988, p. 44-n. original emphasis). The point of marking this self-effacement—the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay”—(through Felman) is to bring this silent writing into its organic counterpart, that is, the silent forms of action that efface the power, or logocentrism, of the whole discourse of speaking (this, in a way, is the whole concern of ‘Chapter IV’, showing how inarticulate bodies write silently, in ways that speech does not yet capture) (Derrida, 1973, p. 88).

the result of the separation of writing from the authority of consciousness (Derrida), that reveals the potential failed “promise of [...] a relation of consistency and of resemblance of son to father, of sign to its referent” (Felman) (2003, p. 24). This is exactly what the performative’s excessiveness comes from, the asymmetry between statement and utterance and the lack of an absolutely intentional authority that governs linguistic meaning. The point is that this lack of, or rupture within, intentional authority is what allows the performative to refer to a reality that it itself constitutes (that is, mean anything at all). To come to the edge of Derrida’s argument, and clarify Felman’s, we are to turn towards the significance of intention within performative speech. Doing so will allow us to understand how, within a haptic and bodily rather than written context, the ground of transposability or iterability is the potential of *failure* (not just meaning) that may outlive the author’s intended governing inscription, as that which means something other than what the author who uses language—or makes speech do things (act performatively)—intends.

Accordingly, for the performative utterance to have force it must “be subject to a logic of iterability that belongs to the transposability [of] the written word” (Butler, 2003, p. 114). The essential problematic for Derrida—that stops Austin shattering “the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept”—is that the context of the speech act becomes defined with regard to cognitive intention, becoming intended to effect “meaningful speech” and therefore to become master of itself (1988, p. 13). As Derrida puts it, “the teleological jurisdiction of an entire field whose organizing centre remains intention” (1988, p. 15). Significantly, Derrida situates the capacity of failure or infelicity as an accidental and exterior risk to the speech act whereas Felman moves us to considering how this is an internal possibility within the utterance of a performative speech that results from its embodied character. Transposing PSAs from a written to a spoken context allows us not only to elucidate what Felman names “the promise of the performative” but also how the potential of failure is

*internal* to, and constitutive of, the sign *because* of the *disjunctive* relation between word and deed, speech and body (Felman, 2003, p. 24).<sup>36</sup> This point—highlighting how performative felicity is possible only because the performative is always liable to fail—thereby allows us to consider how the field of the performative is not governed by intention but is constituted by the possibility of (or necessity of) intention failing, that is, the iterative structure of intention itself. Thus, where Derrida sees writing as cut off from paternal meaning—a point that opens us to challenge the “concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept”, a challenge Austin forecloses due to his focus on intention—Felman, in contrast, says that this metaphorical promise of paternity (the promise of a proper meaning and of a proper name) is exactly what cannot be promised by performative speech (1988, p. 13; 2003, p. 25). This is due to the performative’s inability to simply be self-referential, and yet, paradoxically, this excessive inability to refer to an intentional consciousness (itself) alone is what makes the performative utterance possible. Moving forward with this transposition—from the structure of iterability that governs written communication to that of embodied communication—allows us to note, via Felman, how linguistic performativity actually refers to a twofold inability of language: 1) to be constitutive of the political subject and; 2) able to contain the force of the body within its own terms. Here, by moving to Felman, we are to appreciate that the excessive capacity of the performative is enabled by the iterative structure of general communication. Further, we are to note how the capacity of failure, both of speech act and intention, is one that is internal to performative speech because its self-referential capacity is situated in an embodied context and must, thereby, always refer to a non-semantic body in a foreign tongue, as a language effect. This latter point, as will come clear, refers to

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<sup>36</sup> In this manner, it may be that Austin does open the gates to shattering “the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept” but not in the manner that was intended (Derrida, 1988, p. 13).

the inability of language to figure how bodies/acts divorced from words can be impactful and forceful in spite of not being a language effect.

### Felman – Performatives and the Promise of Failure

Turning to Felman allows us to note that Derrida's concern is with the *aim* of performative speech in written text—which is, more accurately, a concern with how performative action becomes inscribed to mean what it intends, to do as it says. However, what Felman brings us to is the realisation that what actually marks performative utterances is the failure to do as is intended, to subvert intention, within oral communication (rather than their ability to act intentionally). For Felman this failure becomes implicated in a logic of “scandal and tragedy” (this is what performative utterance bring to language), but, for us, in a political register, what we are to recognise is how this actually exemplifies the inability of the speech act to capture the act it speaks of, to account for the force of the act it emanates and draws significance from (2003, pp. 64–67). Noting these steps will allow us to bring Derrida's concern—of the potential of performatives shattering the concept of simple semiotic communication—towards a context whereby, because of language's organic bodily foundation, the capacity of failure is not an exterior part of speech but its enabling *and* limiting condition. Felman, following Derrida, notes that what is remarkable is not simply how the performative utterance is governed by intention, but the logic of promising that the performative entails, that is, the promising of an act, of producing the event that the words designate (2003, pp. 4–7). Here, akin to Derrida, the significance of a performative is to intend to do something and by means of the utterance carry out this promise. For Felman, extending Derrida, the performative promises the constancy of intention, “a continuity in time between the act of commitment and the future action” (2003, p. 20). Above all, Felman notes, the PSA is marked by what it promises to do, yet what makes it distinct is not being governed by intention but *failure*.

For Felman, the performative is scandalous to the degree that the performative is constituted by the capacity of missing, producing misfires, or, in Derridean terms, missives—what guides it here is not intention alone but the capacity for intention to miss, to not do as it promises but do something else, to enact difference, not only the alternative between referentiality and self-referentiality but also its own consciousness (2003, p. 29). Thus, where Derrida saw the performative as complicit with a metaphysics of presence, within the context of Felman—understanding the performative as an act of oral communication—it is marked and constituted by its inverse potential, to miss and act un-intentionally. Its iterability is not constituted through a founding absence of the referent (Derrida) but the possibility of subversion, to break the vows of its own author: as Felman puts it, “the scandal consists in the fact that the act cannot know what it is doing, that the act (of language) subverts both consciousness and knowledge (of language)” (2003, pp. 33–34, 67). For Felman, in so far as the performative is self-referential it equally has a self-subverting potential; here, the potential for the speech act to have an “unhappy ending”—here the capacity for the failure is “situated *within* the act” (2003, pp. 43–45, n. my emphasis). Paradoxically, and in contrast to Derrida, for Austin, the internal possibility of the performative failing is what actually constitutes the possibility of its iterability (Felman, 2003, p. 46). Here, Felman allows us to consider the failure/risk that Derrida saw as external, in the case of written performatives, as an internal risk—but why, what makes it so? In answer to this, we are to come to see how the performative *power* of PSA’s results from the performative’s *inability* to be constitutive of the political subject and contain the force of the body due to speech’s embodied character.

### Speech’s Organic Foundation – Tongues Speaking of Foreign Bodies

To make these points apparent—and to usher in the impact of a body that is not present within speech—we turn to what Felman’ terms the “organic condition” of speech, its embodied character, that is, consideration of speech as a bodily act (2003, p. 115). Here, where Derrida

pointed us toward the intention of speech Felman turns us to the body, and makes it apparent how “even as speech claims to represent a cognitive intention—a promise”, it cannot circumvent its organic, bodily, condition at the moment in which it appears to represent an intention (2003, p. 115). Felman’s focus on performatives within oral, not written, communication pushes us toward the organ of speech, the tongue; here the self-referential capacity of performative utterances actually brings us to the fact performatives indicate that there is no longer a simple opposition between language and referent (2003, p. 50). Therefore, as discussed, language makes itself part of what it refers to, it makes substance an act—it is in this sense that statements are excessive, they involve force that modifies reality *through* language effects, the referent is no longer a thing referred to via signification, but a signifier that does things itself (2003, p. 52). It is here that PSAs raise the question of the limit of language; as Austin notes, and Derrida underemphasises, this self-referential, excessive, and modifying capacity of a performative utterance constitutes its capacity to remain “unconsummated” and fail, that is to say, breach its own promise of acting through speech alone. Yet, as Austin notes himself, “failure [is] not a simple act of negation being void and without effect, it doesn’t mean we haven’t done anything” (Austin, 1975b, pp. 15–17; Felman, 2003, p. 57).<sup>37</sup> Significantly, this failure of the act of promising, of speech doing what it says, “opens up the space of referentiality” through the “enactment of difference” because “something else is done” than intended; *in absentia* of intentional illocutionary force we have an *unintended* perlocutionary effect that, in reference to Langton, is not simply subordinating (that is, silences illocutionary effect) but raises the question of language’s own limits (Felman, 2003, pp. 57–58; 1993, p. 305).

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida perhaps over valued the position of intention with the performative utterance; this is because the capacity of failure internal to performative speech points us toward the wider failure of intention and the inability of language to actually communicate reality fully (without reference to some absent something, some unintentional excess that may actually fail language itself).

Crucially, the performative utterance does not simply project its own intentional subject or self but actually signifies the limit of language—the fact that not everything is language or communicated by language. Significantly here, what is communicated is the fact that the act still does something, but *not* what is intended, and this is because the “myth of consciousness”—as that which governs communication or intention—“falls flat” (Felman, 2003, p. 34). As Felman puts it, “if language[s] are tongues, tongues are bodies—and as bodies they are deaf, and foreign to each other.... they are intrinsically incapable of hearing, of understanding, one another” (Felman, 2003, p. 59). In this way, for performatives to mean what they say and keep their intention relies on the ability of meaningful semantic communication to express and ‘do’ the non-semantic elements of a world that it, itself, constitutes. In turn, this ability rests on the promise that what they refer to, the non-semantic elements of the world, must be unspeakable in themselves. Here, the body, its non-semantic gestures and movements, only exists as a foreign presence that is referred to and speaks *via* the semantic body of language.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, if performatives are effective in a communicative and deliberative sense it is *because* they miss themselves and their own organic functioning within a body which is foreign to itself. What they thereby raise is the question of language’s “power to comport the body” in the way that it decides or intends to alongside the question of the effect of non-semantic elements on the PSA (Butler, 2003, p. 118). Here, where Felman helps us situate the performative within the wider context of its foreign relation to the body and the radical potential for unintended effects that this makes known, we are coming to the limit of linguistic

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<sup>38</sup> To be clear, semantics refers to “the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences” (Yule, 2010, p. 112); the point, and this is perhaps what occupies Derrida, is the fact that the focus on the meaning of words excludes the consideration of non-semantic elements, that is, meaning independent of the structure of signification: it is, as a result, a focus on the meaning of words *qua* words rather than that of the interaction of semantic and non-semantic *within* words/beyond their frame of reference/meaning (here we can think back to footnote 32 about the speech/conduct distinction). What Derrida thus raises as a legitimate concern is the ability of language to speak or communicate about non-semantic elements, aspects of speech that are cognised as semantically meaningful. Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, computer code is the closest linguistic analysis that seeks to directly talk of non-semantic elements—those which tell us nothing about their content—within the meaning of code itself.

performativity due to its emphasis on inscription and general need for legibility. As will be seen, this is a need curtails appreciation of the full potential of how acts are forceful beyond the world of language, how, without meaning to or intending to, the non-semantic elements of the performative utterance impact language forcefully.

### Inscription: Meaning and Power – the Failure of Performative Force

Moving forward, what limits the radical potential of thinking of performativity in linguistic rather than haptic terms is the criterion of legibility or inscription for the act to be performatively felicitous. Where Felman exposes how the performatives gestures towards the limit of language she also reveals how performatives come to be consummate (that is happy) with meaning and power. As she says, “the performative act is a sort of writing on the real... *there is no act without linguistic inscription*” (Felman, 2003, p. 64, n. emphasis added). Here we have the end, or telos, of the performative when considered linguistically: Where Austin was interested in the force of the utterance, how speech does, Felman translates this into a concern with how performatives (un)intentionally become inscribed and, thereby, ends in being meaningful and powerful (that is, semantically meaningful and thus communicable). If the residue of the performative’s energy comes from its excessiveness—its capacity to modify reality—and constitutes its force, it becomes clear that the subversive potential of performative utterances become incorporated into communication and become equivalent, to and neutralised, as meaningful. In an ironic twist, what linguistic performativity (unintentionally) reveals is that what makes the performative utterances meaningful (in language) is the *lack* of their subversive potential, which, in the first instance, constituted their unique force and excessive character. In this last instance, what makes performative analysis meaningful is that it “explore[s] acts *as* language effects” (and, thereby, reduces the force of the utterance—as something which exceeds language’s own terms—to the meaning of semantic communication) (Felman, 2003, p. 64). The critical question here is whether this is all that becomes apparent

within the PSA. Significantly, what Felman reveals here is the tendency of linguistic performativity to understand the performative's passage from force to meaning; namely, the capacity of performatives to self-referentially inscribe themselves such that the full force of the act, its organic foundation, is captured within the matrix of speech. This is perhaps why, if Derrida focuses on performatives in a written context, his is a concern with how failure is made external to the intention of the speech act itself. In this sense, what is revealed in the passage from Derrida to Felman is that linguistic performativity's interest is, in the last instance, in demonstrating the power of language (or understanding acts *as* language effects) rather than noting the wider potential of language to fail to contain the force of bodily action: in this way both are wedded to showing how the bite of performatives—their potential to subvert communication and intention—becomes neutralised in being equated with semantic meaning. To clarify, what gave linguistic performatives political potential was their ability to do things in excess of the simply saying something (to refer to something or some doing outside of language). Yet this subversive potential is wedded to construing these doings as language effects such that as the power of performative speaking becomes apparent, equally, the excessive force of the deed that beyond language, becomes reduced or inscribed *as* a language effect. How then can PSAs do justice to the force of those deeds that are forceful beyond language or language effects, and do something more than what language says?

PSAs do not simply communicate an intentional meaning, but a meaning inscribed; they therefore reveal the broader structure of meaning in language, something that comes into being through the reduction of force into power. In this manner, if the act has meaning/gains specificity and uniqueness through inscription, through being written into language, this is just one side of what the act does, or is liable to fail at doing; namely, in the moment of inscription there is a question of what force does the act have beyond its inscribed meaning and in what ways does this absence become felt (in essence the concern becomes, how does the inscription

of action fail)? Thus, irrespective of the medium, written or oral, analysis of the significance of performativity is circumscribed by the teleological end of performative utterances being meaningful and powerful due to their linguistic constancy (their semantic meaning) rather than their haptic force (non-semantic effect). What is at stake here is the shifting of authority: regardless of the conclusions of Felman, speech acts performatively because of language's general *incapacity* to contain the force of bodily action (that is to say, the ability for language to do as it says depends on the fact that bodies and deeds exceed the performative's semantic field). The power and meaning of language comes from reducing the subversive force of the non-semantic world, this is the operation of censorship that the PSA makes obvious.<sup>39</sup> In this analysis, the meaning and power of language is thus produced by the force of a reality that lies beyond referential capacity; what gives language power is the force of the body—language's organic and embodied foundation which cannot be spoken about or circulated directly. Here, what language speaks of in the moment of the performative utterance is precisely this: that “something *happens* between tongues”, between bodies of discourse, meaning and non-meaning, something is happening here that is exceeding this moment and the incumbent referential field, this is what the speech act speaks of (Felman, 2003, p. 59). This is what is productively, and ironically, revealed through linguistic performativity (its only self-referentiality referred to by a presence that is not of its world, it speaks of a body that speaks in a foreign tongue as something other than a language effect). While this is what linguistic performativity makes known—that action exceeds speech, acts beyond it in a manner that is forceful before it is inscribed—this is what makes it equally ill-equipped to conceptualise action in terms of its haptic sense. This is due to it always seeking to equivocate action's force

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<sup>39</sup> This focus is exactly what Derrida was interested in, namely the absence in the sign as a grammatical criterion that constitutes the sign's referential capacity; in a certain sense, here Langton's discussion of conduct contra speech is perhaps a laying bare of the whole “force of the law”, that is, the way speech actively enforces its own self-constituting and “mystical” authority (Derrida, 1992; Đokić, 1998).

as meaning, a language effect, rather than something that is definable precisely due to its effect *beyond* language; that is to say, action's dual position as proto-linguistic, and non-semantically forceful.

### Actions Beyond Language – The Force of the Body

This, it becomes apparent, is the limit of language generally and that of the PSA specifically, namely, the inability of language to figure how silent acts, or bodies divorced from words, can nonetheless be impactful and forceful beyond language, that is, be meaningful beyond the terms of “language effects”. It is by moving forward from this implication, the inability of language to be constitutive of the political subject in its full modality—language's capacity to refer to its own limit and therefore its inability to contain the force of the body within its own terms—that we are to consider the place of the body and the acts it conducts beyond the signification of language. Thus, while previous analysis is engaging to the degree that it traces the passage of action's force towards its inscription into the power of language (the translation of non-semantic absence into semantic presence), we are to look to the wider implication: namely, that, what it actually gestured towards is the body's ability to affect language from a position beyond language's own referential field, and, crucially, this is a capacity which *is internal to* the possibility of language being significant, meaningful, and active in the first instance. It is in this way that, just as the felicity of performative speech rests on the ability to incorporate and circulate the body *as* speech, this possibility is constituted by the acts of the body demonstrating the limits of language, that is, the possibility of the body being a force that disassembles the homology between acts and deeds that assembles within speech. This speaks to the wider inability for the action of speech alone to guarantee the meaning of, and communicate about politics, that is, the inevitability of the performative to fail to speak of its organic function, the body(ies) to which it refers. Moving forward, where linguistic performativity was concerned with the meaning of speech acts *per se*, we are considering the

force and gravity of the body and its actions beyond the speech act. This involves a turn towards the residual energy that carries over and cannot be captured by the moment of the performative and which, paradoxically, constitutes the meaning of speech, the fact that speech's action is constituted by the meaning that is exscribed beyond it (the process of exscription will be more fully explained in Chapter III).

### Uncivilised Bodies in Speech

Having established how the felicity of performative speech rests on a body that remains unspeakable within the act(ion) of speech we come to the broader political concerns, the limits of language to semantically—that is, meaningfully—represent the body politic and its variegated demands. In having characterised the place of the body in language, we are to turn to that situation of the body *qua* language and set up the concern of the third chapter, accounting for the force of bodies beyond signification; doing so brings us to Lyotard to characterise the nature of this dispute, or differend.<sup>40</sup> In this manner we are to figure the presence of the incommunicable as the locus of political potentiality—as something that becomes potentially political in so far as it able to change the meaning of political life—and grasp the passage of *how* the body moves in/through/beyond words; that is, our focus is to understand how the body *gives* weight to the speech and regime of representation through its passage beyond the intention of language. To set up this inquiry—that will be carried through in the third chapter—

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<sup>40</sup> To be clear, as is expressed on the next page, a differend is something that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments; where Différance is the deferral that gives birth to difference, the differend for Lyotard, is that which results from the lack of a “universal rule of judgement between heterogeneous genres” (1988, p. xi). The differend thus is the result of heterogeneity, between genres (Ibid, p. xii). The differend, for Lyotard, is distinguished from litigation, the latter being an attempt to settle a differend (something which cannot be settled universally) and thereby results in wronging one side of the dispute; as Lyotard says, “in effect, the differend is not a matter for litigation; economic and social law can regulate the litigation between economic and social partners but not the differend between labor-power and capital” (Ibid, p. 10). Thus, Lyotard’s concern is with giving “the differend its due is to institute new addressees, new addressors, new significations, and new referents in order for the wrong to find an expression and for the plaintiff to cease being a victim” (Ibid, p. 13): see also footnote 41.

how exactly do we characterise the position of the body in the PSA *qua* language and the more general exchange of communication that constitutes the general action of political speech? Significantly, Lyotard allows us to realise that the peculiarity of performative speech acts does not refer to a specific oddity *within* language but a more general problematic that occurs *between* discourses, languages, and tongues. At the broadest level, this oddity refers to the inability of language to manifest or “grasp” the reality it represents or speaks of. What we are to work towards is thus this open inarticulate spacing between tongues. In working through Lyotard, we are to expose not just the concealment of action within language, but how the body opens the space for dialogue between words and deeds, articulate subjects and inarticulate actors and spoken forms of action and non-uttered, mute, acts (exactly what is foreclosed by transmuting action into semantic language effects). This possibility of a dialogue *between* discourses, in the last instance, is constituted due to the conflict of phrases *qua* phrases *within* performative-cum-communicable discourse. Significantly this phrasal dispute points us not only towards Lyotard’s observation that language is not at peace with itself but that *this* is what drives language, its *lack* of communicative function, a lack that, paradoxically, leads us into the excessiveness of bodies in political assembly. These excessive bodies become realised through disassembling present forms of speaking or phrasing in such a way as to make possible a dialogue between the haves and have nots.

To clarify how the paradoxical lack in language leads to the excessive force or gravity of bodies who are *not* semantically inscribed we are to now note how the heterogeneity within the PSA opens language to the admission that something other than language means, or does, something. Curiously, in looking to speech that acts (its positive power) we are to touch on the limit of language and understand it as a relation structured by a failure to mean what it says and do what it means. To make these points apparent we are to turn to Lyotard, who says, speaking of discourse, that at stake in dialogue is “is two parties coming to agreement about

the sense of a reference” (1988, p. xii). Critically—and what becomes all too obvious as one traverses the disagreement about the meaning of performative speech in general—there is the lack of a universal rule of judgement between heterogenous genres which gives rise to a differend (something that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments) (1988, pp. xi–xiii). What the differend captures here is what is happening not only within each discourse—as we have been investigating thus far, the discourse of performative speech *contra* constative reality—but what is happening between tongues, bodies and genres of discourse (the concern of Felman). Lyotard’s notion of the differend at once captures the issue seen between performative and constative speech as well as that between the genre of performative speech and performative acts, and more specifically, a linguistic *contra* haptic account of performativity. Within this frame of thought, we have thus far characterised the internal heterogeneity of the speech act to bring out the broader wrong that structures the relation between semantic order and the non-semantic elements within those very orders.<sup>41</sup> In less abstracted language, we are speaking of the relation between bodies who speak as subjects, and those that have not yet been figured within discourse, whose very presence in discourse is defined by this unrepresentable unspeakability within language. What

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<sup>41</sup> As Lyotard defines it, “damages result from an injury which is inflicted upon the rules of a genre of discourse but which is reparable according to those rules. A wrong results from the fact that the rules of the genre of discourse by which one judges are not those of the judged genre or genres of discourse” (vi) (1988, p. xi). A wrong is thus a damage accompanied by the loss of means to prove the damage; what defines the wrong is that it has the “added [...] impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others and in particular to the knowledge of a tribunal” (1988, p. 5). The importance of this, and what occupies Lyotard, and by extension us, is the central question of speech’s ability (*contra* litigation – which applies a single rule for both sides) to settle of disputes *between* orders that do not communicate. Thus, in as much “the “perfect crime” does not consist in killing the victim or the witnesses (that adds new crimes to the first one and aggravates the difficulty of effacing everything), but rather in obtaining the silence of the witnesses, the deafness of the judges, and the inconsistency (insanity) of the testimony”, we are to attest the crime committed by speech whereby the body becomes a victim of language and cannot attest to itself other than by language; wherein it (the body) is always, in some sense, wronged by language in its very testimony which requires we take the meaning of language in good faith (1988, p. 9). This, however, is the limit of the simile because Lyotard’s concern is with “new addressees, new addressors, new significations. and new referents in order for the wrong to find an expression”, yet we are to raise the question not of how “new phrases are to be found” but how bodies can attest to themselves before phrases have been found, who attest to themselves without being admitted into these new rules of formations (1988, p. 13).

we are speaking of here is the moment that language admits that something other than language means something. Here, Lyotard's exposition on the relation of disagreements *between* discourses or speaking orders brings us to the force of the undetermined and non-semantic elements of the body within the speech act so as to clarify *how* the body makes this something occur.

To elucidate this latter point, much as the self-referential quality of the performative reveals the limit of language acting *as* language, it equally brings us to a parallel of Lyotard's point about communication: namely that, what human beings learn through using language as an instrument of communication is that "they are summoned by language.... to recognise that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase" (1988, pp. 18–19). The limit of self-referentially that the performative subverts, meets its non-performative and real, constative, accompaniment in Lyotard's need for phrases that *exceed* what can presently be phrased. Thus, much as Lyotard attributes the performative as being "too extended to be able to designate a specific phrase regimen", he also, unknowingly, extends the insights performative make known onto the general communicative level; both for performative communication, *that does*, and constative communication, *that says*, language becomes underwritten by the paradox of its own promised failure, a failure to always be just itself in communication, a failure to be purely self-referential and constative without pointing to other bodies, and other phrases that are in excess of what can presently be said (1988, p. 143). In this manner performative speech acts illocutionary force is constituted by a referential world beyond the utterance which in turn gives them meaning. This asymmetry (between what speech says it does and what is doing things in speech) is the radical point that Butler's reflections on the historicity of the performative make known; namely that the performative's historicity exposes how performative speech, which references itself, and non-uttered acts, which are not referenced by speech, co-relate to make possible what the performative does. What Lyotard

allows is bringing this relation into a setting wherein constative or “cognitive” language is circumscribed by a world of events and figures that do not yet have a “proper” name; in this sense performative speech acts merely gestures to a general limit of language as a regime delimited by *something* that it cannot, presently, speak of (1988, pp. 49–53). It is in this sense that Lyotard’s point broadens the heterogeneity internal to the PSA—its inability to be simply referential to itself as a form of speech—to the level of communicable discourse and reveals that the body beyond words, the faceless figure, has gravitas precisely because of language’s lack of communicative power (its inability to mean precisely what it says always-already without gesturing to something else, some other doing).

Significantly, what Lyotard typifies as a non-performative issue—of settling phrases in dispute—mirrors the position of the total speech situation: the intentional field that governed the performative utterance is now governed by the non-semantic. This non-semantic governance of intention, within Lyotard’s thought, becomes transmuted into the figures and events that fail to be put into words and yet have significance and force within linguistics and communication, which, in Lyotard’s mind, are *felt* in silence (Crome, 2006; 1988, p. 13). Yet—and this is what Lyotard allows us to develop in relation to Felman—much as performative utterances gain meaning through inscription, the reduction of their subversive content, communication inversely, in an opposite movement, gains meaning due to its open, exposed, manner. The point here is that language communicates meaning only with reference to the fact that within language “things themselves are not grasped, only their images, if things were grasped there’d be no need to phrase” (1988, p. 22). It is here that Lyotard’s observation—unintentionally bringing performativity’s self-referential problematic to the language of general communication and reality—opens up two avenues that guide the rest of this chapter: 1) how felicitous or expressive can semantic representation be if its meaning is constituted with reference to phrases and events that exceed the area of the referential field (that are never

grasped as phrases but something more excessive and weighty), and 2) what does an event in language look like if the possibility of communication—the exchange of meaning—hinges on discourse being open to triviality, residue and excess rather than the meaning that inheres within it; how can we speak of an event if an event, by definition, is that which occurs beyond words and is *improper* to them?

In relevance to the second question, and as Lyotard goes onto say, language is the sign that one does not know the “being of the existent”, it is a sign that imitation is necessary, and yet “you can merely improve the imprint” (1988, p. 23). That is to say, language functions, or settles disputes, through a metalepsis, the shifting of a frontier between two worlds, or, between tongues; however, for this to be possible it appears that “the body needs to be civilised *before* being admitted to dialogue” (1988, pp. 24, 26-n. emphasis added). In this frame of thinking we are brought to question how felicitous—or consensual—language’s representation of the civilised body and its conduct is, or can, be. How, in a word, can the body be civilised before dialogue? Here, Lyotard pushes us towards thinking about what exactly makes the body so uncivilised, and, if language is born by the fact that phrases or events exceed the moment of their utterance—language’s “grasp” or “present idioms”—what hopes are there for the body to presented in dialogue, *irrespective* of it being civilised or not? While these are the questions Lyotard brings us to, his concern is not with the ability of language to grasp reality and civilise the body but precisely the power of negativity that the presence of figures—of phrases in abeyance, and bodies not yet civilised—bring forward to language. Here we are brought to the edge of Lyotard’s concern: the dissemination of the differend, or dispute between phrases, that occurs within society due to these figures, events, and residual energies. The point becomes that, even if within the context of orders that do not communicate in the same tongue—orders which are foreign to each other—there are still phrases in dispute, and this dispute still does something (even if unintentionally). To figure exactly what this faceless doing or something

is, the question becomes, how do we make sense of the (un)civilised body's force? It is here, at the edge of semantic representation that we are brought to the third chapter wherein, through Nancy and Rancière, we give weight to the figure of the body beyond language that stands as a phrase in abeyance and waits to become an event in language whatever *that* would look like.

Now we come to the concern of the third chapter: how do we give form to this formless, unfigured, and nameless bodily mass. Thus, if this chapter has explicated the limits of language, the operation of inscription by the promises that language means what it says, and the paradoxical potential of failure immanent to PSA, we are now to turn to parsing the space of haptic performativity. As such, while this chapter has concerned itself with the force of bodies within language, we now face the task of figuring the force of bodies and acts that do not communicate, but act in excess and in absentia of speech. Doing so will make clear that, if language's power comes through assembling a community of speaking bodies, the force of the body, or bodies, in politics becomes sensible or graspable in its ability to disassemble the spoken narrative and undo the authority of speech. Thus, while we may have clarified that language is structured by a promise of failure—of the potential for inscription to miss the mark and not do what was intended—we now need to give weight to that *something* which is done in the midst of this failure between tongues, namely that uncivilised body that forces itself beyond language effects.

## Chapter III: Signification, Gravitas and Bodily Disorder in Communication—

### Undoing the Narrative of Assembled Community

“A silent yet bodily action is sometimes heard most loudly.” – *Lawy, 2017*

“Unlike saying, doing is always trivial” – *Felman, 2003*

Having figured the limit of how one can be political within a linguistic account of performativity—that is, through the authority of words first and foremost—we are now to give weight to the basis of acting from the position of marginality, from facelessness, *en masse*, through silent forms of political participation. Thus, if the last chapter explicated the limits and paradox of language, we will now usher in the paradoxical implication for political actors, namely that action without voice is inaugural to politics, the *sine qua non* of being political, and it is that which makes space for speaking politically. Therefore, the political actor contra subject is never simply a person of words, but a doer of deeds which, inescapably, fail to stay bound within the community of which they are part; further, these deeds are the actions of the body that occur in absentia of a fully governing ceremonial ritual, code, or law. As will become clear, the haptic effect of the body is its ability to disassemble the deliberative assembly and open the possibility of a dialogue between tongues, political communities, and ultimately, the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, those exploited subjects divorced from the meaning of their own practice. If we have thus far figured how the body moves *in* language’s referential field, this chapter will begin figuring the force of bodies and acts that do not communicate, but act in excess and in absentia of speech.

To make these movements—from accounting for force of the body within language to the force of the body *beyond* language and signification—the chapter will proceed by: 1) demonstrating how the body beyond words has gravitas precisely because of language’s (un)communicative power (Nancy); 2) showing how this negative potentiality widens the possibility of excluded

actors or political figures being impactful politically despite their exclusion from discourse; and 3) laying bare the logic of articulatory enclosure that inscribes the assembly of speaking subjects (Rancière). The implications of the chapter are that, while language's power results from its capacity to assemble bodies in a narrative, the political potential and force of bodies that stand beyond the pale of words is to disassemble the narrative itself, that is, to revolt against the authority of the spoken word and thereby open the space of dialogue within existing narratives of community. In this way, what is unique about understanding the language of politics from the perspective of haptic performativity is that it does not gesture towards self-referentiality—to a past and already existing community of language, as linguistic performativity does—but outward, toward a world open beyond community, a body in common. Thereby, the chapter will be arguing that by thinking through speech haptically we are opening the potential for action that does not necessitate incorporation/integration, that can be forceful *in absentia* of its inscription and assimilation into the world of speech or communicative discourse (forms of action that are not significant on the basis of their homology with speech).

### Nancy: The Corporeal Figure – On Gravity in Language

To begin, we must ask if bodily action, or the body as an event within speech, is expelled *through* speech, where does it go? Here, Jean-Luc Nancy brings us to thinking of haptic performativity as an event or action that opens signification, and the world of speech, to meaning. To think how the force of deeds within speech is due to their expulsion from speech we are to correlate Nancy's thematic of gravity to that of the performances and appearances of bodies in language. This correlation helps us put *to* words a sense of political community beyond the structure of signification, the confines of sensibility as conveyed through a linguistic account of the body. Thus, if we have exposed the speech act to the reality that language is open to an ill of general insensibility (or infelicity), Nancy gives us the *gravitas*

that actions have for language *in lieu* of their incomplete incorporation therein. Before coming to the body, and Nancy's thought of exscription, we must expose how gravity comes to figure in the political community of representable and significant speaking beings. This enterprise begins with understanding the relation of thought to weight. Akin to the performative utterance, this opposition itself is defined by an asymmetry: as Nancy says, "thinking can never grasp weighing", "it [thought] itself cannot weigh up the weight nor can weighing touch thinking" (1997, pp. 75–76). This thought is what emerges in response to the questions, "what is the meaning of the political when all political significations touch on their own insignificance", and, further, what does it mean when political speech is insignificant, silenced and without linguistic, performative, force (has lost its ability to effective to be politically impactful, that is, for speech to do as it says) (1997, p. 36)?<sup>42</sup> Here, the thought of weighing, or thought *as* a weighing, becomes relevant when we consider the possibility of performative/constative speech signifying something while also doing *something else*. For Nancy, this possibility of speech to do something other than what it signifies, is due to the distinctive feature of logos, its capacity to "encounter itself at its own limit... to encounter there that which exceed its significations", an encounter which constitutes the very weight or meaning of those messages conveyed through language: this is the whole weight of thought itself, to think *this* limit (1997, pp. 47–48).<sup>43</sup> Here, in language, signification infinitely escapes itself—at the unsignifiable limit of signification what is imparted to us is a quantity of movement which is the enactment

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<sup>42</sup> Think back to silence and Langton; what does it mean when subjects of politics are given a voice but it is limited in that it conveys meaning—communicates—and thus does not really have performative force, that is, does not really act meaningfully. The question here—between being meaningful and acting meaningfully—is precisely the question that confronted us in the introduction; the scenario where one's political speech does not offer an avenue to change the meaning of what it is be political, that is, the boundaries of a politics in common.

<sup>43</sup> Thus, where Derrida saw intention as a synonym for presence, and Austin saw intention negatively, as something always vulnerable to undoing, Nancy figures itself as a promise (Felman) that opens language to that which weighs beyond it, the non-semantic weight of bodies that exceed their presentation in language: the promise of language thus is its intention to weigh-up something that it does not have.

of difference of meaning (1997, pp. 30, 47). Akin to Austin, this continual logical or (un)intentional exhaustion of signification (or logic of iterability), the undoing of the constative world, “does not imply that all significations will have been null and void. They had their meaning”, or as Austin says in a different tongue; “failure [is] not a simple act of negation being void and without effect, it doesn’t mean we haven’t done anything” (1975b, p. 17; 1997, p. 48). These failed significations are significant precisely because of their failure to signify themselves, to grasp the thing of which they speak, the act which they do; this is the weight of language that thought must weigh to “clear the way” “toward some other significations” that do not convey the empty promise that it is *subjects* alone (and not bodies) that act in speech (Nancy, 1997, p. 48).

As Felman and Lyotard have indicated, the action of language—the act of speaking, phrasing, the doing of language that makes language significant—works through a lack that continuously projects itself: the meaning of speech itself is lacking and this lack unleashes all the figures of discourse.<sup>44</sup> Herein, the possibility of linguistic representation, of speech simply saying and/or acting, is possible *because* of language’s inability to be constitutive of the political subject in its full modality (because of language’s lack of authority over non-semantic meaning, that is, the bodily dimension of the subject). Thus, as we come to think of the force that is carried beyond the meaning of language, beyond the performative’s inscription, what it actually gestured toward is the body’s ability to affect language from a position beyond the terms of its reference (beyond the meaning that constitutes it as a subject of discourse or system of representation). Crucially, this is a capacity which *is internal to* the possibility of language

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<sup>44</sup> One could reference back to how this inverts Arendt’s conception of *vita activa* or the life of political action. This is the point that speech *relies* on reifying action; it is not simply that speech is what makes it possible to speak of deeds, but inversely what makes speech distinct, or possible politically, is the presence of deeds or doings that exceed what language can presently effect. The significance of this is to consider how what haptic performativity gestures to is a different purpose of political action, namely, that of making space for deeds to do things and effect language rather than seeking to understand how deeds are done through language alone (see conclusion for extend more discussion about this point).

being significant, meaningful, and, active in the first instance. Significantly, this negative quality that language passes over to the real world—the world that it cannot grasp without lacking to grasp it—consists of a weight, a weight that cannot be grasped in language as a system of representation or intentional meaning; this weight, as we have explained, is not a “simple negation” but inadvertently excessive and forceful. This is due to the reality that speech acts because it is open to the gravity of the world beyond itself. It is for this reason that actions and deeds (un)willingly exceed the referential field that constitutes their semantic presence within that very self-same world: the scandal of the speaking body is not just its failure to be inscribed (which still happens) but its necessary gravity beyond inscription, its presence beyond the text that speaks of it as a subject of discourse alone.

Thus, paradoxically, what is expelled from speech, or the matrix of significant discourse, are *meaningful* speech acts—it is this expulsion that thought weighs, and language feels not simply as silence but, following Nancy, as a *weighty* silence that testifies to the “power and weight of an unrepresentable” emptiness (Campbell, 2001, p. 63; Lyotard, 1988, p. 79, n. see notice 131; Nancy, 1997, pp. 1, 76, 79). Here, language’s action of weighing finds itself on the limit of its own signification, where, “to sign a ‘we’, an ‘us’ may already seem impossible, far too weighty or light, [as] always illegitimate amongst the living” (Derrida, 2000, p. 28). The body here is that which infinitely resists and is opaque to the transparent meaning and order of signification, of language’s ability to weigh *itself* as language; the body presents itself as that which resists its denomination as something ‘we’ speak about. The body is what fails the intention and promise of the speech act as it refers to itself. It is that something that disassembles the notion that what the speech has said is all that impacted linguistic reality. What Nancy opens us to is not just a language of incorporation—or in his words, “appropriation”—but the reality that the act of inscription is open to the weight of exteriority, the gravity of the body and the force that constitutes it beyond its semantic meaning (or its intentional, logical or sensible, inscription as

a political subject). Where, for Felman, there was no act without inscription—an act of writing which *gave* the act meaning *as a* language effect—this presentation of action as speech is constituted and exposed by the inappropriability of what it appropriates. As Lyotard phrased it, “things themselves are not grasped, only their images” (1988, p. 22). Thus, what Nancy’s thematic of gravity opens is precisely the weight of the body’s resistance to meaning; how, perversely—much as the meaning of communication is due its open and exposed manner for Lyotard—the open and excessive insignificance of the body (its trivial, non-semantic character beyond speech) increases its force that we feel as a weight within politics *due to* its gravity beyond inscription, beyond what is said of it or written about it.<sup>45</sup> Thus, what language is open to is an excess beyond it. This limit—“which [language] lacks access to”—weighs upon language as a force of gravity, a figural body that has force because it infinitely resists its enslavement to intelligence, the order of signification, intention, or the promise of the referential field which speaks *its* name properly (Nancy, 1997, pp. 76, 84).

### Gravity Embodied: Indigestion in Discourse

While this may expose the logic of the process of inscription—as that which *fails* to write into discourse the weight of bodily action, attesting only to its significance rather than reckoning with its political force—how does the general gravity of opaque meaning coalesce and coappear as a corporeal figure? How, in a word, does gravity become corporeal and part of a “haptology” that does not simply proliferate differences but forces a change of meaning without

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<sup>45</sup> The phrasing of triviality is one that Felman imposes upon Austin; for Felman, “Austinian materialism is a materialism of the residue, that is, literally, of the trivial” (2003, pp. 109–110). What makes Austin’s materialism trivial is precisely that it attends to the “*practice* of the singular”; this is, in essence, the enactment of play between centre and periphery through the production of “a decentring effect” in this theoretical space (2003, p. 83). In this sense, what these trivial doings decentre is doctrine: thus, “history, belonging to the order of acts or of practice, is always—however grandiose it may be—made up of trivialities”, here the thematic of gravity asks us to weigh the granular texture of “trivial singularities” that are a composite of the grandiose claims of speech. This is a weighing that welcomes in the “heterogeneity of the Other Stage”, other subjects not named or figured into the “purity of doctrine” (Barthes & Howard, 1979, p. 35; 2003, p. 84).

intending or promising to (2007, pp. 90–91)? Here, what Landes names a haptology refers to this corporealising—a realising—of the weight of the body in the order of signification. Significantly, this opening—of the process of inscription, intention, of the logic of phrases, that the force of the body implicates—is not an opening onto an “abyss of empty thought and chaos” (Nancy, 1997, p. 23). Rather, it is pushing, a forcing to (re)cognition, of the reality that the meaning that this weight of thought “invokes is always on the move” as *something* that happens between discourses, phrases, and tongues (1997, p. 30). Here we “should not side with” thinking of this exposure of inscription as an absence of speech but rather turn our eye to how bodies move through words—between orders and discourses—and are never properly incorporated by them but a subject which slips between tongues and “skids [...] outside the realm of meaning, outside the terrain of knowledge” (Felman, 2003, p. 85; Nancy, 1997, p. 30).<sup>46</sup> Herein, what the body’s gravity or force pushes toward is the thought of a body as a figure of something that happens between tongues; the body here becomes haptologically sensible in becoming felt as that indefinite elsewhere that is displaced by the act of speech itself. While Landes ascribes the significance of Nancy’s haptology—the thought of weighing bodies (of knowledge, of meaning, of significance)—to “the proliferation of differences between sensing”, the wider point is to understand the body as an absent excess that we “commonly share” (2007, pp. 89–91). That is, as a common thought, that “brings us back to the folds” which is, in the last instance, “an ontology bodies open to the production of experience as the interruption of the continuity of sensibility”, of “essential taxonomies” (Derrida, 2005; Landes, 2007, pp. 80, 91). But how and where does this immanent feeling come to be felt, and in what form?

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<sup>46</sup> See footnote 51 for a more expanded exposition on the thematic of sliding, skidding and falling flat, which is an intimate promise of performative speech.

Here, the gravity of thought—the weighing of action qua speech—becomes haptic in so far as it comes to be recognised that, in language generally and the performative speech act specifically, “the body on display is foreign, a monster that can't be swallowed [...] we never get past it” (Nancy, 2008, p. 4). This gravity that Nancy talks of, that which cannot be swallowed, becomes that of the asymmetry internal to the speech act that is shared in common in the act of speaking. Significantly, in a haptic sense, when considering this gravity, the body that acts beyond its proper name refers to a body that “never happens, least of all when it's named and convoked” (Nancy, 2008, p. 4). It is this moment of inscription that Nancy brings us to in order to undo Felman's “writing of the real”—which said that an act cannot exist without inscription. More accurately, this is the asymmetrical moment where the body exists as a trivial weight *in* speech, but, imperceptibly, as a gravitational force beyond this inscription (2003, p. 65). Here, Felman also noted that “the act of failing through which the body's doing always fails to speak itself”—that is, the “body's inherent incongruity”—is what makes bodily action a trivial thing in respect to the “purity of discourse” (2003, pp. 78, 81, 83). Notably, for Felman, this triviality of action that fails but nonetheless does “is that which cannot be generalised” (2003, p. 83). Yet, for Nancy, this incongruity is the way that the body—as that which embodies a gravity beyond words—relentlessly exposes a common exteriority, a spacing, a coappearing of strangers, that “lets itself be touched as meaning right there where it become absent as discourse” (1997, p. 79). It is at this point of becoming absent as discourse—where the body *fails* to be inscribed—where it, the body, manifests as a corporeal presence and a common feeling that blurs the boundaries between “seriousness and unseriousness” and demonstrates “impropriety of the proper”, that is, the inability of language to touch or grasp the weight of the body as it inscribes itself (Derrida, 2005, p. 73; Felman, 2003, pp. 92–97). This impropriety is precisely that of the scandal and political potential of the performative speech act that fixated Felman; the performative is that “untenable promise of giving that which

you do not have” (2003, p. 111). It is this scandalous giving that structures the whole ‘action’ of linguistic performativity, the giving of a body which is improperly incorporated into the political community of speakers; a body which is spoken of but not incorporated in its full gravity. This body, as we will see through Rancière, is one that becomes haptologically felt in an inarticulate and mute resistance that revolts against verifying its equality to others by speech.

The field of gravity becomes corporeally figured and referentially forceful in the form of a body which remains indigestible, unable to be incorporated or assimilated by the “metaphysics of presence” (Derrida), the “history of ideas” (Felman), “the myth of history” (Lyotard) or, “the order of signification” (Nancy). It is, above all, a body that resists and contests the meaning imputed to it by speech. This is because the body is that existent force which does something *elsewhere* in the void when saying fails; as Nancy says, this presence comes to be felt “like a concretion, a thickening [...] a becoming heavy or weighty”, a weighty silence felt in common but insensible in words alone (1997, p. 80). This is the “communication of resistance” of those bodies, who, without speech, act against all sensible meaning, and force the opening of discourse to the performative effects of non-uttered action itself (Nancy, 1997, p. 80). This action is that which itself disassembles the political assembly of speaking subjects even if they “represent the non-communication of a ‘meaning’” (in so far as all they promise is the obstinate “non-delivery” of a message) (1997, p. 80). In this sense, the act within the speech act becomes forceful and present as something with gravitas in politics through its “incomplete”, “aborted”, and “failed”, sense; in this inversion, the body is not definable by its articulatory or orderly presence but by its very resistance to articulation that represents it *in absentia* of itself (1997, p. 81). As such, the body’s resistance is this passage through words that communicates what is *incorporable* within words. What corporealises the body is this incorporable, material, and “weighty point” where the human—or political subject that is represented in speech—“seems to touch on, to come up against some limit” that acts as the provenance for the body of speech

to be. The body here becomes touched upon as an inarticulate mass that bears no meaningful or proper name that is common to speech (1997, pp. 76, 79). It is, properly, a presence that is untouchable within speech but which becomes felt through this very limit of present sensibility, as an event in abeyance, a figure that exceeds present phrasing (Nancy, 1997, p. 81). In this instance, Nancy moves us beyond opposing a semantic/non-semantic criterion within the speech act (Derrida and Felman) and the world of language (Lyotard) wherein the body becomes present to the degree that it is rendered as consummate with speech (this, to reiterate, was the limit of linguistic performativity covered in the first chapter).<sup>47</sup> Crucially, Nancy, by removing this criterion, opens us to the experience of an intimate foreignness and estrangement that is central to the act of speaking. That is, he elucidates “the exteriority to my enunciation” that is central to being a common body politic, that is, a polis *with* gravity, whose words have weight (2008, p. 29). It is in this blurring—of speaking between tongues in languages deaf and foreign to one another—that the resistance of the body in abeyance (existing beyond language) makes the gravity of its presence felt. Crucially, it becomes felt, not as a civilised figure, but as an uncivilised and inarticulate mass immanent to the birth of the cornerstone of politics, speech that acts; the body acts in this space as an intruder that interrupts the consensus of this relation.

### Bodily Resistance: The Passage to an Unspoken Revolt

Now, we must move towards thinking of the body’s force beyond resistant terms. Namely, if the body’s gravity or face is due to it being indigestible to discourse, in what manner can this exscriptive capacity be exercised and make space for political actors without names? In other

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<sup>47</sup> This was, in the last instance, the emphasis which structured the whole of Butler’s account of performative speech and Arendt’s account of the *vita activa*, the tendency to impart the world building capacity of political action to the authority of words (as that which guaranteed the permanence of assembly and space of deliberation where lexis and speech that acts becomes the prime currency of being political); what if speech, however, fails its own promise; what space of politics will this open for those who have not yet been civilised into dialogue?

words, in so far as the force of the PSA, when considered haptically, is external rather than internal to speech act (the PSA, linguistically, only refers to a force that it itself does *not* have but nonetheless promises to give), what form does this above practice take? To answer this and establish how the gravity of action without voice is inaugural to politics and the *sine qua non* of being political, we will put the notion of exscription into touch with a more overtly political lexicon via Rancière. For Nancy, exscription refers to the gestures that are to be made in writing, gestures that point towards an outside, a meaning that resides outside of the written text (1997, pp. xiii–v, 79–81; Nancy & Lydon, 1990, pp. 64–65). As discussed, this occurrence is synonymous with linguistic inscription, and as such there is a double movement: as performative speech becomes linguistically powerful/meaningful via inscription, bodily action becomes haptically forceful in the synonymous moment of exscription. In what way then can we consciously write in this haptic movement of the body—if this enterprise is not self-effacing, what form could it take? Here, by reaching across to Nancy we are to make it apparent how the process of exscription, which, is a process concurrent with writing, happens across the surface or flesh of the body. This dialogue thus opens Nancy to a politics of action *before* the motion of writing and Rancière to a politics that moves away from the foundational criterion of articulation as *the* way of being political. This twofold movement allows us to articulate how the body exscribes beyond written text and, in turn, breaks the bond or promise of spoken performatives that allows the possibility of dialogue without the logocentrism of narrative (or the cardinal authority of the storyteller).

To clarify the above we note how exscription acts as a resistance internal to inscription and therefore make sense of how it can be incorporated as part of politics without being synonymous with inscription (and thereby efface itself as a distinct modality of being political). As Nancy says, “any writing, insofar as it traces out the interior and exterior edges of language is the point where all writing is exscribed” (Malt, 2018, p. 224). In this form, exscription comes

to figure as a “naked writing” where “we exist, we write, only ‘for’ this staggering spillage of meaning” (Nancy & Lydon, 1990, p. 48). The resistant potential of the body to be exscribed and spilled—*as* its meaning is ordered into discourse—becomes a process whereby “this ‘outside’ [is] entirely exscribed into the text”, a moment where writing is exposed and exposes oneself to “not-having” (Nancy & Lydon, 1990, p. 64). In this first instance, exscription is primarily a “withdrawal from signification”, from the promise of politics as that which gives what it does not have (Nancy, 1997, p. 67). How, if exscription refers to a sort of writing, can subjects who are beyond the purview of the text—who, again, are defined by not having an inscribed presence—act inarticulately and spill their meaning in excess of what is said? In so far as “we know nothing about the ‘writings’ or ‘exscription’ preparing to come from these sites [outside of the text]”, how do we come to give collective form to this exscriptive resistance that “passes through writing” in the form of the body that acts as a “word *in excess*”? (Nancy, 2008, pp. 11–13, 19, 21-n. original emphasis). In relation to these concerns, the turn to Rancière helps us put the process of exscription into contact with the haptic performativity of the actions of the social body.

Rancière puts Nancy’s notion of exscriptive presence into the sensibility of the social body, and thereby allows us to understand how the inarticulate comes into politics through inaugurating a division that opens the body of political speech to disorder and thus welcomes a space of dialogue whereby events in abeyance, nameless figures and improper names, can change the substance or subject of the community in which they have place; this, to be clear, is the political potentiality of incommunicable deeds and doings. The need for this becomes evident in so far as Nancy’s thematic of exscription—generative as it is as a way to imagine the meaning and capacity for disassembly that inheres beyond the written text—is always a retroactive capacity (akin to the legislative authority of the storyteller, as seen in ‘Chapter I’). What this means is that, for Nancy, insofar as exscription is coeval with inscription, it does not

allow for a form of action or exscription that occurs before the body is ushered into the text, or the total speech situation; the act of exscription, as an instance of haptic performativity—in so far as it refers to bodies doing things *without* words—requires “the text itself being abandoned, left at its limit” (Nancy, 2008, p. 12). Resultantly, it is a form of action that occurs *after* the establishment of consensus, that is, the world of speech or communication. Thus, while Nancy exposes us to an opening that occurs as an *after*-effect of writing (a residual excess), what possibilities reside for bodies to exscribe themselves before being written into meaning, before the utterance of the speech act? How do bodies that are yet to be written of come to figure as an event within language that makes possible a further opening of the space of political community?

### Rancière – Revolting Against the Cardinal Authority of The Word

If Nancy welcomes us to the opening of the text, its exteriority after the fact of its utterance, Rancière stimulates us to think of inarticulation as the collective political practice par excellence, a practice that, significantly, occurs before the inauguration of speech. To move to this point we must, first, note the limit of Rancière and his politics of articulatory enclosure, the meaning of which will become apparent through the chapter, and will refer to the limits of valuing ‘dissensual speech’ without a consideration of the corporeal haptology that Nancy welcomes in. That is to say, we will look at how dissensus, or the force of dissent, primarily becomes felt as an inarticulate action rather than one that is expressed through speech. To bring us to the possibility of an exscriptive practice before the text of politics we will take the lead from Rancière’s *On the Shores of Politics* (2007): this text allows us to welcome the figure of the boundary as the political question that inheres within the PSA while also typifying the wider scenario of voiceless actors *to* constituted speaking subjects. Herein, as Rancière notes, the end of politics is “marked by a particular employment of time: the promise”; that is, the proliferation of an empty, homogenous time that is nonetheless structured by an excess (or

surplus) that propels the telos of community (2007, pp. 5–9). The problematic here is that the structure of the promise invokes a political community free from division, a community without resistance, whose formation occurs through words alone. In this vision, homogeneity (the linguistic speech act) and division (the actions of the body within the PSA) occupy opposite poles of the social space; translating across, the *something* that happens between tongues is lost as babble, as something *out* of political order. In so far as the promise of politics (which becomes represented *within* the logic of linguistic performativity) is to end division it calls forth a force that is yet to be recognised as a power, and thereby that must gesture to another limit or boundary. Equally, much as the boundaries of the total speech situation were hazy at best, defining the scope of politics, its foundation, becomes an equally futile idea in so far as politics is defined by irreducible indeterminacy (2007, pp. 14–15).

Much like the performative speech act, which is structured by a referential excess or asymmetry that constitutes it, the political community or body politic is an assembly who are made presentable by a surplus (or excess) that allows there to be an assembly at all (Rancière, 2007, p. 16). While Rancière’s focus is on radical democracy (which refers to the energy of this excess), his insights are remarkable in relation to understanding the boundary of the performative speech act itself and the surplus that allows it to assemble politically (as something capable of altering the world). For Rancière, the power of the demos is not because of the law declaring people equal but because the demos hold a “power of division”, a power “to undo all partnerships and ordinations”, and this power, properly, is what is named the capacity to enact a scene of dissensus (2007, p. 32).<sup>48</sup> As Rancière says, the power to declassify

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<sup>48</sup> The scene of dissensus refers to setting “up a ‘disagreement’ between two regimes of sensoriality”, a practice of dissent which “produces the opening of intervals in the midst of subjections” (Quintana, 2019, p. 214). These intervals, for Rancière, act by effecting the distribution of the sensible, and demonstrating new ways of ‘doing’ progressive politics (Tolia-Kelly, 2019). They do this by, 1) exposing inequality and 2) creating “the possibilities of new taxonomies, paradigms, and palettes of sensibilities, determined by the subaltern” that stashes “a community of readers as community without

is the political power par excellence of the “anonymous many”; equally, the performative, even when linguistically considered, derives its power to divide the world of semantic meaning from that of non-semantic nonsense; this is its supposedly emancipatory quality whereby it declassifies constative reality *as* equal to a performative utterance; as Austin says, “what we need to do for the case of stating [...] describing, and reporting, is to take them a bit off of their pedestal” (1970, pp. 249–250). Translating Austin’s point, it becomes equivalent to Rancière’s dictum that the “essence of equality is not to unify” but to undo the supposed “naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division” (2007, p. 33) The point here is not to just draw a textual similarity of terms but to note how the power of the people (as a mass that break the consensus of political order) is synonymous with the political potential, or promise, of the performative (as a speech act that undoes constative forms of speaking). Both are definable in the capacity to institute new divisions, boundaries, and open new limits of what words can do *with* things (the existing, objective or constative, reality). As is all too obvious, the (logocentric) fixation remains on the limits of what words do rather than how the body acts in an inarticulate manner beyond the things that words do. To bring this point forward—how the potential of division that constitutes the whole power of the PSA is a result of articulatory enclosure—we turn to how this linguistic force restrains the possibility of an exscriptive capacity for the nameless masses *before* the speech act itself.

In relevance to this, for Rancière, the essence of equality, that constitutes the *force* of the demos, is not to unify but declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with division that amounts to the “revolt of the ordinal against the cardinal” (Rancière, 2007, p. 32). Equally, Felman speaks of performative speech as nothing other than an act that “destroys the metaphysical dichotomy between the domain of the mental and the domain of the

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legitimacy, a community formed by the random circulation of the written word” (Rancière, 2004, p. 14; Tolia-Kelly, 2019, p. 125).

physical in its inscription”, the “relation between the linguistic and physical body”; here, the performative’s subversive element is that it discovers the radical break between action and knowledge, it is from that breach in knowledge that “the act takes performative power” (and, in reference to Derrida, subverts intention) (Butler, 2003, p. 123; 2003, pp. 65, 67, 101). In this similarity between democracy’s belief in the essence of equality and the performative’s belief “in the principle of equivalence and equality” we can appreciate that, ultimately, the performative act professes a belief in ordinal rather than cardinal authority (Felman, 2003, pp. 22–23). Much as the performative promises what it does not and cannot give—the equality it has with the existing world—equally, the democratic school for Rancière is where “the promise is being broken”: in both instances—of performative speech acts and dissensual scenes—failure is a space whereby a gap of equality between tongues, between orders that are deaf and foreign to one another, is opened. The conundrum that confronts this space of political potential—this revolt against the cardinal authority of constative reality or the established world of political community—is “how are we conceive of the agent of this action of declassification? How to name this agent if still not a class name?” (Rancière, 2007, p. 33).

It is in this phrasing that we find the indigestible limit that the linguistic account of performative speech finds itself articulating when speaking of speech acts and bodies in speech. This is, to be precise, the need to name a subject that keeps undoing the notion of a subject, a subject that keeps reasserting authority cardinal in the face of an ordinal force or revolt of the faceless masses against the referential field of reality. If Rancière manages to give us a political vocabulary for the recurrent limit of linguistic performativity—its tendency to always name the authority that the act itself seeks to undo, that of Proper Names (Lyotard) or constative referents (Austin)—how are we to situate Rancière himself within a notion of articulatory enclosure? Moving forward, while Rancière may be generative for transposing linguistic performativity’s challenge to authority within a political lexicon, the essential problematic

remains: how can the inarticulate force of the masses, the gravity of the faceless figure, act as an inarticulate force *within* political movements and actions? How does this inarticulate movement open this gap of equality between tongues? Here, we are to consider how, in as much as Rancière opens the doors to the revolt against authority, akin to a linguistic account of performativity, his analysis remains focused on the teleological journey of inarticulate acts coming into presence *as an* articulate form of political speech, and therefore a significant form of dissensus or division within sensible reality. Here, Rancière gives the operation by which the performative inscription becomes powerful a much clearer exposition, an operation that works through *articulatory enclosure* and results in the diminishment of appreciating how inarticulate bodily acts carry-on-over a force beyond the political assembly. Further, Rancière helps us make sense of how the bodily disassembling, a doing without words, can be exscribed *before* the text is written (the limit of Nancy). In what has, thus far, been a fairly generative reading of how “democratic intervention consists in the ability with which the non-rulers enable themselves to play the game”—and thus how those who are without merit or possess no referential significance can come to alter their constitutive reality beyond the terms of reference—we come to limits of such a model of logocentric politics (one that remains fixated on speech as the axiomatic point of reference) (Rancière, 2007, p. 42). Namely, much as the promise of democracy is that of a practice that “transforms a groundless claim into its opposite, into a space open to dispute”, its action becomes orientated towards “verifying words” that become “organised like proof” that transforms a “power relationship by means of a practice of logical demonstration” (Rancière, 2007, pp. 47–48). Significantly in this structure, the struggle for equality occurs through escaping “from a minority status” and proving that one is a creature “of discourse and reason, capable of opposing reason with reason and giving their action a demonstrative form” (2007, pp. 48–50). Here, the concern for Rancière is with the entry into politics, an entry that comes forth from the “nether world of inarticulate sounds” which force

themselves into commonality and end in words, the “world of meaning and visibility” (2007, p. 49). In this “forced entry”, this transition from inarticulate sounds to articulate and egalitarian words that *prove* oneself as equal, what happens to the inarticulate bodies who share in politics but act in ways *other* than that of sharing a community of words?

In lieu of the gravity of bodies within the actions of political speech how transgressive is a “world of shared meaning” without its non-semantic shadow, or inarticulate interlocutor? For Rancière, in contrast to Arendt, the inarticulate violence that allows entry into speech is a proof “there is only one world and that one can prove the legitimacy of one’s actions” (2007, p. 50). Yet, while Rancière chides Arendt’s “illusion” of a common language that makes humans heard, how far is this from the illusion that Rancière presents us, namely that of actions that prove their legitimacy *through* speech (2007, pp. 50–52)? Here, there is a sleight of hand, the “inarticulate sounds” that mark the rupture of the exploited into the scene of politics—those “who are separated from the meaning of their own practice”—become a “communal invention of discourse” (2007, pp. 44, 85). This invention “requires an initial breakthrough” to give a name to the “anonymous” that at once requires a re-insistence that “in politics everything depends on a certain founding utterance” (2007, pp. 85, 93). In a word, just as the ways in which the anonymous masses and inarticulate sounds of faceless figures exscribe themselves *into* the political fold, Rancière turns his attention—akin to those who consider the effect of the body in the speech act as a *language effect* first and foremost—to the utterance that is birthed as the inaugural moment of dissensus. It is this utterance, for Rancière, which “creates room for debate”, by “contrasting the inscription of equality with the facts of actual equality”; this dissensus, most obviously is a spoken division that is “only possible inasmuch as it projects the egalitarian presupposition back into the past” (2007, pp. 85–86). This is the logic of articulatory enclosure, a logic which finds its parallel in the linguistic account of performative speech. That is to say, the tendency to retroactively impart words as that which determines the

force of the body within politics, or to impart the political quality of division to articulate speech rather than inarticulate sounds. Rancière makes plain what Butler was talking of in the first chapter, that is, the need for speech to project its equality onto past speech and thereby reinscribe the suppression of silent, inarticulate, and mute forces so as to prove the present equality of speaking subjects qua the authority of past speaking subjects. What Rancière reveals is the degree that for speech to be proved as equal qua speech, it requires presupposing *inequality* of speaking subjects qua subjects without speech. Thus, what this articulatory enclosure forecloses is the possibility of thinking of the continued presence of those inarticulate bodies who have entered into deliberative assembly of speech, and yet, imperceptibly, exercise force beyond the community of which they are part. Thus, if Rancière opens the possibility of seeing how bodies exscribe as a faceless mass *before* inscription—through an inarticulate violence that makes possible the performative ‘scene’ or dispute—what he forecloses is the possibility of inarticulate action *within* speech, that is a haptic sense of performativity that continues even when one is a named and legible subject.

### Enclosure and The Assembled Body Politic

To close this chapter, we will consolidate Rancière’s notion of dissensus—the potential to declassify the existing order/sensible reality—through verification of oneself *as a co-equal* speaking body via other *speaking* bodies as a form of articulatory closure. In doing so, we will see this equality begins in inarticulate manners and performances, but becomes significant politically on the basis of an equality *between* speakers (the verification of equality through speech). As such, as we will show, what drops by the wayside is an attempt to understand dissensus beyond the terms of speech, as an action that verifies its equality with other (speaking) subjects via silent forms of protest. What is occluded then, is understanding forms of participation that do not prove the egalitarianism of speech *qua* speech but of action *contra* speech, protests which are those of inarticulate actors *contra* articulate subjects. In doing so,

we will come to appreciate how the inarticulate becomes a force within political ways of speaking—not at the foundational utterance (Rancière) *or* after the text is inscribed (Nancy). This will usher us into the concern of the fourth chapter, putting this exscriptive performance to the streets of the social body. In relevance to the above, we can close this chapter through seeing how attempts to appreciate the inarticulate sounds and actions of bodies linguistically, as a language effect or founding utterance, is myopic with regards to considering those whose existence is defined by a lack of speech (the exploited “who are separated from the meaning of their own practice”). Notably, herein, Fisher attempts to provide an account of the “performance of dissensual speech”, which, the author claims, is a form of speech acts that reveals “the power of speech to challenge the prevailing consensus” (2017, p. 187). As Fisher says—and which can be taken as a quality attributable to all linguistic speech acts when considered haptically—dissensual speech “can no longer be determined by appealing to the content of the act” (2017, p. 188). In this characterisation, dissensual speech is distinguished from “revolutionary speech acts”, the latter of which suffer from the “problem of borrowed speech”; that is to say, “they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names” (2017, p. 192).<sup>49</sup> In contrast, dissensual speech, or moments of forced entry, are a break from the established and “dominated” forms of speaking, and are unique as they strive “for a displacement of speech itself” that “forces” the production of a new chorography, a new region of utterances” (2017, p. 198). Speaking back to Rancière, this is

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<sup>49</sup> To be clear, Fisher here is talking of revolutionary speech as that which “once characterised earlier epochs of popular insurgency” (2017, p. 188). Fisher contrasts these two forms because he sees “revolutionary speech” (within the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century Marxist proclamations) as disseminating a poetics that it grounded “in its own content”; “while it may be true to say that it ‘articulates the rupture it performs’, its specific performativity stakes everything on an ‘authority it does not yet possess... [thus, the] speech acts of the Manifesto ... are launched in the anterior future” (2017, p. 190; Puchner, 2006, pp. 5, 18). Thus, for Fisher, revolutionary speech acts, despite this self-claimed rupture, are incapable of addressing or “transforming the social base; incapable of transforming once and for all the social foundation of linguistic domination that secretes itself silently and barely noticed into almost every public utterance”—“The emancipatory problem comes down, today, just as it did for Marx reflecting on the failure of 1848, to a problem of language” (2017, pp. 192–193).

precisely what makes the work of division or declassification a political act. This is the fact that it opens the space of politics to *other* meanings, that is, opens inscribed reality to factual reality, and this is what is *so* foundational about utterances that declassify.

However, for Fisher, dissensual speech acts involve a “forced entry” into the prevailing consensual or constative reality, and, therefore, are a “communising act” that “lacks authorisation” but are “felicitous” to the degree that they lay claim “to a peculiar authority” of speaking (2017, pp. 198–199). The question returns, however: what is the nature of this “peculiar authority”, and *how* does it escape the logocentrism that reduces political action to intentional forms of speaking? The problematic becomes clear as Fisher tries to speak of a “mode of speech that lacks all property”, and yet, even in Rancière’s own account, the speaker, they who utter, clearly occupies a privileged, authoritative, and *foundational* position in the space of politics (2017, pp. 199–200; Rancière, 2016, pp. 88–89). Thus, as much as this is the promise of dissensual speech acts—acts that welcome division and a revolt against existing hierarchy—it relies on being an “unlicensed speech, meaning its utterances derive from a place other than that of sanctioned discourse” (2017, pp. 200–201). Yet, it is hard to see how this power can be anything other than of a figure inscribed, that initiates and projects an asymmetry between itself and the inarticulate body that ceases to figure in the speaker. Fisher, here, merely makes explicit what Rancière was saying about utterance being foundational: namely that the “egalitarian moment” of speech—which makes it “possible for one speaker to call across the immemorial silence of inert and dumb matter to another subject in mutual recognition”—is “founded on an egalitarian logic in which appears a subject of equality at the level of speech” (2017, p. 201). Notably, the whole emancipatory promise of such speech—that makes a volatile and conflictual politics possible—is premised on the absence of the inarticulate force of bodies that are not recognised in speech, or, are only recognised in a linguistic sense. Thus, confusingly, the author notes in the same chapter that “given that I have defined dissensual

speech as unauthorised and illegitimate speech it becomes difficult to see how one can speak of it in terms of performatives” (2017, pp. 202–203). The author then recuperates the failure through equivocating dissensus to a moment of parrēsia because “parrēsiastic speech never reproduces or confirms institutional power” (2017, p. 203). The concern remains: is speech the right medium to convey this fracturing power of dissensual performance or do bodily acts actually bring us to some other supplement or exteriority that exceeds the field of intention or *logos*, a something that escapes the assembly of words yet still exists somewhere?

Significantly, Fisher notes how dissensual acts could never really be forms of performative speech due to their lack of authority, and therefore neglect the necessary authority immanent to be able to speak (and speak parrēsiastically) in the first instance. The question returns: as we have seen—in both radical political thought and linguistic accounts of performativity—if there is the need to name a subject that keeps undoing the notion of a subject how much of a fracture or parrēsiastic can these language effects be? If there must, as Fisher notes, be recourse not to social authority as such, but to *logos*, a universal and communising capacity—from which parrēsiastic speech or performative speech gains its authority—how felicitous is it to say that parrēsiastic or dissensual speech “*never reproduces or confirms institutional power*” (2017, p. 203)?<sup>50</sup> Thus, significantly, while dissensus seeks to name a moment where inarticulate subjects open a new space of politics or “a truth that power would rather not hear”, capturing this in terms of speech falls flat (2017, p. 203).<sup>51</sup> Instead, while parrēsiastic speech “does not

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<sup>50</sup> To clarify, Fisher sees parrēsiastic speech as dissensual not because it gestures to a promise of universal reason but, “on the contrary, it ‘creates a fracture’, as Foucault puts it, in the speech situation; the outrage of a supplement and a void where there should only be the fullness of an accord” (2017, p. 203; 2010, pp. 62–63). Notably, in what is otherwise a generative point, Fisher therein dedicates his attention to the origin of authority for causing this fracture (the ritual circumstance that gives it authority) rather than the larger question of how it is that acts which inhere to no formal truth or meaning may still be haptically parrēsiastic or fracturing *in absentia* of these governing rituals.

<sup>51</sup> Here, again, where Derrida saw the scandalous potential of the performative as foreclosed because it promises the consistency of an intention, Felman brings us to the inverse point; “In the eyes of its creator, the [...] performative [...] is, capable above all of the act *of failing*, of missing or of losing

produce a codified effect; it opens up a specific risk”; it also reinscribes the very logic (or *logos*) that excluded the inarticulate *as a* parrēsiastic force in the first place. In this scene, linguistic performativity, despite its political/dissensual potential, reintroduces cardinal authority *ex nihilo* (here the sleight of hand is a trick of God).<sup>52</sup> The point here is to note the confusing application of speech alone as that which declassifies and disassembles the governing order. Further, we must note how, if dissensual speech is “outrageous”, it is precisely because it exposes the scandal of the performative and does so in a way that language cannot capture (at least not without reinscribing cardinal authority, testifying to the limit of its power while projecting its power nonetheless) (Fisher, 2017, p. 203). This moment reiterates that speech gives what it does not have, the body of which it speaks; the outrage is that these scenes expose “a supplement and a void where there should only be the fullness of an accord” (2017, p. 203). This insight reaffirms the point that Rancière gestures to but forecloses, the point that the body acts politically *in absentia* of speech, that is, because of its failure to assemble the force of the subject of which it speaks.

Moving forward, we are to see how linguistic performativity gestures towards the potential of declassification as a communising act of political assembly—opening the space of politics whereby one verifies oneself as a political subject. Now we are to clarify how haptic

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ground, an act itself constituted by the lack of means inherent in falling or skidding” (Austin, 1975b, p. 61; Austin & Warnock, 1970, p. 241; 2003, pp. 44–45). In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that speech’s “reasoning falls flat”, namely because performative speech promises nothing other than the potential of this failure, a falling flat of intentional consciousness, which, *is* the act of the performative itself, the slip of the tongue that performs an inverted metalepsis (and subverts whole intentional authority of consciousness) (2003, pp. 84–85).

<sup>52</sup> Notably Felman, more accurately, describes this as “the habit of ‘playing God’: of [theory] underwriting, by its authority of ‘supposed knowledge,’ the values or theses it proposes” (2003, p. 95). In this light, the scene of dissensus, once it is founded/uttered, is, properly, a scene of pure declassification and pure signifiatory projection concurrently. Perhaps it is this which is actually so “outrageous” about performative dissensual speech, namely that the performative is infelicitous not because of its lack of authority (which it clearly has in excess) but, gesturing back to Butler, *because* it is a “sovereign performative”. The scandal here is that the performative is an illusion of God, an utterance with no heterogeneity between the saying and doing, no excess or energy that constitutes its very excessive or *un-*authorised character that makes it itself in the first place (that is, illegitimate and scandalous).

performativity gestures towards the potential of disassembly by inarticulate bodily acts which open a different space of politics that verifies its equality with other (speaking) subjects not via speech or “language effects”, but in silent forms of protest. To make this clear, and to elaborate on how bodies exscribe in politics—through disassembling the promised equality that speech puts into action—we come closer to articulating how the gravity of action without voice is inaugural to politics and the sine qua non of being political; this is the impossible reality that dissensus speaks of but cannot name properly without foreclosing itself through articulation. Quintana notes that, for Rancière, “emancipation is a rupture with ‘corporeality’ *and yet* the quotidian transformations of bodies inflect the ‘sensory fabric [of]existence’ that is, they affect common life by disassembling the ‘well-ordered’ body “in order to promote *other* configurations” (2019, p. 213). What marks the contorted place of the body in the foundational utterance of politics is precisely that it can open “up a “disagreement” between two regimes of sensoriality” (Rancière, 2009, p. 58). Thus, while Rancière focuses on how the body moves into speech and articulation, its orientation towards the assembly of speech, it equally has a potential to disassemble the space of speech and open its own different space of meaning that cannot properly be articulated in present modes of communication (Quintana, 2019, p. 214). Crucially, though, Rancière forecloses this possibility of the inarticulate actions of the body continuing to be political after the foundational utterance; they, in a sense, are overcome by speech. His account, as Fisher makes clear, means that just as Rancière tries to give a sense of the “sheer weight” of the demos—the mass and gravity of the people as a subject of politics that disorders regimes of sensibility—he reduces this weightiness to a matter that is dealt with by a subject who takes the “wrong in hand” and “addresses it by disputation” (Rancière, 2007, pp. 94, 97). The precise irony and articulatory enclosure at work in a scene of dissensus, or the scene of speech that acts, is this: just as one is to verify words by actions, these actions in turn only become sensible or “political” as language effects, that is, as a body of words. This, we

shall see, reduces consideration of how disassembly characterises the possibility of their being non-uttered forms of exscriptive practice within deliberative assemblies.

Just as Quintana's article *says* its dealing with the subject of corporeality within Rancière's corpus what it actually is concerned with is the "materiality of words" and "the inarticulate voice of suffering and pleasure" (Quintana, 2019, p. 220). This materiality is that which gestures towards how the body can be more than a body, that is, one that is capable of logos and articulate discourse "that can give an account of the just and the real"; here, akin to Fisher, it equally reinscribes the body *within* the domain of logos. Subsequently, just as the body, and the inarticulate acts it brings, are spoken about with relevance to the hierarchies that they challenge, we come to the figure of the civilised body as that which *explains* equality rather than one which enacts it. We have arrived at the teleological structure that Lyotard hinted at, the fact that, in linguistic PSA theory and language generally, the focus is on how "words that can pass through bodies, affecting and altering them", yet we, inversely, have been working in the reverse order: looking at the passage of bodies through words (Quintana, 2019, pp. 220–221). This civilised body, in the last instance, is a body of discourse that constitutes and reinscribes the hierarchy between word and deed, a body whose very equality is premised on the diminishment of its own mute force beyond the pale of words. This civilised body, indeed, projects this egalitarian presupposition back into the past and retroactively imparts words with a cardinal authority which determines the ordinal force of the body. Thus, while corporeality within Rancière begins its focus on inarticulate manners and performances of voiceless subjects its real subject of concern is the equality *between* speakers (the verification of equality through speech); what is foreclosed by all these attempts that seek to give voice *to* the inaugural violence that makes dissensus and performative speech acts possible is precisely the haptic dimension of these moments. What drops by the wayside is an attempt to understand dissensus or performative action beyond the terms of speech, as a disassembling action that does not

verify its equality with other (speaking) subjects via speech, but in silent forms of protest. This confused focus—the asymmetry of concern between inarticulate violence that births the space of politics and the articulate utterance that results from these inarticulate mo(ve)ments—is such that, just as the corporeality of the body is being spoken of, the article ends in a discussion of how “words can pass through bodies, affecting and altering them” (Quintana, 2019, p. 220). The corporeality discussed remains focused on the articulatory power of words rather than the non-articulate force of the body itself beyond words. That is to say, what we are *not* focusing on is how the body revolts through disassembling the body politic as a purely linguistically constituted entity and, therefore, declassifying cardinal authority, even that of logos, “a higher discourse of truth” that presupposes “the inscription of equality” rather than actual equality (220; Fisher, 203). Is it not ironic that as Rancière is meditating on the “end of politics” and valorises the excessive declassifying force of the classless subject, we come to end in a regime that seeks to claim politics as a terrain of the open through the common power of language *which* denies the dissensual capability of the inarticulate body *as* a classless subject? Here, the inarticulate body’s gravity is that of a haptically performative presence that holds a capacity to divide the political power of speech itself, to disassemble it and open a new space of deliberation. Critically, as has become clear, this potential is enclosed by the foundational moment of articulation whose very promise of equality cannot be verified by means other than that of words; haptic performativity is the practice of verifying this promise by means other than words.

### Closure: A Disassembled Body Politic

To close, we have demonstrated how dissensual acts and linguistically performative speech is a limited avenue for characterising the potential of exscription before writing because it reduces inarticulate action to language effects. We will conclude this chapter with the closing exposition that action without voice is inaugural to politics and the *sine qua non* of being

political. The concluding question thus becomes; if performative speech creates a space of articulatory enclosure, what space does haptic performativity make possible? Before answering this, we must clarify the larger iterative structure that linguistic performativity, through this analysis, falls into; one of narrative rather than one of dialogue. Significantly, what becomes clear is that, in so far as we are speaking about actions in the terms of language effects—or equivocating the political promise of action to that of articulation—we are reducing the space of dialogue between political orders who, in this denial of political standing, are being wronged. Namely, throughout the above analysis, speech is turned to due to its tendency to assemble subjects in abeyance, figures who are not fully constituted in the present idioms, constative speech, or represented in the present community of politics. The reason that linguistic performativity always reproduces the authority of the cardinal in the last instance is because, properly, performative utterances are always speaking to the “decline of the referent’s reality” and thereby call for further institution of rules to make possible further consensual or constative speech, a form of speaking that ensures phrases can fulfil their promises of having import or the capacity to generate meaning (1988, pp. 22–23). Significantly, in so far as performative speech means something, its meaning must be written or inscribed, it must mean this *and not* that something elsewhere beyond the text; as Lyotard says, “the written signifies the death of dialogue” (Lyotard, 1988, p. 23). Just as politics, or the performative utterance, is made possible by an asymmetry or division within the existing order that opens the possibility of dialogue, the felicity of the performative linguistically is that it encloses dialogue as a form of narrative.

Properly understood, the space of linguistic performativity is self-effacing as well as self-referential (this is its dialectical reality): it effaces itself in the present by referencing itself through the passage of narrative. What it self-references, more accurately, is not just the body of which it speaks but an iterative community that is constative, a community of bodies that

appear in the inaugural dialogue as civilised bodies. It is precisely in this sense that the “body needs to be civilised before being admitted to dialogue”, this is because the body in the performative speech act is not properly a part of dialogue but a narrative, a normative force (Lyotard, 1988, p. 24). As Lyotard says, “the normative makes common” and in so far as the normative body references or cites “proper names” they remain bound to a structure of narration (1988, p. 143). Significantly, these scenarios that bring forth these “narrations of the unreal” are how the heterogeneity internal to the discourse—the dialogue that makes phrases and speech move as actions/actors—remains *unnoticed* (1988, pp. 25, 149–150). Clearly, as Lyotard says, “narrative recounts a differend [...] and imposes an end on it or them [...] its term makes sense and retroactively organises the recounted events” (1988, p. 151). Thus, just as performative speech constitutes an unreal assembly, it does so through a logic of articulatory enclosure. As such, though the performative utterance may be foundational in forming a political assembly around the subject of declassification—that is as assembling a political community around a promised narrative—it conversely encloses the possibility of a dialogue within the narrative it introduces into writing.

If the performative utterance is effective or felicitous, it is to the extent that it assembles around a narrative structure: a constative community of subjects who *have* been present. Conversely, the force of the haptic performative and the space it opens is that of a dialogue within narrative. As a result, if linguistic performativity assembles a narrated community, the space opened by performativity in a haptic sense is that of a community formed by a disassembly of the narrative, a community that reintroduces an asymmetry or event into narrative. Properly, then, the space of haptic performativity is that of uncivilised figures, figures who have no narrative to call upon but are the anonymous event that comes into language; it is for this that the exploited, silenced, and marginalised—the have nots, whose speech does no do political things—should not be as a subject outside of political concern, but, rather, the political subject

(or political subjects) par excellence. As becomes obvious, it is this fact that makes understanding this haptic dimension of the speech act generative. Namely, understanding performativity as efficacious in haptic terms opens the possibility for bodies to initiate a dialogue by disassembling the performative narrative of a community, which they, as yet, have no part in. Accordingly, it makes sense that Arendt gestured toward the storyteller-cum-historian as that which makes possible human community—or, more accurately, the narrative of humans as a community of speaking animals—or that Butler gestures to the historicity of the utterance “we the people”, an utterance which gestures back to a larger community of speakers which grounds the effervescent potential of the present “freedom of assembly” (Butler, 2016). In both instances, the possibility of deliberation is opened from *within* the authority of narrative; in contrast to this, haptic performativity opens the narrative to deliberation and dialogue by its inarticulable and faceless presence as a figure *not yet* narrativised or spoken of. This revolt occurs not through words but deeds; it is in this sense that action without voice is inaugural to politics and the *sine qua non* of being political. This is because what the uncivilised and inarticulable existence of the body within the narrativised space of speech opens is the possibility that there is a dialogue before the text has been written and the speaking political community is assembled. Haptic performativity operates in this space of disorder, as a “interrupting the hold of the discourse” (Nancy), a political tragedy “for the authorities” (Lyotard), or as a “community of sharing [...] tracing that violent inscription” that managed the “scattered” masses (Rancière) (Castaño, 2016, p. 86; 1988, p. 144; 1996, p. 35; 2007, p. 58) . As Nancy says,

A *corpus* isn't a discourse, and it isn't a narrative. A *corpus* is what we'd need here. *Here*, there is something like the promise that this must *involve* the body, *shall* involve it, almost immediately. A promise of the kind that's not subject to a treatise, or something to be cited and recited, or the character or setting of a story. In effect, a kind

of promise to *keep silent*. Silent less “about” the body than *from the body*, subtracting it materially from its signifying imprints: and doing so *here, on the read and written page*. Bodies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book) (2008, p. 51 n.-original emphasis)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the utterance of the haptic performative is a silent one; an utterance that acts in spite of speech, which is a potential immanent to the body, not simply in writing, but *before* the body has been imprinted: the force of the body politically is this gravitational revolt that happens irrespective of words.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, to close this narrative, the political actor, contra subject, is never a body of words alone, but a doer of deeds which, inescapably, fail to stay bound within the community of which they are part (it is this surplus, or supplementary element, that makes political assembly possible, as Rancière mentioned). Closing this point and gesturing to chapter four, how then, does this inarticulate presence, the gravitational pressure of the anonymous masses, those who act in politics without words, inarticulately, silently, through the sheer weight of their bodies, become presentable; in what form does this community of sharing or scattered masses rupture what we understand as the meaning of the political subject itself? In giving form, answer, and flesh to these enquiries we must turn to the fourth and final chapter where we will see haptic performativity in action, a form of political participation bereft of speech, whose meaning cannot be assimilated to a language effect, an action whose force infinitely escapes its written meaning precisely because it is an act that is exscribed *before* there is a written text or significant imprint. This action is that which welcomes in a gaping void into community and

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<sup>53</sup> In relevance to Langton in chapter two; the gravity here is that of the transgression that happens despite speech’s claim to have political-cum-judicial authority on the meaning of transgression itself; here we are to recognise that, even without speech’s authority or distinctions, bodies do something when language fails.

thereby opens the existing narrative or utterances to a dialogue that makes political beings in abeyance possible *in absentia* of a fully governing form of testimony that verifies the power of actions *through* words. This—the testimonial and narrative structure of linguistic performativity—as we have seen, has 1) undergirded the authority, meaning, and power of linguistic accounts of performativity and 2) foreclosed understanding of how bodies that act disassemble the authority of written words. This disassembling potential of bodies—their resistant existence and revolting force—is what opens the space of dialogue between; words and deeds, articulate subjects, and inarticulate actors, spoken forms of action and non-uttered, mute, acts.

## Chapter IV: Being in the Flesh, Black Lives Matter and the Body's Movement

### Within Forms of Silent Protest

The sad and brutal truth is that de facto segregation permeates our institutions and exerts a cumulative force: like a tropism beyond the reach of law, it impels the white man to identify with his race and to turn his back on the Negro - *David Danzig*

Before we close this thesis, we must answer: how we can understand the body as something other than a language effect in politics? Thus, if the last chapter addressed how the body disassembles narrative, the concern now is with how the haptic performances of the body make a dialogue about words possible, or how bodies do things with words by exposing language to something other than itself. As such, to answer the central question that began this thesis—how can the marginalised act politically when denied voice or are defined by being silenced?—we turn to what the body does in political movements if it does not speak. Thus far, this thesis's concern has been with demonstrating that for a PSA to do as it says it requires narration. The concern of this chapter is to show how words keep coming up against some limit, their antinomy. More specifically, this chapter is preoccupied with demonstrating how this confrontation divides and undoes speech so as make a dialogue about what speech does possible. To demonstrate this, the chapter will contextualise this argument within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. More specifically, the chapter will attend to the use of silent protest by this movement to demonstrate how bodies can do things *in absentia* of speech. It is by turning to these silent protests, where people participate politically by standing against speech, that we can understand the political life of the body as something other than a language effect. To do so, the chapter will proceed in three stages. These stages will be preoccupied by following the topics: 1) what the body does in Black theorising; 2) what the body has done in history (seen within the Civil Rights Movement (CRM)), and; 3) and what the body is doing in the present (seen within the context of the BLM movement). The common purpose across

these contexts is to expose paradoxical significance of the body within theorising, historical understanding, and the present; this paradoxical significance being that while words assemble around bodies what is actually testified to (by words themselves) is how bodies express a political life beyond what is said of them.

By noting this, the chapter will underline the previous argument that in-so-far as performative speech is felicitous as a form of narration that refers to a past community, it alone is *unable* to make space for those who are bereft of words and still do something politically. It is for this reason that we turn to a haptic reading of the body, one that makes known how bodies, when bereft of words, still act in ways that are more significant than language effects (or are reducible to performative modes of speaking). The point of this—centering how actions without words effect change—is to demonstrate how linguistic performativity construes the use of silent protest as a rhetorical form of speaking. By exposing this tendency, we will see what linguistic performativity does not allow consideration of. Namely, how the silent protests enacted by the BLM movement expose us to that which exists beyond the grasp of language and thereby acts in a political way by making a dialogue *about* what language does or is doing possible. It is by making this point apparent that we will see how the silent protests of the BLM movement demonstrate the force of haptic performativity. This is a force that becomes sensed as politically impactful by standing *against* the present narratives and structures of spoken discourse, and thereby opens a new space for a different “genre of the human”, for those who experience “out-of-placeness”, or do not yet fit into spoken forms of action (Walcott, 2021, p. 44).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This term, developed by Wynter, is a crucial backdrop for parsing out what exactly the body does and how it disassembles the narrative of performative speech so as to make space for other discourses, other meanings, and other genres of being human. Specifically, here, Wynter claims that the human is always hybrid—always something that is happening between genres of discourse (a mixture of bios and logos) (Walcott, 2021, p. 56; 2003). Wynter’s notion here is a way to mark the potential for (Black) people to insist of their own distinctive humanity so as to affect the human genre overall. In this way, the category is a way to mark the renegotiation of the “human” subject within the present, that is, cite the human’s incompleteness, its failed promise as a narrative and therefore its openness to revision from those who are not written into the narrative of “Man”.

Before delving into this, it is necessary to clarify the purpose of grafting my theoretical perspective onto to a specific history or tradition of thought. The risks of not doing so are the potential erasure of the radicality or thinking/contribution this perspective of thinking brings. This statement is necessary in the first instance because the following theory comes from a legacy of thought born from being excluded from the universality that defines ‘hegemonic’ ways of thinking and being in the world. In paying attention to this context, we are to note the dangers immanent in speaking about what this specific tract of theorising has to say about political life more generally; that is to say, we are to be conscious about not speaking-over the thinkers discussed. In this context, I should note that my insights come from a position that is removed from the violent racial confrontations that define this theory. Therefore, I cannot pretend to know the full wealth of knowledge and thought within these thinkers, and must be conscious of potentially writing over and erasing the voice of others (exactly as was my intention to avoid, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis). Thus, the turn to this particular history of theorising it is not to accord or bestow it with a ‘universality’ to which it does not aspire, or to try and validate the insights it brings forward through a mostly white caucus of thinkers (those who have preceded this chapter).

Against these impulses, the preceding analysis tries, as much as is possible, not to over-determine the voice of the thinkers that come forward. Rather it is hoped that—akin to the significance of silence politically—by attending to this legacy of thought about the body in this tradition we can come to reflect on our own (potentially violent) patterns of thought and action that, perhaps unintentionally, further marginalise those we seek to give space to. The following discussion, as a result of this ethos, is thus orientated to trying to *undo* and *disassemble* the authority that accrues in our own interpretation. In doing so it is hoped that the following section is marked by a willingness to theorise responsibly and responsively in such a way that our work, thought, and action, is orientated towards making space for—rather than

superimposing ourselves upon—the lives of others. It is with this point in mind that the proceeding analysis does not try to validate existing and dominant accounts/theories of the world, but rather tries to undo them so as to make space for the as of yet unheard.

### Theory in Black and Haptic Acts in the Flesh

The first stage of this chapter will attest to the inability to express the political life of the Black body through inscribing it as something that does what words say. As we begin with Gordon and end in Spillers, what we will come to appreciate is how the body stands as something other than a language effect. More keenly, this chapter will demonstrate how this body makes dialogue possible through a refusal to be inscribed in language or existing forms of speaking, and therefore that which, trivially, opens speech to a new political life. To begin this point—that bodies are not simply a language effect but effect language through silent forms of refusal—we turn to Gordon’s articulation of “theory in Black”. Gordon begins by reflecting on the fact that “one of the paradoxical and ironic dimensions of reason” is its “ability to synthesize the anomalous and even what at first may offer itself more aggressively as antinomy” (2010, p. 195).<sup>55</sup> Notably, this is exactly what Nancy was saying about the ability of logos, that is, its unique capacity to come to its own limit. Where Nancy marked the capacity for reason to come to its own limit, we are therefore, to mark the ability of illegible, unreasonable, and uncivilised, bodies to expose the unreason, or underside, of reason, that is, reason’s capacity to distort humanity through speech-acts.

As such, doing theory in Black involves attention to the antinomy, this doing of something that, theoretically, should not be possible, to the effect that “a form of illicit seeing, then, at the very

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<sup>55</sup> Gesturing back to footnote 54 about Wynter, by reading haptically we are to reckon with how bodies have come up against the linguistic category and yet—despite being denied illocutionary force, the possibility of speaking felicitous, or ontological presence, the possibility of being understood as a civilised, that is to say, reasonable or speaking figure at all—have nonetheless impacted it as an overall subject or genre.

beginnings of seeing Black, which makes a designation of seeing in Black, theorizing, that is, in Black, more than oxymoronic”; it, in short, requires theory to reflect on itself (2010, p. 197).<sup>56</sup> Notably, this self-reflection requires “uncovering” “the mythic life that the age claims to have transcended but instead has simply repressed”, that is, the production of “a form of subjectivity conditioned by a suprastructural expectation of its elimination” (2010, pp. 197, 206). This dark (under)side of theorising, significantly, involves laying “bare the mechanisms of colonial imposition” through *suspending* “disciplinarity” (2010, pp. 199–200, 203; Maldonado Torres, 2008). Where we have uncovered the body’s force of disassembly—the underside of the theoretical reason of the speaking community—we are now to put this into a wider praxis of suspension that “demands being willing to go beyond disciplinary presuppositions for the sake of reality”, for the sake of seeing Black (Gordon, 2010, p. 203). Translating across, this demand is one that suspends our narrative of speech as the actor ‘that does’ so as to see the paradoxical place of the body within emancipatory movements, that is, how the body does things with words (as the underside of liberation itself) (2010, p. 203).

Importantly, Gordon brings us to a conundrum immanent to Black theorising, namely, its relation to speech and speechlessness. As he says, “speech, which is crucial for social appearance, is expressed through the complex set of bones, nerves (including the eyes), muscles, teeth, and skin that constitute the face, accompanied by the gesturing force of hands”, and yet “anti-Black institutions demand the distortion of Black faces to the point of near speechlessness or emotive cacophony, in short, facelessness” (2010, pp. 209–210). Thus, while we are asked to suspend teleology, or the structure of linguistic narrative—to subvert the

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<sup>56</sup> For Gordon, this is a challenge for theorising, namely, because “*theorein*, from which we receive the word *theory*, did not only mean “to view” but also to view, as the root *theo* suggests, what G-d or the gods would see”. Thus, while theory may be orientated towards the god trick (see foot note 52)—that of providing a total account of itself—it nonetheless encounters that “that which should not be seen” (2010, pp. 196–197). Theorising in Black thus is the irreducible dark side of thinking the outside, the abject, as in relation to *something* that present “models of mind and its semiology” cannot presently figure (2010, pp. 201, 206).

dynamics that render Black subjects “homeless in the present because they are only able to live in the past” (2010, p. 210)—the question is opened: if a condition of anti-Blackness is a distortion of Black faces to near speechlessness, how, then, can Black bodies come to subvert the dynamics that render anti-Blackness reasonable? If Gordon gives us a slightly abstracted vocabulary, the point nonetheless has structural resonance to the issue we have been working through: how do faceless subjects come to face or confront the conditions of their disposability without reiterating the juridical-cum-grammatical structure that grounded their non-standing in the world? Thus, Gordon enables us think through what haptic performativity seeks to do and understand what the role of the body is in the path to Black freedom (2010, pp. 206–207; JanMohamed, 2005). It is to that concern that we now turn, to figure how the body holds a paradoxical place in the movement toward Black freedom by being that which stands as the conduit of oppression for Black peoples (distorting their humanity and reducing it to facelessness or, more haptically, pure corporeality) while also being that which acts against and disassembles this very rendering; here the body is that which testifies to potential to change the “genre” of the human *in absentia* of human’ qualities. As a result, the following chapter is an attempt to stand with and “glimpse” this body that stands outside of the present grammars of liberation. In this way, this illicit seeing is remarked upon to align ourselves with Walcott’s observation that as a legal concept emancipation works *against* the freedom of the formally enslaved due to being embedded in the juridical realm. As we move toward Walcott’s observation, we are thus concerned with how speech and forms of speaking are embedded in the juridical realm and thus work against the freedom of the formally enslaved. By reading haptically, we open the possibility of glimpsing how bodies who are bereft of words can alter and change the very grammar of what we mean by the subject of politics while being antinomical to it.

## Personhood and the Weight of Black Bodies

Herein, we are to figure what standing the body has in relation to personhood and begin this ‘illicit seeing’ that marks the body as a paradoxical point of political assembly, as that something which words assemble around but are unable to be testified for within the terms of narration. Following Gordon in his recent work, *Fear of A Black Consciousness*, we must equally ask, “so what happened to Black people under the weight of Black bodies” (2022, p. 36)?” Gordon’s question points us to the historical fact that Black bodies and personhood have been in conflict, with the former being constructed as an obstacle to the possibility of full personhood. Drawing from Fanon, Gordon points to this as a symptom of two-dimensional thinking wherein the “the epidermal schema” of the body prevents, and has prevented, the humanity or personhood of Black subjects from being recognised or appearing: the Black body has been that which has both marked and effaced the subjectivity of Black people (2022, p. 35).<sup>57</sup> Here, as Nunnally says—and which deepens the significance of thinking of the political force of bodies in conjunction with the legacy of the bodily subjugation of Black people—“African-American political development assists us with tracing the processes of Blacks’ struggle to move beyond the constructed, corporeal “Black body” towards Black humanity”, or what Lebron would perhaps note as “Black personhood” (Lebron, 2017; Nunnally, 2018, p. 139). In this frame of thinking, we are to ask, what is the relation of the body to personhood and what does it reveal about the political force of the body as something that affects language? Before coming to the connection between the body, flesh, and emancipation, we must first traverse the legacy whereby human personhood comes out of Black death, that is, the reduction

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<sup>57</sup> Gordon, expands on this notion of epidermal schema thus: “refers to treating Black people as mere surfaces, superficial physical beings without consciousness and thus a point of view—in short, only bodies” (Gordon, 2022, p. 35). The body herein raises the paradox of Black experience:

The prejudice is familiar: Blacks live, at best, on the level of the particular, not the universal. Thus, Black experience suffers from a failure to bridge the gap between subjective life and the world. It is an experience that is, literally, not experience (2005, p. 15).

of Black life to a purely corporeal state of being, as the occluded other of the speaking being. We would be remiss to not notice that the production of the speaking political subject occurs through a grammatical legacy where the flesh of the Black body became “a prime commodity of exchange” (Spillers, 1987, p. 75). Thus, if one narrative of humanism is the gradual expansion of the category of the human subject through speech (a linguistic account), we are forced to contend with the labour which produces this subject of history, that is to say, the publicisation of Black people as a “waste” to human society, as people whose bodies did not “fit” in (Nunnally, 2018, p. 143; Roberts, 1999; Threadcraft, 2016). This Black history is one whereby the subjugation of bodies—that made people faceless to the “point of near speechlessness”—was the condition by which personhood for others could be spoken of (Gordon, 2010, p. 209). We must work through the possibility for bodies to haptically perform their own political standing—to do something political without being grammatically present as political (within the genre of the human)—that is, to shatter and re-constitute perspectives that do not allow for them.

It is important to understand that the grammar of liberation constricts bodily freedom and thereby articulates the limited ability of linguistic performativity to provide an account of this freedom in terms of language effects alone. As such, turning to Black theory—and to the position of the Black body therein—requires us to confront that, in turning to the archive of slavery, the written history of slavery, we “gape” at “infelicitous speech, obscene utterances, and perilous commands [which gave ] birth to the characters we stumble upon in the archive” (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 6).<sup>58</sup> To be clear, the reason we are turning to the Black archive before

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<sup>58</sup>The archive is turned to here precisely because while archives are usually concerned with attesting to and knowing the history of those within the past, what is particularly significant in this context is that, as Hartmann among other testify, the Black archive—or history of Black subjects during the time of slavery—is marked by unknowable persons (S. Hartman, 2018; S. V. Hartman, 1997). The question that this point stages, as we will see, is that, if the Black archive testifies to the failure of language to convey Black persons as knowable, how do we make space for this history to breathe in the present as

the BLM movement is because it reveals the paradox we mentioned in the beginning; namely that, while words assemble around bodies, what words actually testify to is how bodies express a political life beyond what is said of them. In this context, the antinomy of Black personhood—the standing of Black bodies *qua* human personhood—brings us back to the issue of illocutionary disablement. What we witness in this illocutionary disablement or silencing is primarily the denial of how agents “perform actions” in such a way that cause events or indeed “jeopardise the status of the event”, and thereby trouble what counts as illocution *even as* their speech is infelicitous (Bal, 1997, p. 7; S. Hartman, 2008, pp. 10–11). As such—and this is the question that confronts Hartman and others who try to speak of the life of the Black body and Black people in terms of narrative—how does one make visible “the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history) in a way that describes ‘the resistance of the object’, the ‘inert masses’ that do not lend themselves to representation easily” (Moten, 2003, p. 14; Spillers, 1987, p. 11)? In both instances as we try to think through Black theory or represent Black lives (or, represent Black bodies as persons outside of an epidermal schema), there is a lasting captivity wherein both efforts are marked by a (linguistic) frustration.

This is the frustration of the capacity to give words to those who played with the meaning of words, who caused events in language, without being subjects therein is, or what Hartman more accurately names the “scandal of the archive”. The confrontation with this scandal is one that forces us to ask “if it is no longer sufficient to expose the scandal, then how might it be possible to generate a different set of descriptions from this archive” (2008, pp. 5–8)? The question becomes, if the Black body has a legacy of being reduced to facelessness—and thus a history of linguistic frustration (of near speechlessness)—what possibilities remain for founding a

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something other than a language effect? How, in a word, can we testify to the political life of bodies that exist in silence?

movement of resistance though the actions of this very body who has been (repetitively) sentenced to death (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 2)?<sup>59</sup> Moving forward, we must reckon with the fact that, if Black bodies are burdened with the legacy of being instrumentalised for the category of the human (and the narrative of human progress), they have also, paradoxically, carried the conditions that open a space for a new genre of the human that allows us “to envision a free state from this order of statements” and venture “toward another mode of writing” (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 7). The point to come to here is that, much as theorising and historical accounts of the Black body testify to the limits of words to assemble the community they speak of, equally, this history opens us to consider how bodies can do things when bereft of words, and alter the meaning of categories that are antinomical to them.

### Histories of Flesh and Bodies Exceeding Narration

To make the above two points clear we need to pay attention to the conceptual history of “the flesh” to make clear how bodies—despite being reduced to mere objects or commodities—testify to the failure of efforts to keep the exploited out of the narrative of humanity. Here, the unintentional failure of speech (Chapter II) comes to meet its lived counterpart, that is, the persistence of Black flesh which marks the resistant potential of bodies to undo the present grammar and meaning of what it means to have political standing in the world. If attention to the body allows us to mark the labour of inscription—the physical cost to Black bodies of the (promissory) narrative of humanity—the flesh brings us to the opening of this relation and the

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<sup>59</sup> The explicit use of the outdated and critiqued model of Man as the representative for humanity is a conscious strategy that brings to the fore Wynter’s point that the struggle of our millennium will “be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, [...] [which] overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself” (2003, p. 260). The point herein is to demonstrate how the overrepresented figure of Man effaces those beings who are reduced to near speechlessness or who cannot be grasped within the terms of overrepresented discourse of Man. The prescient question returns (as was covered in Chapter III), how does one unsettle man in a language other than that of the language of humanism (or the paradigm, performatively, that speech is what does politics—how, in short, does one undo cardinal authority without replicating it in the moment of the utterance)? (2003, pp. 260–262)

necessary failure of the narrative to hold those bodies captive. Spillers, to help with this, introduces a distinction between body and flesh, a distinction “between captive and liberated subject-positions”; in this distinction the flesh comes before the body as that “zero-degree of social conceptualisation” that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse”, but escaped “overboard” in the period of captivity (1987, p. 67, 2003). Notable here is the notion that the flesh stands as the “primary narrative”. Thus, while persons were “suspended” and “culturally unmade” through words—with the captive’s body being the inscribed result of such an unmaking, standing as the epidermal schema that represents a lack of humanity—the flesh is “produced by the violence of racial slavery and yet it brings into view a new mode of relation” (S. Hartman, 2016, pp. 166–168). In other words, the flesh points us to that which exceeds its capacity, that thing that opens language to new meanings.

In this metaphorical description, flesh comes to occupy the unthought “problem” that Gordon gestured toward earlier; that is say, the flesh stand in as those excess or residue parts of bodies that exist beyond the narrative of liberal humanism. For our sake this flesh acts as a sort of hieroglyphics that allows for the excavation of “the social (after)life of these categories” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 2).<sup>60</sup> This, as Pinto says, is what brings Weheliye, among others, to Spillers’s thought, namely an interest “in the flesh because of what it retains—its materiality, its possibility to become something else entirely out of a recognisable discursive grasp”; here the flesh stands as that something that allows us to “think otherwise” so as to usher in other genres of the human (Pinto, 2017, p. 35; Weheliye, 2014). In this frame, the flesh exists as a code of what happened between tongues, the “undecipherable markings”, “severe disjunctions”, “breaks, crevices, movements, languages, and such found in zones between the flesh and the law” (Spillers, 1987, p. 67; Weheliye, 2014, p. 11). The flesh does not just carry

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<sup>60</sup> Notably, hieroglyphics refers to a character, “a figure of some object, as a tree, animal, etc., standing for a word” [...] A figure, device, or sign having some hidden meaning; a secret or enigmatical symbol; an emblem” (Kashema, 2019).

the inscribed violence committed against the Black body—the brutality that reduced Black persons to an epidermal schema—but that which resists the “brush of discourse” or “reflexes of iconography” (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). This is because, while the “body can be written, the flesh cannot” (Bradley, 2013, pp. 10–11). In other words, it stands as that which becomes exscribed, or dissents, before the subject of the body is written *and* is that which exceeds the writing of the body. Thus, much as the body is burdened with the unbearable weight of inscription, the flesh is marked as both the primary means through which Black bodies were inscribed *and* that which resists total inscription, that is, the resistance of personhood to complete narrativisation or captivity. The actor here is that which/who exceeds, or escapes, its confinement, and, therefore, they who exceed the body as a social narrative or social script. It is this point that we will seek to expose in the instances of silent protest in the BLM, protests that are politically forceful because they are the movement of bodies *against* present forms of speaking.

### Between Remedy and Redress: the Afterlife of Captive Bodies in the Present

If the “primary narrative” of the flesh constitutes the persistence of Black personhood despite enslavement and captivity—the brutality of the epidermal schema—we now turn to thinking of the body as part of a wider practice of liberation. As we gesture to this liberational dimension of bodily movement we are coming to (illicitly) see how the body, through silent forms of participation, makes space for a different “genre of the human” to emerge in speech. As such, we are attesting to the capacity of bodies to bring a new mode of relation into humanity by *disassembling* the writing of its narrative. At this point, while we have attended to the violence that has occurred in order for Black bodies to be legible as persons—we now come to question opened by this passage: what does this legacy mean for present political communities marked by this labour? Here, Best and Hartman note that the result of this violent archival past is that, despite efforts to name and make visible the extensiveness of this process—the captivity that

was central to the making of the narrative of humanity—there is a recognition of the afterlife of slavery is primarily plagued and marked as being “between the necessity of legal remedy and the impossibility of redress” (2005, pp. 2–3).<sup>61</sup> This inadequacy of legal remedy to redress past forms of slavery marks a deeper significance; namely, that of a “sign of the political interval in which all captives find themselves”, the “long history of failure” or the incompleteness of abolition (2005, p. 3). In our terms, this articulates the failed promise of humanism’s narrative, that is, for speech to do the work of constructing humanity. Thus, while the time of slavery is past, the attempts to redress the violence contained in this history through law or through legal remedy are marred by failure such that attempts to do so testify to the inability to render the past wrong. From this, and this is perhaps what Gordon what gesturing towards, the grammar of speaking, or emancipation through speech, “remains grounded in originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation” (2005, pp. 3–4). Here, we are drawn to afro-pessimism to note not only the impossibility of redress, but the paradigmatic *dependence* of society on anti-Black violence. The turn to afro-pessimism is to make clear the tendency to understand this potential for bodies to disassemble words as a negative capacity—as a proof of non-being or a proof of infelicity. However, what we are to try make space for is understanding this capacity as generative for changing the very meaning of those words through haptic performances, and performatively doing things with words in the absence of felicitous speech.

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<sup>61</sup> The authors elaborate thus: “recent cases for reparations have focused on figuring out formulas for “just commutation,” on how to create a case for a “cause of action,” on how to advance and pursue claims for redress before the bar”” (2005, pp. 7–8). The point is that “appeals for judicial redress must satisfy the demand for identifiable victims and perpetrators, unambiguous causation, limited and certain damage, and the acceptance that the agreed remuneration shall be final (Ibid).

## The Permanent Falling of Bodies Who Do Not Perform<sup>62</sup>

The central implication of this mode of thinking—seeking to draw attention to the continued inscription of Black bodies “as a form of subjectivity conditioned by a suprastructural expectation of [their] elimination”—draws us toward a “paradigmatic perspective” that diminishes the importance of illegible activity done by those who are not yet formally assembled as a people (Douglass et al., 2018). For Warren, in his recent book *Ontological Terror*, the promise of humanism instrumentalises Black life in such a way that the creation or promise of (ontological) subjecthood is intimately bound with the proliferation of anti-Black violence (a violence that reduces Black beings to a nothing, a political cypher or pariah class) (2018, pp. 47–54). Or, in his words, “the metaphysical infrastructure that supports the fiction of the white human is sustained by anti-Black violence” (Warren, 2018, p. 54). The engagement with Warren specifically is because his book stands as one of the most consistent articulations of the paradigmatic perspective of Afro-pessimism. As such it, in contrast to the promising narrative of humanity, represents one of the clearest articulations to understand Black people as antinomical to a narrative structure (as people free from a conditioning violence).<sup>63</sup> In this extreme articulation, Blackness is incommensurable with freedom, and Black thinking is a concern with “confronting this ontological abyss” wherein the “world needs the Negro, even as the world despises it” (2018, p. 7).<sup>64</sup> This reality—of the world’s consumption of Black bodies—means that Black people must embody nothing such that “to exist as Black is to inhabit

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<sup>62</sup> The thematic of falling was one which was keenly noted in Chapter III; it refers to the capacity of the performative to fail, to miss, or lose ground (see footnote 51). The point of falling will become clear on the next two pages when Warren mentions the “permanent falling” that occurs for Black Subjects. For our purposes, what we are to consider is the paradoxical point that because words fail to assemble bodies, we—following Davis and Walcott—get insight into different forms of freedom that occur in this falling or failure of words to convey the subject of speech.

<sup>63</sup> Other illustrative accounts can be seen in the work of Sexton, and Wilderson among others (Douglass & Wilderson, 2013; S. V. Hartman, 1997; Patterson, 1982; Sexton, 2011, 2016; Wilderson, 2010, 2020)

<sup>64</sup> It is not simply that the cultural text is turned inside out but that “philosophy lacks a grammar and a tradition to explain accurately the Negro Question” as that ‘thing’ which interrupts form (David, 2003, n. see David for a more extended mediation on this point; 2018, pp. 14–15, 32–34).

a world through permanent falling” (2018, p. 13). Warren, here, is articulating, in severe terms, what Hartman said about the issue of the “open casket of the archive”, namely that the birth of Black subjects occurs through what Warren terms the “ontological condition” of “execration” which renders Black beings, or Black freedom, unintelligible within the “field of ontology” (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 5; 2018, pp. 40–42). Thus, just as theory struggles to see itself, equally, philosophy is “incarcerated by the white imagination’s inability to confront its corporeal reflection” (2018, pp. 20–21). As Douglass et al. say, Afro-pessimism consciously “theorizes Blackness as an effect of structural violence, as opposed to thinking of Blackness as a performance and embodiment of cultural and/or anthropological attributes” (2018). Because of this, “so-called” Afro-pessimists may simply be “diagnosticians of their society” that highlight how “living in this order, Black people are still [...] doing the work of dying” (S. Hartman & Wilderson, 2003, pp. 197–198). But, in this articulation, there is a slippage that misses (much like linguistic performativity) how the grounds for freedom and possibility for a new genre of humanity are being haptically, if not illegibly, performed by bodies.

That is to say that, because of Afro-pessimism’s paradigmatic view, what is missed are the unscripted eruptions that bodies perform (Scully, 2020, pp. 7–8). Scully elaborates, “Warren risks reifying the very permanence of anti-Blackness that his project critiques and that which he must endure. This is analogous to the historicist who creates what they aim to find in the archive” (2020, p. 19). As such, while Warren supports Fleetwood’s idea of the “troubling” performativity of Black bodies he also denies their effects; to quote Warren, “in other words, troubling does not yield ontological or transformative results—rather, it translates into an incorrigibility that anti-Black violence works to subdue” (Fleetwood, 2011; 2018, p. 194). Notably, in this narrative, it not that Black bodies have no impact, or do nothing, but that what they do, their incorrigibility, becomes overwritten, subdued, and blotted-out through writing (or, the ontometaphysical structure of the present); even here, it is not that the actions do

nothing eventful but that they are culturally “unmade” and “subdued”. Here, despite Black persons being illegible within the archive or narrative of Man (understood as a social order), how do we, nonetheless, make sense of the ongoing and trivial acts of resistance that permeate the (Black) movement toward freedom?<sup>65</sup> How, simply, do we attest to Black bodies exceeding the anti-Black grammar of the present and how can we give space for these *unfigurable/unthinkable* actions to impact the category of humanity while being antinomical to it?

### The Long Emancipation: Glimpses of Freedom

Significantly, the legacy of slavery historically, and anti-Blackness presently, delivers to us a crushing image of the impossibility of Black freedom or bodily autonomy in the present. How then can we understand that something trivial is nonetheless happening in the “zone of non-being”, in this “permanent falling” that marks the interdiction of the post-slavery present? In this space of permanent falling what exactly does the Black body do if it does not meaningfully, ontologically or linguistically, contribute to the category of the human (or, indeed, is subdued *by* that category). In other words, what *is* the something else that it does (and how is this doing different from a language effect)? Here, crucially, as generative as Afro-pessimism is to mark the execration of being or the paradigmatic exclusion of Black people from humanity, it does so by foreclosing “glimpses” of other “genres of the human” which exist beyond a discursive grasp. Haptic performativity—by noting the general *inability* of narrative to protect bodies—

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<sup>65</sup> Crucially, this impulse is the focus of Stephen Best’s work who is sceptical with the turn towards seeing Black history as communising: as he says, “a communitarian impulse runs deep within Black studies. It announces itself in the assumption that in writing about the Black past ‘we’ discover ‘our’ history”, an assumption that confronts the reality that “in the archive, we discover not who we are but how “we” are not” (2018, pp. 1, 132). The rest of the chapter is an attempt to do justice to Best’s observations; as such, we are here to make sense of how Black bodies communise not by “the recovery of an impossible community”, but by making space for new glimpses of freedom and creativity through a dislocation that makes it possible for bodies to finally breathe in words without becoming subdued by narrative (S. M. Best, 2018, p. 26; Scully, 2020, p. 6). We are attempting to articulate, not how Black bodies belonged in the past, but how bodily movements make it possible for Black beings to be in the present. See also footnote 59 about use of the term ‘Man’

may perhaps lend itself equally towards a certain pessimism regarding the possibilities of redress within the terms of law, or translating across language effects. However, the story does not end there; far more events stand in abeyance against the making of *that* story. What emerges from thinking about the paradoxical place of the body within movements toward (Black) liberation is its “incurable place”; that is, as an obstacle to freedom while also being the force that has persisted in spite of this “narrative condemnation” (Walcott, 2021, pp. 16–17; Warren, 2018, p. 5; Wynter, 1994). As we move forward, what we get a sense of is how despite not “fitting in” or being “out of place”, the body remains steadfast as that which acts against its confinement and defies its definition in a way that makes possible a new mode of relation to the genre of the human. Equally, much as Butler says one could read Austin’s book on performatives as a comical reflection on how speech fails, equally, and ironically, what is testified to here—through putting the conceptual insights of the last chapter into a particular history of Black theorising—is the inability of words to convey the full humanity of Black subjects; this is what the words of the archive make known (1997, pp. 16–19). Crucially—whether it is in the form of being paradigmatically excluded from Being or narratively condemned within the narrative of Man—what the body does is not easily said by words. What gets testified to within the archive is precisely the excessiveness of bodies, how their meaning spills out over the confinement of words. What this exposes is that archives assemble around inscribing bodies as subjects (as that which has a known place in history). However, what is actually being testified to is how bodies disassemble narratives and express a political life beyond what is said of them. Thus, as we come to mark the edge of speech’s ability to assemble excluded subjects, how else can bodies do, in what do they inscribe themselves if not through discourse, archives or, more broadly, language effects?

To expose how haptic performativity articulates an insensible moment of Black freedom we now turn to Walcott and Davis to answer the question that, thus far, cannot be made intelligible

in previous analysis. That is, given the denigration of Black people—and the notion of personhood for Black subjects—how does the body, and its attendant flesh, become part of the movement to resist this dehumanisation? Or, put slightly differently, how do bodily acts work against bodily schematisation and affect language in a way that is other than a language effect? Walcott’s notion of the “long emancipation” stands as a way to describe how the interdicted “post-slavery present” ushers in the possibility of recognising the force of allegedly trivial actions. Attending to this perspective will ground our discussion about the force of silent protest, as a protest that effects language through standing against conventional forms of expression of forms of doing. Walcott begins by noting the incompatibility of freedom and Black humanity, or, as he puts it, how we remain in the “time of emancipation”—whereby the legal freeing of the slave (emancipation) marks continued *unfreedom* (2021, p. 1). Walcott makes explicit the stakes of what previous thinkers have said, namely that, as a legal concept emancipation works *against* the freedom of the formerly enslaved due to being embedded in the juridical realm. Translating across, equally, the point that is attested to, in reading haptically, is that emphasising the emancipatory potential of speech works against understanding how those subjects defined by a lack of voice can be significant politically (that is to say, affect the language and meaning of political assembly).

As a result, emancipated forms of freedom, for Walcott, thereby delimit the possibilities of understanding freedom *beyond emancipation* and assumes that post-emancipation conditions are *ipso facto* forms of freedom (2021, p. 2). Freedom, for Walcott, therefore gestures beyond this anti-Black discourse of emancipation—which produces “Black people as waste”—and looks towards forms of freedom that exist beyond the judicial realm (which are, in the last instance, false freedoms) (2021, p. 13). As Walcott says, “once Black people *move*, the limits of freedom and autonomy announce themselves” and, thus, “the brutality with which Black movement is greeted makes movement central to Black being” (2021, pp. 2, 13-original

emphasis). In similar terms, at this point, we can note how linguistic performativity is equally wedded to a promise that linguistic emancipation is the route toward freedom (as being the only way that one moves in politics), or that linguistic emancipation—the freedom to do things with words as the way to be political—actually opens space for a dialogue about what language does. The key point here is that the promise that performative speech undoes cardinal authority, or the “overrepresentation of Man”, is also one that necessarily prohibits undoing the actual locus of cardinal authority: the primacy of speech as *the* doer of politics. It is perhaps because of this “symbolic order”, quoting Spillers, that means that “sticks and bricks might break our bones, but words will most certainly kill US” (1987, p. 68). The point, rendered less metaphorically, is that what speech does here—as it fails to assemble bodies through words and archival retellings—is testify to the force and affect of bodies on language. More specifically, this is the point that Black movements (unaccompanied by words) expose the political force of actors who are yet to be subjects (the grammatical potential of sticks and bricks to break or interrupt words). How then, do we get glimpses of this force and freedom that exceeds what words can say and how do these movements affect language?

### The Maturation Narrative: Freedom Beyond the Script of Humanity

For Walcott, Black freedom, although policed, is not as structurally impossible as it is for others but lies outside of “modernity’s imagining”. As Walcott says, we catch glimpses of Black freedom as “eruptive moments” that expose the tension between freedom within the linear narrative of modern humanism, and those “moments of the *something more* than exists in the dire condition of Black unfreedom” (2021, p. 3-n. emphasis added). For Walcott modernity’s freedom is one that aligns freedom as concept to the time of linearity, as something that comes out of a result of linear progress (the gradual expansion of the category of human to include other actors, bodies, and beings that were excluded from it) (2021, p. 3). Equally, the power of linguistic performativity, is that which works by progressively enclosing and incorporating

bodies so as to be an effective narrative of action. Thus, while anti-Blackness delimits Black freedom and secures Black *un*freedom—through a legislated and “apprenticed” form of freedom that uses the mechanisms of legal redress that work *against* bodily autonomy—the long emancipation marks our existence within a time where Black people experience *unscripted* moments of freedom *beyond* the current mode of intelligibility, or in excess of narrated scripts of what it means to be in the world (Walcott, 2021, pp. 4–5). Accordingly, where Warren sees a “void of relationality” as that which marks the unintelligibility of Black being within an anti-Black world, Walcott brings us to see the acts of Black creativity that gesture towards forms of floating freedom that are not quite intelligible in the existing grammar of the world, and yet are no less present in the world despite their unintelligibility (or lack of grammar). In other words, it appears in those moments which stand against the violent interdiction of the present, those moments of dissent that make space for other things and bodies to assemble against (not within) the narrative. In this transition, we are answering the question ‘how can the marginalised act politically when denied voice?’ through turning to what the body does in political movements. In this turning we will get a sense of how exactly bodies which stand against narratives make possible new forms of dialogue between what language does and what things bodies can do *in absentia* of speech.

In light of the above, we can say that the anti-Black structure of emancipation may render the question of Black freedom as unthinkable or paradigmatically-cum-structurally prohibited. However, through Walcott, we get a sense of how to put the mute force of the body into a particular vernacular or, more broadly, “vernacular moments and practices” that gives us a sense that something more than language is doing things in politics (Walcott, 2021, pp. 6–7). The point is thus, where Warren—among others—saw freedom as unintelligible in the present, when read haptically, it becomes present in those eruptions that “push against and within how we have come to understand what freedom is” (Walcott, 2021, p. 2). Unintelligible as this

pushing is, we may still be able to feel its force as it resonates “through various centres of human and social meaning” and, unspeakably, undoes the narrative of the human that has been spoken of before (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). The point, looking forward, thereby, is not just to note how performative forms of speaking fail in conveying the subjects that they speak. Rather, the guiding thread is that without “methodological suspension”—as Warren mentioned, or narrative restraint as Hartman will mention—we miss how bodies that exist beyond the grasp of language act by making a dialogue *about* language possible.

While the promise of emancipation in no way guarantees the possibility of Black freedom, it, in unscripted moments, still happens. What is generative here, and will lead us to Davis, is the notion that these moments of freedom do not just gesture towards a form of freedom that is wedded to captivity (forms of freedom that do not take unfreedom as their ground). Of relevance, Walcott interrogates the promise of freedom that inheres in notions of “fugitive justice” or “marronage”—that Best, Hartman, Moten, among others, talk of—as actual freedom for Black persons.<sup>66</sup> Notably, this is because, both terms are conceptually reliant on unfreedom to frame the discussion of freedom for Black life; therefore both concept prohibit “the potential for Black freedom rather than being a moment that provides us a lens onto or into freedom” (2021, p. 106). As such, for Walcott, equivocating these emancipatory moments as equivalent to freedom obscures the actually existing possibilities for radical forms of Black freedom,

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<sup>66</sup>To be clear, “the concept of fugitivity highlights the tension between the acts or flights of escape and creative practices of refusal, nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant”(Campt, 2014; Sojoyner, 2017, p. 516). As Koerner says, “Fugitive thought invokes a people that, by nature of the “oppression it suffers,” is exterior to the state apparatus: a minor race understood as the “unthought” of Western philosophy; a people who, from the perspective of the state model of thought and its existing ontologies, does not exist” (2011, p. 178). Furthermore, maroonage refers to “the creation of autonomous communities by runaway slaves”, communities which were a “central form” by which Black peoples asserted their humanity within the apparatus of slavery, or following Harney and Moten, the undercommons that persists within the university apparatus (Bledsoe, 2018; Harney & Moten, 2013). Further, see Bledsoe (2017, p. 30). The point here, following Walcott, is not to undo the historic significance of these communities, but to imagine freedom *beyond* the violence of “emancipated freedom”.

forms, that, paradoxically, make their illegible mark through haptic performances—or, in his terms, “vernacular practices and movements” (2021, p. 6). These are practices and movements that move beyond the domain, or language, of the human being; that is, they move beyond those “normative registers of recognizing freedom [which] do not, in fact, give us insight into the ways that Black beings make something like freedom appear” (2021, p. 2). Thus, for Warren, where unintelligibility marks the impossibility of freedom—or the banishment of Blacks from humanity—for Walcott, this “permanent falling”, or “Black vernacular” that erupts at unscripted moments is an instance of potential Black creativity. In this moment the space of freedom beyond juridical structures is opened, and the body—with the flesh it carries—becomes part of the movement that effects language and forces it to move towards new narratives and new ways of speaking.

Here, we turn to Angela Davis who notes the fact that very little has been said “about the unique relationship Black women bore to the resistance struggles during slavery” (1981, p. 5); the point here being that, when bodies depart from scripts we get a glimpse of freedom beyond the terms of captivity. That is to say that we get a sense of how, if performative speech is felicitous as a form of narration—referring to a past community to be felicitous—it is unable to make space for those who have not been included in the present narrative of humanity but still do something with words. Where Davis goes on to speak about the “magnitude and effects of the Black people’s defiant rejection of slavery” she, equally, remarks that these “were only the tip of an iceberg: resistance expressed itself in other grand modes and also in the seemingly *trivial* forms of feigned illness and studied indolence” (1981, p. 6 n.-emphasis added). Thus, while slaves “were forcibly deprived of their humanity”, Davis notes that the drudgery of tasks performed by female slaves “could help to lay the foundation for some degree of autonomy” that was central to “the survival of the community” (1981, pp. 6–7). In this framing, while Warren, among others, see the permanence of Black people being indentured—or the existence

of a future turned inside out for Black subjects as those who are born *into* death—Davis points us to the depths of “Black creative life force we have yet to witness” (1981, pp. 8–9). In other words, those moments of unscripted eruption which weaved a “consciousness of resistance” were enacted by Black women slaves through their labour, and now stands as “proof of her ability to transform things” (1981, pp. 8–9; Walcott, 2021, pp. 12, 82–83). Where, as noted in Chapter III, Rancière advocated for a verification of one’s equality (or personhood) through words—which, Spillers reminds us, “will most certainly kill US”—we come to a haptic counterpart. That is to say, we come to see how actions—even when a priori conditioned by facelessness—weave a (Black) consciousness that not only stands against oppression, but opens the possibility of freedom even when in the wake of the execration of being. These trivial moments of transformation that occur in the moments of silent protest speak to how “the Black body configures and reconfigures modes of being in the world” that “initially exist outside of or in response to dominant and normative institutions and modes of being” (Walcott, 2021, pp. 4–6). As we will see, it is in this trivial moment that we get a glimpse of how the body labours and affects language in such a way as to expose language to something other than it, and expresses a political life beyond words.

### Bodies at the Edges of Writing: Narrative Restrained

Here, we have noted a two-fold inability for narrative to present a full picture of the present. Namely, we have shown how, on one hand, the narrative of modernity constraints the potential of Black freedom and, on the other, how it delimits the force of Black bodies, and thereby minimises the significance of supposedly trivial acts that stand as the ground for further survival. It is at this point that if we note that performative speech is felicitous to the degree that it refers to already consisted subjects, haptic performativity is felicitous and relevant in so far as it makes us consider how those who are defined by a lack of words still affect language. Thus, while the archive is a “death sentence”, through Walcott and Davis we get a sense of

how we can “do more than recount the violence that deposited these traces in the archive”, “without committing further violence in [our] own act of narration” (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 2). Herein, following Hartman, attesting to the space of freedom opened up by haptic performativity may also be a story that is equally “predicated upon impossibility” (2008, p. 2). This is a project that seeks to mark the edges of one’s own writing and requires “listening for “the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives” (2008, pp. 2–3). Thus, the question that all of the above brings us to is “how does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence” (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 4)? Here, as we attempt to avoid romanticising resistance (or equate Black existence as revolt or expression) and make space for the possibility of exceeding or negotiating “the constitutive limits of the archive”, we come to the importance of haptic performativity in accounting for the force of the silent protests of the BLM movement (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 11).

While Hartman turns to the past to understand the present, we follow Walcott by turning to those moments where the street corner has been remade as a “site of communal gathering” that makes the future “yet to come” possible (2021, p. 6).<sup>67</sup> As Hartman says, “the intent of this practice is not to give voice, [...] but rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal”, and thereby imagine a freedom to come that persists within the interdicted and legislated moment of the

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<sup>67</sup> Notably, the future “yet to come” is a consciously Derridean tongue that notes how “freedom as immanent condition [...] is both belated and always just ahead of us”, as Walcott says,

it is my argument that Black life most clearly reveals the limits of the conditions of freedom because Black life seems to dwell in that Derridean ‘to come’ that is always anticipatory and future-oriented. Black life points us toward what freedom might be, and ultimately is, a project yet to come (2021, p. 4).

Thus, up to this point, if the thesis has looked at how freedom has not yet been—existing as a project of linguistic projection (in Nancy’s sense) —the turn to the “yet to come” is a way to note how the project of words is always coming undone by bodies, and is being torn apart in such a way that there is an always coming space for a new freedom to be spoken of. The generativity of this point is to start thinking of freedom as learned with death, or that, as Derrida says, the learning of life is “only from the other and by death”” (Derrida, 1994, p. xvii; Walcott, 2021, p. 45)

present (2008, p. 11). This listening or illicit seeing thus requires us to attend to those moments where narrative fails, and yet those nearly speechless bodies, in trivial ways, still do something. In this form of writing, we must note the connection of these doings to a “history written with and against the archive”, a history wherein we see fleeting moments of freedom that are not complicit with unfreedom, that is, politically speaking, forms of doing that are not complicit with, or reducible to, language effects (2008, p. 12). Thus, if Walcott spoke of the limit of previous attempts to emphasise unfreedom as conditioning the possibility of what we consider to be freedom, we, equally, note that the “vernacular movements” of the body become the ground to resist dehumanisation despite the anti-Black grammar of linguistic performativity and the narrative it assembles. If, as has been shown, language works to “narratively condemn” Black people, we are to note how haptic performances demonstrate how the meaning of the human is open to change from beyond the field of its reference and how this is the precondition of further struggle, testifying to how the body does things *without* words (Walcott, 2021, p. 16). This process, to develop from Gordon, involves not only a disciplinary suspension, or “method of no method”, but the enacting of “narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure” (2010, p. 200; S. Hartman, 2008, pp. 11–13). As the next stages of this chapter will seek to show, this perspective gives us a chance to see how change is enacted by those who, despite their illegibility, trivially, labour towards disassembling the present grammar of what it means to be human through inarticulate, silent, and bodily, forms of protest. In having covered what the body does in Black theorising—demonstrating how words assemble around bodies but what is actually testified to is how bodies express a political life beyond what is said of them—we now come to the task of making sense how this disassembling force makes a dialogue about language possible. To make this apparent, we now turn towards the CRM and the BLM protests to clarify *how* the silent protests undertaken by the BLM

movement demonstrate how bodies can do things in absentia of speech and furthermore how a linguistic account of performativity misreads the bodily doing *as a* language effect.

### The Civil Rights Movement: How Bodies Work Towards Equality

Having covered how the body moves in Black theory, we now come to put that journey into the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The question now becomes, what does the body do in Black movements of protest, and how does it work towards equality? In answer to this, the next section walks through the legacy and concerns that dogged the CRM and the BLM movements. The point herein is not to draw a continuity, but illustrate that, despite the diverse use of tactics and different contexts of each struggle, the body plays an equally pivotal role in protesting its condition of *unhumanity*—despite the differing grounds of struggle, reflective leadership structures, and (*not* so different) styles of protest or pressurising tactics. To begin this genealogy we are directed to the actions of Rosa Parks in 1954 “whose refusal to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery launched the 1960s movement”; this action, it should be remembered, was in response to the murder of Emmett Till which moved Rosa Parks to protest the *de jure* segregation of Blacks from the white community, or the Jim Crow Era (Morris, 1986, pp. 51–56, 2021).<sup>68</sup> Rosa Parks’s specific act of protest occurred in the context of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP)’s persistent legal challenges to Jim Crow legislation. While these eventually resulted in the 1954 Supreme Court

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<sup>68</sup> Two points, to clarify. The murder of Emmett Till occurred in August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1955. On this date Emmett was brutally murdered for allegedly flirting with a white woman. In response to how Till had flirted/spoken with the woman, her husband (Roy Bryant) and his half-brother forced Emmett Till in their car, beat him brutally and threw him into the Tallahatchie Rive. The corpse of Emmett Till was so disfigured that Till could only be identified by a ring, and two weeks after the murder the assailants were issued a verdict of not guilty by an all-white jury for their role in the crimes (because the state had failed to prove the identity of the body). For a more substantial summary, see Tyson (2017). Secondly, *de jure* here refers to a state of affairs in accordance with the law (segregation was legally sanctioned), and *de facto* refers to a statement of affairs that is true in even if not sanctioned by law (in the face of *de jure* desegregation there was the persistence of *de facto* segregation). For an extended chronicling of the effects of the Jim Crow era and its attendant legislation see Tischauser (2012).

decision to desegregate schools, as Morris notes, “little changed on the ground”, because, as Schmitt remarks, social change “were [it] to arrive, would do so through pressures other than legal compulsion” (Morris, 1986, 2021, para. 11; Schmidt, 2011, p. 645).<sup>69</sup>

What Rosa Parks ignited, however, was the rise of direct action that came to characterise the next years. These actions, which ultimately came to define the CRM, were adopted precisely because the question became: in the face of such an intransigent and unjust system how could Black people “with their meagre economic and material resources” enact change (Morris, 2021)? It is from this ethos that we come to know of the various forms of action taken in relation to the racism and inequality faced by the Black community: sit-ins, freedom rides, boycotts, and other non-violent civil acts of disobedience that aimed to “gain bargaining leverage” for enacting change (Luders, 2010, n. see chapter three in particular; Morris, 1986, 1999, 2021). It should be noted that this “use of deliberate, public lawbreaking as a form of protest seemed unprecedented” for causing legal change. The protests worked to both enforce legal change *through* law breaking and, for liberal-leaning partisans, bring awareness to “the occasional necessity of extra-legal means to achieve legitimate social and political change” (Zashin, 1973, pp. 285–286). It is at this point that we come to the edges of success for the CRM, for, as Rustin says, the movement evolved to such a degree that it called “into question its very name” (1965, p. 27). Thus, as the effect of protests set in, the very “decade which has witnessed the decline of legal Jim Crow has also seen the rise of *de facto* segregation in our most fundamental socio-economic institutions” (Rustin, 1965, 2003). It is in this context that the successes of the CRM—resulting in Lyndon B. Johnson formally ending “the Jim Crow era by signing the Civil

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<sup>69</sup> Notable here is the “Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which thrust the NAACP into the limelight and crystallized the emerging massive resistance movement dedicated to systematically destroying the NAACP across the South” (Morris, 1986, p. 25). This decision, more specifically, resulted in the ruling that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (this, to be clear overturned the Supreme Court’s decision in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that “separate but equal” educational facilities were constitutional).

Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965”—equally invite reflection on its limits as being simply a story of nonviolent forms of action and pure oration (Morris, 1986, 2021; Ware, 2012, pp. 1091–1092). It is at this point that we come to note the underside of this story.

While the CRM was driven by a non-violent ethos—the dictum that “we cannot let violence overcome nonviolence”—violence and more confrontational strategies of shock and fear were part-and-parcel of the non-violent achievement of civil rights (Morris, 2021).<sup>70</sup> Here, this point is not to just note a division in the movement—a difference of means and ends between the two leading characters, Martin Luther King (MLK) and Malcolm X—but that the pacifism of the movement, the articulate and spoken power it is known for, was assisted by acts of physical violence. It does not take much to note how, in what Rustin calls the “classical phase”, Martin Luther King stands as this “narrative’s defining figure” in the 1963 march on Washington (Hall, 2005, pp. 1233–1234; 1971, pp. 111–122). This event, as Hall notes, acts as a sort of narrative arc or peak that testifies to the power of speech to move minds and enact (*de jure*) change.<sup>71</sup> Significant here are the swathe of violent protests—especially, but not exclusively, in the wake of MLK’s assassination in 1968—that interdicted the purely pacifistic retelling of the movement. What should hereby be noted is that “Malcolm and Martin are the revolutionary sides of the same coin” rather than “opposing forces in the struggle for civil rights and against white supremacy” (Gross, 2020; Joseph, 2020). The point here is to note how the narrative of CRM as a successful and non-violent movement—or a happy story of political change—comes

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<sup>70</sup> This quote is taken from Dianne Nash, who, among others, began “a series of sit-ins at “whites only” lunch counters” (Morris, 2021). As Morris puts it, “Recognizing the key role that students, with their idealism and their discretionary time, could play in the movement, visionary organizer Ella Baker encouraged them to form their own committee, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], which started to plan and execute actions independently” (Ibid). See also, Morgan and Davis (2012) and Pineda (2021, pp. 161–162, chapter five)

<sup>71</sup> As Hall says, “the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement. It ensures the status of the classical phase as a triumphal moment in a larger American progress narrative, yet undermines its *gravitas*. It prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time” (2005, p. 1234-n. emphasis added)

to be efficacious on the condition of a certain articulatory enclosure that requires bracketing the role of violence.<sup>72</sup>

Violent forms of protest, in other words, were critical to the efficacy of the CRM (or indeed, the efficacy of non-violent leveraging). Notably, as Malcolm X says, “I want Dr. King to know that I didn’t come to Selma to make his job difficult. I really did come thinking I could make it easier. If the white people realize what the alternative is, perhaps they will be more willing to hear Dr. King” (C. S. King, 1969, p. 256; Vasquez, 2014). What is significant here is not just the presence of a “diversity of tactics”—that is, the interlacing of violent acts with non-violent acts (indeed the use of the former to support the felicity of the latter)—but that, despite the turn to radical means, the movement came to the edges of effect in so far as there were “no forces prepared to move toward radical solutions” in the wider “scene” of America (Feigenbaum, 2007; Khan, 1994; Rustin, 1965, p. 28; Vasquez, 2014). Thus, we come to the limits of the CRM for our purposes: a movement that is definable in its confrontation of the *de jure* implementation of anti-Black policy at the edges of legal activity; yet was unable to “translate itself into a political movement” that was able to alter the *de facto* basis of this policy (Rustin, 1965, p. 26).<sup>73</sup> The point here is that, while the CRM confronted and overcame *de jure* barriers that segregated Blacks from American society, the Black community became “stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before”, namely those *de facto* issues which “are more deeply rooted in our socio-economic order” (Rustin, 1965, pp. 27–28). These obstacles, looking forward—no matter the means of non-

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<sup>72</sup> In lieu of this point it is worth turning to Izadi’s article which highlights how the movement is being picked up by conservatives/republicans because of the progressive narrative it builds into in stoking new forms of political activism (Gold & Hohmann, 2015; 2016).

<sup>73</sup> In a nod to Walcott, this language of “protest movement” contra “political movement” is not to insinuate that protest movements are not, in and of themselves, political movements; nor is the point to insinuate that there is a linear progression from protest to political movements (dissent, after all, is the beginning of politics moving).

violent/violent action undertaken to affect them—could not be addressed by the movement alone and thus could not be translated into an enduring political structure; it is here that we encounter BLM.<sup>74</sup>

### Black Lives Matter: The Gravity of a Mass Movement

Contextualising the difference, that is, the non-continuity, of the struggles involved in the two movements—CRM and BLM—we note that, while defined against different confrontations and, indeed, different gravitational orders of change, both still employ the same tactics: namely, the occupation of space by bodies as a pressure tactic. Akin to the CRM, BLM has its origins in response to the tragic deaths of members of the Black community by white men, particularly white police officers. According to Rickford, the BLM began modestly, as a hashtag in response to “the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder in Florida of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin” (Garza, 2014; Rickford, 2016, p. 35).<sup>75</sup> Later, in the summer of 2014, the BLM slogan began to be used more poignantly and aggressively following the suffocation death of Eric Garner by New York Police Department (NYPD) officer, Daniel Pantaleo (Lebron, 2017, pp. 5–6; Morris, 2021). Notably, there has, since 2014, been an eruption of protests, stemming from the “last straw” being broken, namely, the murder of George Floyd. Floyd’s murder in 2020 by Minneapolis (white) police officer, Derek Chauvin, provoked protests state-wide with the United States, and, more broadly, across the world, as Floyd, akin

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<sup>74</sup> This point, it should be added, is, again, not to emphasis the CRM ended and we have the BLM as that which is its new interlocutor; the notion of closure here is a nod to the fact that the “long civil rights movement” that took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s [...] inspired a “movement of movements” that “def[ies] any narrative of collapse” (Hall, 2005, p. 1235).

<sup>75</sup> To clarify, Martin, 17, was shot by 28-year old male George Zimmerman. While Zimmerman was charged for murder, he was acquitted on the grounds of self-defence despite Martin not being armed and carrying around a bag of skittles and an Arizona watermelon drink. As Alvarez and Buckley say, the case and Martin, became a catalyst for a wider debate around racial profiling, its consequences, and the effects of the “stand your ground laws” which have only become “more extreme” since Martin’s death (Alvarez & Buckley, 2013; Hannah & Felton, 2022)

to Garner, gasped, in his dying moment, the phrase “I can’t breathe” (D. Harris et al., 2021; Morris, 2021).

While the CRM followed the leadership model of a “singular, charismatic clergyman or politician” – that is, MLK and/or Malcolm X – BLM sharply departs from this, having been founded by Black women and arising “from an organic Black protest tradition” (Harris, 2018; Rickford, 2016, pp. 35–36). Herein lies the first discontinuity between the CRM and BLM, namely, the mixed reaction of vanguard CRM activists to the BLM. As Reynolds, a past activist in the CRM, argues, BLM “is a motley-looking group to this septuagenarian grandmother”; “the group’s confrontational and divisive tactics make it difficult” to be in solidarity with them; whereas, in “the 1960s, activists confronted white mobs and police with dignity and decorum” (2015).<sup>76</sup> While the origin of the CRM and BLM movements may be structurally similar, the governing context is not. This difference in leadership structure or “decorum” not only reflects a different ethos—or spirit of the times—but also a differing approach to/subject of confrontation. As such, while the CRM was delimited insofar as it confronted *de jure* issues—and thus had difficulties becoming a felicitous political movement—the BLM movement is preoccupied with the struggles that were the unhappy end of the CRM, namely the *de facto* persistence of racial inequality despite the *de jure* advance of racial equality. In this light, the

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<sup>76</sup> Notably, Reynolds goes on to say, “what we have seen come out of Black Lives Matter is rage and anger—justifiable emotions, but questionable strategy”. Here, she references Al Sharpton who states that, in response to a young activist asking about the differing leadership structure, “my question is: what movement? Y’all ain’t got nothing to take over”, “you burned the building down. Great. Now what?” (Saslow, 2015). In lieu of the point above, notable is Izadi’s article about America’s long history of being resistant to CRM; the point to be raised, as Cobb (field secretary for the SNCC in the 1960’s) says, is that, regardless of context, “whether it’s segregated lunch counters or voting rights or whether it’s police violence—that’s what protest does, and it challenges with varying degrees of intensity the status quo” and that even during the era of the CRM protestors were seen as impolite (2016).

factors that contributed to the infelicity of the CRM are the exact issues that BLM has started to face in its inception.<sup>77</sup>

What is significant here is not just that the BLM movement deploys a variety of tactics, but that the tactics are orientated to a different issue than the CRM and, resultantly, the movement is of a different “gravity”. BLM is, more precisely, not a protest movement per se, but a movement of “mass struggle” (Cole, 2020; Rickford, 2016). It is in this sense that we come to focus on the efforts of the BLM movement, namely, because its efforts are actually not continuous with that of the CRM and more aligned with that of the Black power movement: an “insistence on self-definition and human rights rather than on mere social inclusion” (Rickford, 2016, p. 37). This focus comes out of the achievements of the CRM, but also its failures. In this context of *de jure* progress, we find the grievance of BLM, that is, the continuation of *de facto* racial injustice in the form of mass incarceration, alongside the ongoing wealth and health disparities that persist despite these legal changes, or, what comes to be known as the birth of the “New Jim Crow”.<sup>78</sup> Again, the point here is not the progress from the CRM to the BLM movement, but the objects of the latter’s concern: that of *de facto* racial injustice, an issue that the CRM was able to protest against, but unable to address as a political movement because they lacked “political power” and tended to “confuse political institutions with lunch counters” (Rustin, 1965, p. 29). In this sense, “far-reaching change—not the mere amelioration of police abuse—is the objective” (Rickford, 2016, p. 37). Yet, if the CRM’s narrative of success ended

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<sup>77</sup> Note how attempts to draw a line of progress here are, more likely than not, a damaging narrative: We could say that efforts towards revolution—in the *de facto* and *de jure* realms—have proven to be asymptotic and, indeed, the system has remained intransigent to a fundamental social shift that would align a *de facto* and *de jure* transformation of society.

<sup>78</sup> Morris notes that “as scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and others point out, when BLM was emerging, over a million Black people were behind bars, being incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites” (2021; Taylor, 2016). For a clearer articulation of the legal and penal architecture that ushered in *de facto* mass incarceration with *de jure* expansion of civil rights see Michelle Alexnader and Angela Davis among others: (Alexander, 2012, 2013; A. Davis, 2003; A. Y. Davis, 2011; Escobar, 2015; Williams, 2019).

due to its inability to be translated into a political movement, what hopes stand for BLM? The question becomes: while the BLM movement is more self-consciously de-centralised, disorganised (in a non-prejorative sense), and faces the (*de facto*) issues more directly, in what ways does it add pressure to politics? And, of significance to this thesis, how does it move from confrontation to conversation, from a mass struggle to a political movement, through *silence*? At this point, it is not that the role of the body that is the common denominator for both movements, but that, despite different structures, purposes, and styles, both movements seek to be “disruptive of people’s view of the status quo” through “pressure tactics” (Cox, 2017; Danzig, 1964; Izadi, 2016; Johnson, 2018). It is in this context that we now turn to the silent protests of the BLM movement and, through a haptic account, make sense as to how a linguistic account misreads these protests as acts that are effective *by* fitting into larger narratives rather than appreciating them as acts which are politically forceful. Or, in other words, as acts that open up space for a different “genre of the human”, for those experiencing “out-of-placeness” and do not, as of yet, fit in.

### Silent Protests: On Acts that Do not Fit In

Why do we turn to silent acts of protest? Why, in other words, is there a withholding of breath in demonstration against the denial of breath? The turn to silent protest occurred because it: 1) has a persistent role in the movement towards equality; 2) effaces the common image of resistance as happening through forms of (spoken) expression; and 3) ushers in different reflections on the genre of the human and thereby gives words the space to breathe in the present (beyond their existence within narrative). Notably, while the above recounting has chronicled the persistence of bodily acts that do—that express themselves against the discourses of the present—we equally have to note the silent legacy that adjoins this narrative. While it is obvious how Black bodies stood out of place to express their humanity (in a legal sense), what is an accompanying theme is those moments where bodies expressed their

humanity without words: be it the “1917 Negro Protest Parade”; the Black power salute of athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos in the 1968 Olympic Games; or the more recently silent protests of Colin Kaepernick or LeBron James (Brown & Kopano, 2014; Morand, 2020; Singleton, 1982). Indeed, most of the acts of civil disobedience undertaken during the CRM were primarily acts of practised refusal where the main means of expression was through (a lack of) bodily comportment in public space with bodies standing out of place within the context of the prevailing narrative. Thus, as generative as it is to look at how Black bodies express themselves in the terms of, or the narrative of, speech, equally pressing is the need to, following Gordon and Hartman, practise narrative “restraint” (Gordon, 2010; S. Hartman, 2008). Doing so involves understanding how to make space for understanding resistance beyond the terms of expression, and how silent protests themselves—by withholding from articulate forms of action—open a new space for expression beyond our present vernacular or normative modes of seeing. In the face of protests and actions that stand against violent *de jure/de facto forms* of racial subjugation—with the accompanying dictum that one cannot be silent in the wake of these crimes—the question becomes how do we contend with protests that act with silence to bring an uncivilised event (in/on)to language? In answering these questions, we come to understand how people participate politically by standing against speech in such a way that the political life of the body becomes present as something other than a language effect and thereby that which exposes language to something other than itself.

It is at this point, before we turn to the silent protests of BLM specifically, that I want to personally give my reasoning for choosing this particular movement for this thesis. This is primarily because of the danger that occurs in privileged subjects trying to support the voice of others by speaking for them. In this manner, while there is a privilege immanent in being silent about the abuses that abound in political community, there is equally a danger that one dampens and diminishes the demands of those who are protesting by taking up the space of others. In

this sense, the personal motivation for covering the BLM protests specifically is an attempt to give room for the movement to breathe. This is because there is, perhaps, a kneejerk response to try and enclose the significance of what is being done in this moment right *here*, right *now*, *this* second. My personal interest is, however, with highlighting the possibilities that reside in making space for, rather than speaking about, those who are defined by not having their voice heard. Thus, I do not mean to dampen the needed advocacy from those who are not directly affected by the violence that Black people face; to be sure, this is one dimension of activism. The questions that guided me as I came to the actions of the BLM movement are, then, what possibilities of change reside in giving space to those allegedly inarticulate noises and moments of silent protest? How can space be made for these movements to act and speak and how can paying attention to what the body does within speech help us to understand our own role and responsibility in the present?

To be specific, the BLM movement was turned to—rather than say the silent protests of refugees and asylum seeking populations, the #MeToo movement, or Extinction Rebellion—because of the responsibility it impresses upon us as we stand as witnesses to it as an evolving and ongoing movement. In this sense, what is unique about silence within the BLM is its reflective quality, the onus and responsibility it puts upon us (the potential accomplices and bystanders) to react in ways that do not further the forms of discrimination and violence that constituted grievances in the first place. It thus makes us acutely aware of the whole violence of our present habitus. The hope of standing against the impulse of writing for others is to support the potential of letting this movement specifically—and broader movements more generally—have space to express themselves in new, unheard, ways. As such, the centering of silent protest is not to legitimise white silence, nor wider forms of political inaction or withdrawal. Rather it is to highlight the possibilities and power that people (myself included) have to make space for the voice of others to come into being. In this sense there are necessary

limitations to my analysis: it comes from the perspective of someone who has the luxury who has not faced extreme and violent discrimination and therefore cannot truly be said to know what the right response is. It is because of this point that the following discussion is not about the correct or incorrect way of protesting or enacting political change, but about the ways that we, as political subjects, can react to these actions and give them their space in a way that has not been done before.

### Black Lives Matter: Silent Acts in Public

To make these points apparent and close the chapter we must give weight to the silent protests of the BLM movement to understand why there is a withholding of breath in demonstration against the denial of breath. Crucially, this next stage will explicate the acts of silent protest and die-ins taken by the BLM movement, move toward articulating a linguistic account of these protests, and close by noting what is missed in this linguistic account. It will become clear that the linguistic account of performativity has a tendency to reduce the force of the body in these protests as simply equivalent to a rhetorical effect and thus it stands as just another way of testifying to the effectiveness of words or speech to convey the demands of the body politic. What is precisely occluded in this account is the radicality of the act; the fact that what silent protests demonstrate is the limit of words and thus they are a strategy that *stands against* rhetoric by exposing language to something other than itself, a humanity yet to come, that becomes figured in its out-of-placeness in the present. Before we delve into the two accounts, we must first gesture to what protests these are. Notably, BLM, despite reinforcing the phrase that “silence is violence”, has made extensive use of silent protests to bring to light violence itself (Capatides, 2020; Global Integrity, 2020). Thus, at the same moment that the movement became spectacularised in the wake of George Floyd’s with extensive reports of looting, theft, burning and destruction, equally we see reports that “the vast majority of Black Lives Matter protests—more than 93%—have been peaceful” (Mansoor, 2020; J. D. McCarthy & Goff,

2021; Stabile, 2020). The point here is not just that there is a spectre of violence that at once overwhelms Black lives, and the non-violent civil disobedience of BLM, but to note that these protests have had silent interlocutors. Worth remarking upon is the use of “die-ins” by the BLM to “briefly shut down lunch at a building on Capitol Hill used by members of Congress and their staff” and bring attention to the death of Eric Garner (Laughland, 2015). The participants lay “on the ground, unable to see, open to any attack or to arrest” for “four-and-a-half minutes to symbolize the four-and-a-half hours that Michael Brown’s body lay in the street” (Mirzoeff, 2015). While this silent protest was before the death of George Floyd, notable is the continued use of silent protests following Floyd’s murder: on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2020, 15,000 people “gathered in front of Brooklyn Museum for Brooklyn Liberation—one of the largest marches for Black trans lives in history; on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021, “The Rev. Al Sharpton hosted elected officials at [...] [the] National Action Network headquarters in Harlem in New York”, holding a nine and a half minute silence, “the amount of time he [George Floyd] was pinned under Minnesota cop Derek Chauvin’s knee; in June 2020, 60,000 protestors partook in a 1.8 mile silent march “down 23rd Avenue from Judkins Park to Jefferson Park” in Seattle” (Balk et al., 2021; Greenstone & Cornwell, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). Further, and more broadly, protests incorporating silence were held in Toronto, Regina, British Columbia and Iqaluit, among other cities and spaces beyond the continent (BBC, 2020; CBC News, 2020; Fox & Aguilar, 2020). The question returns, how are we to figure the deployment of silence in these performative moments?

### Linguistic Stories: on the Rhetoric of Silence

From a linguistic performative account, what the body is doing in these silent protests of the BLM movement becomes reduced to a rhetorical effect and thus is just another way of testifying to the effectiveness of words or speech to convey the demands of the body politic. Here, the use of silence is figured as a strategy of language, wherein the actions, clothing, and

stances and, at the broadest level, the choreography of the protests becomes part of attesting to the significance of words and associated “with various forms of voicing” (Kunreuther, 2018, p. 1). In this reading, the inarticulate presence of bodies that refuse to articulate via speech becomes circumvented as testifying to a notion of language being “central to democratic practice” and thus the emphasis is not on how the choreography exceeds the phrasing of words but how it is reducible to them (this is perhaps, equally, the linguistic frustration that the aforementioned archival readings face) (Goldberg, 2020; Kunreuther, 2018, pp. 1–2). In this scene, from a linguistic perspective, the speech act has a displaced illocutionary effect; the withholding of performative speech becomes, through articulatory enclosure, an action of speech. What is tricky here is that for linguistic performativity to stage these protests as speech acts that, in silence, do—as acts which immediately have an illocutionary effect—we are to occlude two things: 1) that silent protests expose the narrative structure of linguistic performativity (the violence of grammar), and; 2) what the bodies protest is their present expression in language, and thereby the present mode of speaking (that is, they express something beyond language, an encountering that present words are not able to figure). More precisely, the silent protest is linguistically exceptional in the sense that, for the speech act to do something in the moment that it is silent, it actively necessitates there to be further performative incorporation. The silent act, rhetorically, withholds its speech, and thus for its performative doing to happen it has to be narrativised (in this sense its illocutionary force is belated; the whole construction of it as illocutionary forceful requires this belated performative inscription that attests to the act itself as rhetoric). Thus, what is most significant here is the fact that, for a linguistic account of silent protests’ illocutionary force to be felicitous the protests must be reduced to rhetoric and therefore act as another form of discourse or speaking rather than being that “something more” than happens between words. The glimpse of freedom

we receive here is one that, properly, is a freedom within language rather than the sense of an action that is happening without, or in spite of, words.

Further, this retelling, or linguistically performative account of silence, reveals that the site of performative action is displaced. Thus, in the linguistic account there is, on the one hand, a reduction of silence as a language effect and, on the other, the exposure of an excess that is immanent to the very retelling of these protests as performative acts. This excess is the fact that the performative speech of silence has to be spoken for and attested to by others and is thereby a possibility that is constituted through an immediate absence within the space of discourse; the other that must be present for the performative speech alone to do is thus *not*-rendered in the silence (silence *qua* silence is unintelligible here). What is revealed linguistically is thus not how silent protests are performative, but the mechanism of linguistic incorporation that narrativises bodies in a way so that it is speech that, paradoxically, is the actor or doer *in* silence. Herein, the whole grammatical structures or limits of a linguistic account of silence are laid bare; the very emancipatory or ungrammatical and scandalous potential (existence beyond the unfreedom of the present) of the speech act is instantiated by reiterating a past grammar (a past community of speakers). Silent protests, in this sense, come after the illocutionary force of speech: the displacement not only obscures the role that silence plays in the protest—its lack of linguistic immanence that invites narrativisation—but also re-centres speech as that which is *doing* silence and constitutes silence as a language effect. In this linguistic account, what is precisely missed is the exposure of performative speech acts to the occluded other which exceeds the grammar of the present assembly: the performative force of silence thus becomes reduced to a spoken effect of silence, that is, a focus of the speech involved in silence rather than the presence of silent forms of action that exceed speech. Silence herein is not rendered as antinomical to speech, but that which affirms the power of speech—ironically in this retelling, the protest against speaking becomes an affirmation of the power of words as things

that do *even* in a moment where words are held in abeyance. Thus, what is most obviously exposed in silent protests—that something more than speech is doing something in discourse—is that which, ironically, a linguistic account of performativity must deny. In this way, silent protests, read linguistically, testify to the assembling power of performative speech rather than disassembling force of the body of those who haptically perform something without words and make possible a dialogue about what language is doing.

### Haptic Performances and the Terrible Beauty Outside of Language

Given that a linguistic account of silent protests reads the illocutionary force of silence as a rhetorical form of speech, how else can we figure the force these bodies impress upon us; how, in other words, do we testify to the force of silent protests as that which exposes language to something other than itself, a humanity yet to come that becomes figured in its out-of-placeness in the present? A linguistic account, to be felicitous in its retelling, attests to the force of silence as an effect of something that brings together bodies in language. Thus, if this assembly in turn testifies to the power of words to move politics, what do we glean by a haptic retelling? Here, it is notable that while the felicity of silence as a PSA rests on it being assembled into an existing narrative, yet, by reading haptically, what silent protests reflect is the asymmetry between the bodies of politics and the words that convey them; that is, how bodies are affective precisely in the immediate absence of words. In this manner, it should be noted that, accompanying these lived protests is a wider tradition of aesthetic resistance that seeks to centre a “Black counter gaze” which, following Yancy, “challenges the cultural norms and practices that make whiteness appear natural, normal and right”; the silent protest is a way of choreographing this oppositional perspective, a choreographing which testifies to the fact that “movement matters [...] [and] bodies matter” in public space (Diverlus, 2018; Ward, 2008;

2012; Yoganathan, 2020).<sup>79</sup> Here, these bodies stand to verify that “movement and gesture are not peripheral but central to the politics of protest” and that “we choreograph our actions in response to the meticulous organization of our opposition” (Diverlus, 2018, pp. 64, 67). In this way, haptic performativity presents us with antinomical perspective; while a linguistically performative account sees the withholding of speech as an active participation in performative acts of speech, by reading haptically what is actually significant is the degree to which silent protests stand against the promise of articulation and the accompanying juridical-cum-grammatical structure it brings (namely, that they dislocate it). In this way, the protest that happens in silence is liable to be read conventionally by a linguistic account of PSA—the acts of the body become reduced as a way of testifying to the effectiveness of words (affirming the existing narrative and possibility that speech is what guarantees political subjecthood). However, what is precisely occluded in this account is the radicality of the act, or the play of bodies; this is the fact that what silent protest demonstrates is the limit of words and thus is a strategy that *stands against* rhetoric by exposing language to something other than itself. Thus if the force of language (its lethal capacity) is constituted by language’s opacity to itself, the converse force of haptic performatives is in reflecting language (on/in)to itself, that is, demonstrating or how it “will most certainly kill US”.

To close this chapter we are not just demonstrating how a haptic account reveals the limits of a linguistically performative reading of these protests, but, more generatively, how standing against words creates a space for political dialogue about subjects who do not yet fit into conventional modes of speaking. In this sense, what is remarkable about the use of silence in

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<sup>79</sup> An example of this comes present in the “Mirror casket”, an art piece that “gives back the problem of racism to police and others who inhabit whiteness to fix”, it something that acts as a tactic in the sense that it dislocates speech, that is, it constructs a space of agency in response to power (Certeau, 2013, n. see for this understanding of tactic; Mirror Casket, 2014; Yoganathan, 2020). While this art piece stands as a static representation of this praxis, the point for us to is to see these actions of standing in silence as an art of standing against speech; a form of action that is forceful precisely in so far as it forces language to reflect on itself in its encounter with something that is in excess of it and other to it.

answer to the crime of “white silence” is the fact that the inarticulate presence of bodies acts by exposing language to something other than itself; the haptic action here is the body willingly exposing itself beyond words. This is especially the case in die-ins; what is spectacular here is the fact that “activists made themselves vulnerable” to speech (Yoganathan, 2020). Exposed here is thus not how speech is immanent within silence, but the revelation that the absence of speech in coalition with the presence of bodies creates a space of reflection about the use of speech itself. Thus if a linguistic account attests to the life that exists buried beneath (or within) discourse, a haptic account gestures outward, towards the life that exceeds the legible structure or “normative ways of seeing” in the present. In this way, reading haptically, we can follow what Athanasiou argues, namely that what is reflected in moment of silent protest is the demonstrations of “a break in communication between authorities and citizens, or a problem with the concept of the public or of politics itself” (2017, p. 225; Kunreuther, 2018, p. 11). As Kunreuther says, “in these demonstrations of palpable and visible silence, people dramatize the problems of voicing without uttering a word—a kind of ironic commentary on censorship” (2018, p. 12). Thus, if our discussion began with Butler noting the operation of censorship that occurs for there to be speakable discourse, haptic performativity, in contrast, inspires dialogue by standing against present modes of speaking which promise to guarantee humanity.

While Rustin noted that Black people find themselves “stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before”, what makes BLM politically forceful beyond being a mass movement is that it is “broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state” (Rickford, 2016, p. 36). Critically, it is doing so through silent, trivial, forms of action; it is this point that makes the protests so weighty, namely because they stand against the “maturation narrative” that is immanent within progressive depictions of speaking and are coeval with “refutation of slavery’s enduring legacy”, or a conventional account of how one

enacts political change (S. Hartman, 2002, p. 771). The protest's force is thus in bringing to "light the broken promises of freedom", the losses, death, or violence, that inhere within language that acts, that is to say, the wider violence and death that is coeval with grammar (S. Hartman, 2002, pp. 759–760). It is in this way that the body, within a moment of silent protest, disassembles the existing narrative that delimits the possibility of freedom, and, thereby demonstrates the possibility of creating a freedom to come by exposing language to that something which is other to it. Reading haptically, what silence verifies then is the coalition of bodies and words that stand in dialogue within the present moment. It is in this space of open dialogue that haptic performativity reveals the possibility of actors who, without words, create events to make space for a humanity to emerge in terms other than it has done previously, without replicating "the grammar of violence" that constituted the scene of subjugation (2008, p. 4). Thus, where reading silence linguistically brings us to a confrontation of the ability of language to express a loss within it, the force of silent protest—from a haptic perspective—is that it exposes us to the "terrible beauty" that exists beyond the grasp of language and thereby that which makes dialogue *about* language possible (S. Hartman, 2008, p. 4; Moten, 2003). What silent protests expose language to is, therefore, the flesh of bodies that attest to a humanity that cannot be found in the previous or current grammar of spoken narrative. It is in this exposure that bodies which exist out of place, in moments of silent protest, make possible a negotiation between the unfreedom of present emancipation and the possibility of freedom beyond the present. It is in this moment that we are pushed toward a new mode of relation beyond the present genre or definition of what the human is by realising how the body does something more than act as a language effect, but rather acts by effecting language and doing things with words.

## Conclusion: The End of Silence and Trivial Acts of Refusal

We began this thesis with the central question: how can the marginalised act politically when denied voice? We are, to be clear, writing at a time where voice, as the medium of politics, promises to deliver change, but is open to doubt as to whether it can fulfill this promise. This doubt comes from the pile-up of bodies and stateless actors on the borders of Europe and elsewhere; the displacement of populations within domestic nations; or the brute and spectacular violence enacted against marginalised subjects within political orders (or, indeed, the spoken violence that marginalises political subjects). As such, wherever we find the proof of voice's ability to guarantee humanity a political standing, elsewhere we also encounter its antinomy, its failure to do what it says. The point remains that we (as always) live in the interval where political bodies are doing something *other* than speaking so as to change what politics is and can mean. It is within this disjuncture—between the promise that voice will change the position of exploited subjects, and the reality that voice alone, without bodily pressure, cannot uphold this promise to be that which guarantees political standing—that we began our investigation into the tension between political action and political speech in political understanding. To conclude this journey we will: clarify what was accomplished through this account of bodies that do *without* words saying so; break down the aim of each chapter, its individual conclusions, and the questions raised between chapters and, finally, after this reiteration; turn forward and speak to the context that defines us, the *something* other than language, which is illuminated in the present, and, finally, end with noting the relevance of these trivial doings to the future.

In lieu of the above, the pressure to give the exploited voice and the concomitant breaking of this promise, we turned to performative speech act (PSA) theory to elaborate on the significance of this occurrence. The turn to PSA, which framed the first chapter's concerns, was because of the common sense response to the issue of subjects who lack political voice;

namely, the promotion of voice as *the* way to be heard for those who are silenced. This specific response was connected to a broader legacy of logocentrism within political-cum-social understanding, wherein the possibility of having political standing is reduced to being a speaking a being. Specifically, the concern was with the fact that this logocentrism does not allow consideration of how those who are defined as not having voice can do things without words; it is here that PSA becomes relevant by allowing us to ask the question that occupied Austin: what exactly does speech do, and how does it move ‘things’? Referring to Austin allowed the thesis to come to its main concern: what does action without performative felicity or unaccompanied by words do *to* speech itself? To answer what and how things do without words, we can return to the passage of the body and its deeds through words.

“Chapter I” grounded Austin’s question and clarified what exactly is it that does things in performative speech. In doing so, the chapter clarified that what was revealed in the total speech situation of PSAs was a split between the actor and the subject in the scene of speech’s doing. In this framing, while Austin attested to speech’s doings, the first chapter, conversely, centred on the radical implication that PSA provides; that acts do things without speech saying so. In building on this implication the chapter generated a distinction between linguistic performativity—performative acts where speech is what does—and haptic performativity—performative acts where the doing, or deed, happens despite (or because it is) lacking linguistic felicity. These insights were examined through the work of Austin (demonstrating the disjunction between speech and acts), Arendt (putting Austin’s analysis within a political vocabulary), and Butler (attesting to the broad tendency to impart agency to speech). Significantly, through Austin’s account of performative speech, we saw that there is a distinction between uttered and non-uttered acts, a distinction that revealed the importance of non-uttered acts in allowing speech to do. Here, where Austin introduced a heterogeneity internal to speech, Arendt clarified the political tendency to circumscribe deeds by words such

that we always have to take speech at *its* word that it is *the* actor that is doing things. This tendency—which comes to be called ‘articulatory enclosure’ later—demonstrated how performative speech acts always struggle against the acts they speak of; it is this point that set the ground for the later chapters which were thus preoccupied with the central question: how bodies do things without words.

Through Arendt, and coming to Butler, we came to witness the broader effects of a linguistic account of performative action, that is, the tendency of performative speech acts to legislate the world they perform. Thus, while Butler turns to PSA theory for its liberatory potential, to change the world by words, we located the implication of this linguistic analysis: namely that performative speech is always belated to the scene of action and, in some sense, is always wedded to some form of conventional authority in its doing. As such, while PSA theory specifically, and speech more generally, is used to understand how people are political, the chapter revealed the unintended (or infelicitous) effect of this prerogative given to speech; even without linguistic felicity, or the backing of conventional authority/political grammar, non-uttered acts still do. The implication of this point was that not only is there an incommensurability between how the body *acts* and what the body *says*, but that what bodies do within speech acts exceeds what performative speech says. A haptic account of the performative speech situation allows consideration of the fact that the body, and its varying acts, is significant even in the absence of a being—a *who*—that is, a constituted, legible, subject. Thus, the opening the chapter built on that which was foreclosed by a linguistic account of PSA, namely those political actors that have agency or force in excess of what they say (or do not say). The significance of this is that, even when denied linguistic presence, the actions of the body are still politically forceful, precisely in the absence of the conventions that render political speech efficacious (the needed existence of a previously existing/speaking

community). It is this point that set up the concern of Chapter II; what exactly then does the body do if it does something other than what speech acts say?

In moving from the edges of linguistic account of performative action, and towards a haptic account, the second chapter attests to how bodies and, more generally, actors who are not yet constituted as legible subjects, can do things without words. What was the limit of a linguistic account became a generative starting point for thinking about how the exploited impact the language from which they are excluded or silenced within. In this way, the chapter moved from the interior focus of linguistic performativity—looking into how things are done within speech—to the exterior perspective of haptic performativity—looking at how bodily actions have a force that exceeds the power of the utterance to speak about what exactly is being done (how things happen beyond what speech says). This passage was undertaken to make sense of how the body appears in language as an uncivilised figure that does things in other ways. To make sense of this uncivilised body this chapter moved through the thought of Derrida, Felman, and Lyotard, so as to make sense of *how* language fails, and how this failure is generative for those actors or bodies that do, without being given a proper name, referent, or place within speech. This was done by showing how, even as linguistic performativity works through bodily incorporation—incorporating a referent that was formally not acting—the possibility of speech doing this relies on potential failure. Thus, it was argued that while the power of linguistic performativity is reliant on inscription, for making the body do as it (speech) intends, conversely it was argued that the force of the body becomes felt in doing something other than what language intends (in the ways that it fails language). The body here becomes forceful precisely because it does not fit into the intention of language and exceeds what language said. The chapter concluded that the paradox of language's promised failure—its inability to inscribe the body's in totality (failing to reduce its excess)—opens language to other meanings. Here, the power of language was to be found to assemble bodies within words. But, conversely, the

haptic force of the body was seen in being able to subvert the intention of words—a potential that exists for those divorced from the meaning of their practice or speaking in a felicitous way—and alter the meanings within language beyond the terms of its reference. Importantly, the chapter closed noting that the body beyond words, the faceless figure, has *gravitas* precisely because of (and not in spite of) language’s lack of communicative power. This point allowed the second chapter to bring us to the point of the third chapter: how does the uncivilised body come to figure or be present within the terms of language; what is the force of this thing that fails to have meaning in the way that language intends?

In this sense, Chapter III was concerned with giving weight and form to the force of those bodies who, *in absentia* of inscription, still do things that are improper to the meaning within words. Thus, where the last chapter concerned itself with the force of bodies in language, this chapter situated the force of bodies beyond language that is, the acts of bodies which exceed linguistic reference. Specifically the chapter aimed to note the flipside of the power of linguistic performativity (of assembling bodies by words), namely that the force of haptic performativity becomes felt in how bodies disassemble the spoken narrative and authority of speech through silent forms of protest (the force of which was demonstrated in the fourth chapter). This chapter, significantly, came to the paradoxical implication that comes from thinking of politics from a haptically performative perspective, namely that action without voice is inaugural to politics, the *sine qua non* of being political, and it is that which makes space for speaking politically. The significance of this was inverting the foundation of politics to the extent that the political actor is never a subject of words, but a doer of deeds first and foremost; it is this point that makes a haptically performative account a more forceful account of the significance of those political subjects who are defined by a lack of voice. This is because it allows a perspective into how bodies and actors who are not yet legible as subjects still do political

things, and, more importantly, to figure these doings as something more than a language effect (an effect of speech's doing).<sup>80</sup>

These insights were brought to bear through the work of Nancy and Rancière; significantly the chapter adopted Nancy's thematic of weight to attest to other force of bodies bereft of words and, further, articulated the limits of understanding the full force of bodies in terms of exscription or dissensus. The chapter, thereby, followed *how* the body moves through words as being that something that happens between discourses, phrases, and tongues. Through Nancy, we saw how, if the body becomes displaced by speech it becomes felt corporeally as that something which contests the meaning imputed to it by speech. In attempting to articulate how bodies can act before being inscribed we came to Nancy's concept of exscription; this enabled us to understand how the body makes space for politics before words have been written. The point here was to make clear how bodies, or bodily actions, are not after-effects of writing, but those things that impress upon us before words. This allowed us to expose the confusion immanent in attempting to attest to dissensus linguistically, and thus show how the full weight of dissensus rests in this gravitational force of bodies who act without authority (bodies who act when there is no proper name for them). In sum, what became clear at the end of the chapter is the tendency to equivocate the body as language-effect and, therefore, the wider point that the force of the body is felt in resistance to, or revolt against, this (this was the aforementioned notion of 'articulatory enclosure' mentioned in Chapter I); this is the capacity for the body to perform inarticulate action *within* speech (its capacity to do things while being enclosed). Now we are brought to the concern of the final chapter, namely, if the body is

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<sup>80</sup> Again this was the tendency that framed the starting concern of the thesis: namely the impulse to try to resolve the issue of silence in politics by understanding it as a language effect rather than something that is political because it, in a certain sense, defies the doing of words. As such, it is at this point that we made clear the problematics of trying to address the presence of the inarticulate in politics through speech alone. Further, it is from here that we opened a space for figuring how those who are defined by a lack of speech still do political things when bereft of words.

forceful through disassembling the cardinal authority of words—which assemble in the form of a narrative—how does it make space for political movements, or a speech that does things in the form of a dialogue rather than narrative?

It is from this context that we came to close the thesis by putting the force of understanding politics in haptically performative terms into action. Doing so brought us to contextualise the conceptual notion of a body that does things in excess of words into a historical and contemporary context: the use of silent protests of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The purpose of the final chapter was thus to demonstrate the concluding points of Chapter III, namely, to clarify how action that occurs *before* there is a written text or significant imprint opens the existing narrative to the possibility of a dialogue about words or language itself. That is to say, the final chapter aimed to show how, through silent forms of protest, bodily deeds not only exceed the written text but make possible a space of political speech that does not reproduce the cardinal authority of words. This chapter was thus a return to the question that occupied us in the beginning of the thesis: how can the marginalised act politically when denied voice? In answer to this foundational question, the chapter, through turning to the role of the body within Black theorising, brought us to see how the inarticulate deeds of the body demonstrate the force of haptic performativity as something that is politically impactful by standing *against* the present narratives and structures of spoken discourse. The purpose of this demonstration, seen through the use of silent protest by BLM, was to expose how silent protests make possible a negotiation between the unfreedom of present emancipation and the possibility of freedom; that is, they allow understanding the body as something other than a language effect, and therefore as something that effects language. What was haptically performative here was exposing us to that which exists beyond the grasp of language and thereby that which makes dialogue *about* language possible. This chapter thus traced the paradoxical place of the body as that which—within the context of Black history within the United States—exposes the

fact that while words assemble around bodies what is actually testified to (by words themselves) is how bodies express a political life beyond what is said of them. This point was seen through haptically reading the force of the body within Black theorising, the Civil Rights Movement and, finally, in the BLM movement. Through this analysis, the chapter thus showed how the body comes to be that which exposes language to something other than itself, a humanity “yet to come” that opens up the possibility of a dialogue in politics. The chapter thus articulated the weight of silent protests as actions that are not simply a rhetorical effect of speech or speaking (as a linguistic account would have), but something that stands against and out of place within the existing grammar of speech. These bodies that act without words, in this case, push us toward a new mode of relation beyond the present genre or definition of what the human is, and, therefore, what politics means for subjects.

Altogether then, through haptic performativity, this thesis has attested to two things: 1) how language holds bodies—and the deeds they do—captive and; 2) how bodies, through silent forms of protest, open language in a new way. In this sense, one half of the concern was with how language promises political power through speech, and yet actually delivers its perlocutionary-cum-illocutionary force (its political power) through the effects of (haptic) silencing. Thus, in the midst of common-sense demands that we give voice to the voiceless, this thesis attended to the residual reality left by this form of logocentric politics: namely, how do those whose voice is ineffective do otherwise? In turning to this residual excess—the broader issue of understanding how the voiceless, nonetheless, exist and act politically—the chapters, in sum, examined the violence that happens to bodies (actors) through the written and spoken process of inscription. Further, the chapters explored how this violent inscription—and the broader logic of articulatory enclosure immanent to performative ways of speaking—effected the ability of a linguistic account of performativity to understand what is political about silent protest. While, linguistically, PSA theory promises is that speech acts and does

things; it is therefore preoccupied with testifying to the power of dialogue. The point here was that the articulatory enclosure performed within a linguistic account of what performative speech does exposes that what makes the speech act felicitous is that it assembles into a form of narrative (*unintentionally* speaking about the possibility of dialogue through narrative). The significance, in short, is that this operation of articulatory enclosure—that results in performative speech actually being a form of narration—actually means that speech “that does things” (that is, performs) is unsuitable to the freedom of the *vita activa* (the life of politics). Thus, to return to Arendt, where the wedding of deed with words, or indeed the doing of deeds by words, was the political art *par excellence*, we noted the bodily (un/anti-political—that is to say, wor(l)dless) labour required for its political potential. In this sense, what made and makes speech so politically felicitous is that it can promise to do things, and, conversely, what makes the body so political is that it can disassemble the doing of speech, that is, it can break promises and therefore open up language in a new way. By noting the violence of inscription, gesturing back to Walcott, the aim was not to simply reject the “maturation narrative”, or narrative more generally. Rather, the point is to see the necessary coalition between bodies and words—and not the synonymous relation, as linguistic performativity would have us believe—through attending to what the body does *between* words. By doing so, we come to explicate the broader significance of the second purpose of this thesis: namely, exposing *how*, haptically, bodies open us to a different kind of narrative, one which gives us a glimpse of the unbearable weight of freedom beyond words.

This purpose found its expression in what Wynter and Walcott say we “must do”, namely, “*undo* the narratively condemned status of those not marked human”; the second portion of this thesis was thus dedicated to *how* this undoing is done if not by narrative itself (Walcott,

2021, p. 17-n. emphasis added).<sup>81</sup> In this, if one half was a concern with charting the violence that reduces the body to a wordless existence, the other was to note how, despite this confinement, that body still does political things in excess of words. The point raised, by thinking through how bodies do things beyond words, was thus not simply to note how the power that assembles in speech is also intimate with a violent silencing of bodies. Rather, it was to clarify that what bodies do something in excess of what can be said in that moment (or narrative) of speech. The body was the *leitmotif* of this analysis as it was exactly that which stood against the words of the narrative, as that something which, without words, still testified to the undoing of narrative (or the reality that the voiceless are still political *in absentia* of being there in language): the body was that which, ironically, could *not* be taken at its word (which is the demand of performative speech). Thus, in our turning to the underside of speech—the bodily labouring or haptic performances intimate within said speaking—we saw how the body not only exceeds language but impacts it in such a way as to leave an illegible mark or fleshy imprint. This is what constituted the force of the body beyond the power of language, namely its ability to do things *in absentia* of speech or the criterion of legibility that defines the standing of political subjects. In this, if the political power of the narrative was to do things by words, conversely, in our analysis, the political power of the body is felt in forcing narrative to go another way and therefore make possible a new form of dialogue within it.

The point of this transposition of the *vita activa*, the life of the politics, is precisely to resituate (or decentre the stage of) the purpose of politics. In this process, politics becomes concerned with allowing, or making space for, bodies to settle in words. It is in the haptic reversal that we come to think of the wider implications for the present; to do so we will see how this raises troubling questions that relate to being trivial in politics, the force of refusal, and the effects of

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<sup>81</sup> Again, to return to Butler in the first chapter, to imagine a body beyond narrative completely would be akin to imagining a body that, as of yet, is without social definition.

trivial refusals on what we mean by freedom. As such, the turn to silent protest was because it stands as a form of political action that breaks with the social relations that underpin the current sociality or social configuration of the narrative of what *we* are. Here, its action was not the complete effacement of the narrative but an intentional withholding of it by the actions of bodies that do not speak (or act through speech). This choreographed action was that which made it possible to expose PSAs, and language, to something beyond its grasp, and thereby open language to something other than that which has come before. In this context, silent protest was haptically significant in making space for a dialogue about language itself; as we look outward, the general issue we are to face is how we give name to those forms of resistance or revolts that are yet to be nameable in the (spoken/perlocutionary) effects they have had. Thus, if this thesis has spoken to how trivial beings—those without speech—act, the point to ask is, how do we assemble with trivial beings, how can we trivially and silently protest with those who seem to lack a language to speak? The general issue spoken to going forward then is how to figure trivial forms of protest in politics and how to make space for these doings that have no space in language and yet expose a future “to come”.

Attending to this haptic performance—this trivial doing that is occurring as words spread across the world—requires us to attend to the force of refusal. Here, silent protests stood as one specific refusal in *that* (silent) moment which made it possible for vernacular forms of Black creativity to take shape and settle within language; looking forward, the concern is thus refusing in a way that makes space for bodies that are yet to have settled in the world. It is in this sense that, as much as speech testifies to the force of standing forth (presence), haptic performativity asks us to withdraw from present forms of speaking as a way to usher in broader forms of participation (and new ways of speaking). This demand, upon us, and upon others, is thus, haptically, to pay attention to, and make space for, those illegible marks that exceed present definition or grammatical phrases, those beings who are yet to come into the fold and still do

things in our world. Doing so, to close, is thus a concern with attending to how we, however trivially, do politics and can effect politics *in absentia* of speech, by withdrawing from narratives and making space for something else, some other body or doing that is yet to mean anything in words. If for Walcott, we see glimpses of Black freedom “to come” as the Black body configures and reconfigures modes of being this turns us toward making space for those objectified, dehumanised, and inarticulate, beings (2021, pp. 5–7). As we feel bodies weigh upon us or upon political communities we are thus called upon to give space for this inarticulate mass to have an effect on what we mean by freedom, humanity, or the subject of politics. We, as political beings, are asked to make space for these trivial refusals that do something more than we can say. As Walcott says “in the performance (of refusal, in the taking hold of our bodies, making, etc.), we might experience the dangerous feeling of freedom, that overstepping of emancipation’s confinement”; properly then the role of politics is not of promising, but of giving space, of allowing those trivial doings to have their day in the light of words (2021, p. 108). It is this way that we may reveal that speaking is just one conduit of how we are political and just one of the potential ways in which we act to the change meaning of politics and social life.

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