

# VIOLENCE AND ART

Friday, May 12, 2017

11.15-12.45

Institute of Philosophy, Raadzmaal

## **The Violence of the Image. Reflections on the Photographs by Alice Harris**

*Katia Hay (University of Lisbon, Portugal)*

As Mondzain has argued (*L'Image peut-elle tuer ?* 2002), there is something wrong in ascribing any kind of power or violence to the image, since what we are always necessarily referring to is the way in which *some people* react to certain images. The image in itself is nothing... it is only in our interaction with the image that it becomes something, and that of course depends on us, the spectators. On the other hand, though, stressing the role of the subject (with all his/her autonomy of reason and judgment) in this way is not entirely unproblematic, because in doing so, it becomes almost impossible to account for the way in which the subject may be unconsciously and unwantedly *affected* by the image.

In this paper I would like to examine some of the ways in which images do affect us. In other words, I would like to raise the questions: *what kind of power do images have, or perhaps to be more precise: what kind of power do we convey to images? What kind of relation do we have to images? How do they - or do they - affect the way in which we relate to the world, i.e. the way we perceive, construct, respond to and engage with the world and what we call reality? Why do some images provoke a violent response in us, while others don't?* – And what I mean by violent in this context is what seems to be an unmeasured or disproportionate response on the part of the viewer.

I will address these questions by examining the role played by photographic images in the denunciation of the atrocities that were taking place in the Congo Free State under the rule of King Leopold of Belgium. These images (mostly taken by the missionary Alice Seeley Harris) depict what would be considered at the time to be a 'crime against humanity' and were disseminated across Europe and the USA by the CRA (Congo Reform Association). Most importantly, though, many authors consider that the CRA's effectiveness (in denouncing and ultimately dismantling the Congo Free State) was mainly due to these photographs, to the extent that Alice would be described as the *lady who brought down a King*.

Even if we don't go as far as Sharon Sliwinski, who in her article *The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo*, claims that "the Historical inquiry into the Congo reform movement shows that the conception of rights did not emerge from the articulation of an inalienable human dignity, but from a particular visual encounter with atrocity."; what does seem unquestionable is that the images played a very important role in this process. *Thus, the urgency of raising again the question concerning the effect or the power (the violence perhaps) of images, which (as we shall see) goes well beyond the violence depicted in the image.*

## **The Absent Body: Violence, Representation and (Im)Materiality**

*Elizé Mazadiego (University of California San Diego, United States)*

The violent phenomenon of the “disappeared” is widespread in the modern history of Latin America. From this context emerge two contemporary artists, Doris Salcedo from Colombia and Teresa Margolles from Mexico who reflect on the traumatic experience of violent conflict. This paper explores their artistic strategies and modes of representation that counteract disappearance with acts of reappearance. A survey of their poignant works examines how presence and visibility are not conveyed through literal representations of violence or trauma, but rather evoked in abstract, contemplative objects. Despite the persistence of war and violence in their countries of origin, the artists’ aesthetic strategy emphasizes the collective human experience of violence, alternating between the individual and the mass body. At the center of this discussion is the work’s ability to transcend the objectified “other” to render the violence visible and palpable, as well as the performative scope of trauma and its transmission. More specifically, I consider the ways in which these works enact what scholar Diana Taylor calls “act of transfer” to transmit traumatic memory from the victim to witness to generate a sense of connectedness and responsibility.

# THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE

*Friday, May 12, 2017*

*11.15-12.45*

*Institute of Philosophy, Room N*

## **The Law and the Notion of Epistemic Violence**

*Luis Garcia (Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium)*

In an influent essay titled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” first published in 1983, the Indian Scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduced in the international philosophical discussion the notion of “epistemic violence”. Inspired on Foucault’s genealogy of the redefinition of the boundaries between rationality and irrationality during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, Spivak suggests that this conceptual transformation was just the half of a two-handed engine whose other half was constituted by the redefinition of the boundaries of legitimate subjectivity and its Other incarnated by the colonial subjects; in that movement, according to Spivak, a whole set of knowledge was disqualified as inadequate, naïf or mere object of curiosity in a process of epistemic subjugation called by her “epistemic violence”. Such epistemic violence would then be embodied in the juridical and bureaucratic vocabulary of the laws and the administrative regulations of the colonies inasmuch as they express a semantic of interests foreign to their subjects and context, as for instance the use British juridical categories to solve conflicts regarding Indian culture.

The aim of this paper is to reconstruct this concept of epistemic violence from the perspective of the discussions on philosophy of language mainly on the relation between affects and their linguistic representations. According to the hypothesis for which we argue, when there is a fracture between the domain of experienced conflicts and the language supposed to express them, then those involved in it would undertake an epistemic violence solely to translate their experience and affects in the language supposed to solve them. This violence manifests itself not only within postcolonial societies where the juridical and bureaucratic language is clearly imported thereby obliging the local communities to adapt themselves to a foreign symbolism, but also within any other society where the social fragmentations often resonate in a juridical language expressing the grammar of interests of a particular sector or class. In order to explore this phenomenon, I suggest exploring a concept used by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to resist juridical universalism, namely, the notion of discursive blockage of imagination. We would like to explore the potentiality of his peculiar philosophy of language in order to articulate the violence comprised in the imprisonment of the human creative power in a static and foreign symbolism.

## The Limits of Violence

*Vasti Roodt (University of Stellenbosch, South Africa)*

Describing an action or a state of affairs as a form of violence is usually shorthand for condemning whatever falls under that description. However, precisely because the concept of violence is taken to have a special kind of moral force, it is particularly prone to conceptual inflation. In this paper, I argue that we should resist such inflation for epistemic and moral reasons. Specifically, the indiscriminate application of the concept deprives us of the resources for working out what violence is *not*, which leaves us unable to specify the moral end for the sake of which violence is to be condemned. Having made the case for delimiting the concept of violence, I go on to defend a strict definition of violence in the normative sense as the use of unreasonable force on the part of identifiable human agents. I conclude that this restricted definition enables us to distinguish between *violence* as a feature of specific human actions and *injustice* as a feature of policies and institutions that cannot be reduced to individual agency. My aim, ultimately, is not to reject violence as framework for explanation and evaluation, but to show that it is self-defeating to expand this framework beyond reasonable limits.

## EXISTENTIALISM

Friday, May 12, 2017

14.15-15.45

Institute of Philosophy, Raadzaal

### **Beyond Victims and Executioners: Daoud and Camus on “Progressive Violence” and Genuine Humanism**

*George Heffernan (Merrimack College, United States)*

Literature offers a unique approach to the critique of violence. An excellent example is Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013/2014), a post-colonial response to Albert Camus's classic novel *The Stranger* (1942). Since Daoud's narrative also contains penetrating anti-colonial commentaries on major topics in Camus's novel, it seems natural to interpret it as a defense of the position that “progressive violence” is justified in rectifying the regressive violence that Camus's European-Algerian perpetrators inflicted on their Arab-Algerian victims. After all, Daoud's narrator, Harun, the younger brother of Musa, the Arab whom Meursault murdered, experiences a kind of catharsis by murdering a Frenchman, Larquais. Exploring the full force of Daoud's novel, however, this paper suggests that Harun's narrative does not support “progressive violence” as a legitimate response to Meursault's oppressive violence, but rather exposes it as a serious obstacle to the achievement of genuine humanism. For Daoud has Harun argue that to take another's life is not to make sense of one's own life, that to kill another human being is to kill all human beings, and that to kill another is to kill oneself. More precisely, Daoud has Harun argue that *murder is suicide*. Therefore it is doubtful whether Harun's complete description of his act is consistent with the enthusiastic assertions of the therapeutic nature of anti-colonial violence, especially of mass murder, by Fanon and Sartre. What liberates Harun is not the commission but the confession of his crime. Harun regains through his narrative what he has lost through his act, namely, the humanity that he shares with Musa, Meursault, and Larquais. It is also the humanity that Daoud shares with Camus. Thus *The Meursault Investigation* is not a defense of “liberation violence”. The lesson that Harun learns from killing Larquais, and that readers can learn from him, is that victims who murder their oppressors do not enhance their own or anyone else's humanity; they diminish it. Such violence does not “cleanse” them in the long run; it only has a fleeting cathartic effect on them in the short run. The murder of some human beings detracts from the humanity of all human beings. Properly understood, no murder is “progressive”, and all murder is *regressive* or *oppressive*. Accordingly, Daoud's critique of violence is consistent with Camus's position that there are other, creative and constructive, forms of revolt and rebellion than murder, that murder, especially mass murder, is unjustifiable, and that murder is destructive of human beings' shared humanity and harmful even to victims with just causes. Just ends do not justify unjust means, but unjust means can vilify just ends. Hence Harun's sense of solidarity, empathy, and humanity overcomes Meursault's sentiments of solitude, apathy, and indifference. So *The Meursault Investigation* represents a contribution not only to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of *The Stranger* but also to the sharp debate about the relation between genuine humanism and murderous violence that split the French Left during the period of decolonization and that still rages with contemporary attempts to justify terrorism as a viable means to political ends.

## Fanon and Camus on the Algerian Question

*Pedro Tabensky (Rhodes University, South Africa)*

Neither Frantz Fanon nor Albert Camus were strangers to violence. And both had an intimate relationship with the bloody Algerian revolution (1954-1962). As is well known, Fanon was a black revolutionary—hailing from a middle class family in Martinique—fighting on the side of the FLN for the liberation of Algeria from French racist rule. With incontrovertible brilliance, he played a key role in the formation of field of postcolonial studies, which focuses on the complex interrelationship between social and psychological health in societies having to endure colonialism and its legacy. Camus, on the other hand, was born a working class French Algerian and he remained deeply committed to Algeria throughout his life, but was a vocal opponent of the revolution. He was an opponent not because he endorsed French rule, but because he was opposed to the violence that Fanon thought was necessary for liberation and emancipation. Indeed, Camus' philosophy rejects utopian narratives of liberation and emancipation and replaces them with the pessimist idea of never ending struggle against the given, rejecting the idea, however interpreted, of a definitive endpoint where perfect justice will be achieved. By contrast, and perhaps chillingly, Fanon states that the revolution he was committed to "... is quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another". Famously, or perhaps infamously, Fanon qualifiedly defends violence in his *The Wretched of the Earth* on largely pragmatic and therapeutic grounds, whereas Camus condemns Algerian violence in, for instance, his short story *The Guest* (1957), in some of his journalistic work and he explores the idea of revolutionary violence, particularly Marxist and Nazi, in *The Rebel* (1951). Fanon, more than Camus, develops an explicit account of the psychology of violence, and I will be exploring this. But I hypothesize that his psychology is flawed and that Camus gives us persuasive theoretical resources for developing a richer story than Fanon's on what happens, psychologically speaking, to the minds of revolutionaries that makes it so that a revolution aimed at undermining injustice once and for all can never succeed in achieving its goals. The solution, Camus would argue, is not to substitute "one 'species' of mankind by another" as Fanon suggests we ought. Camus' solution involves fostering mutual recognition, and working to understand why recognition fails in circumstances that beckon the revolutionary impetus. The aim should be to dismantel Manichean orders—where the world is grasped as the battleground between the opposing forces of goodness and evil, between heroic individuals and worthless vermin—set up by colonial rule. The colonizer does not want to recognize the humanity of the colonized and that is precisely the problem that needs to be addressed. And, contrary to Fanon, it cannot be addressed by using the same logic that informs the colonial mindset. In other words, Manicheanism cannot be the solution to Manicheanism. If I am right about this, then Fanon's revolutionary therapy cannot succeed. My sense, following Camus, is that revolutionary violence is too high a price to pay for freedom. The price of freedom would be so high, in fact, that whatever freedom is achieved would be seriously compromised. But work will have to be done before establishing the plausibility of this view. A guiding question will be: How could liberation happen otherwise in situations where those in power refuse to recognize the legitimate demands of the oppressed? And part of the reply will involve putting pressure on the very idea of a liberatory politics.

# PSYCHOANALYSIS

*Friday, May 12, 2017*

*14.15-15.45*

*Institute of Philosophy, Room N*

## **The Lack of the Imagined ‘White’ Self: Colonial Violence and its Repression of Imagination**

*Seunghyun Song (KU Leuven, Belgium)*

Fanon’s anticipation of ‘the personal is political’ – a feminist movement that contests the rigid division between the private and public domains – is clearly demonstrated in his psychoanalytic approach to colonial consciousness. Throughout *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon provides a critical analysis of the colonial culture, one of them being his critical appropriation of Jungian collective unconscious. Through the notion of European collective unconscious that both the white colonizers as well as the black colonized participate, the structure of violence where the political transposes to the psychological, and vice versa, is exposed. In other words, deeply embedded in the colonial culture, both the colonizers and the colonized suffer from a Manichean delirium where their identities of being white/black become facile and reductive representations of good and evil (white=good/black=evil) which pervades both the political and the psychological registers. In this paper, I aim to broaden this notion of structure of colonial violence as a collective delirium by actively including the field of colonial imagination and its deleterious effect.

Evocative of the feminist critique of imagination, I will first demonstrate how Fanonian psychoanalysis of colonialism testifies the abysmal lack of concern towards the colonized imagination, i.e., the collective unconscious of colonial culture removes the colonizers’ sensitivity towards how they would be depicted in the imagination of the black colonized. Then, I demonstrate how this lack testifies the politicization of, and the violence in the domain of, imagination. On the one hand, a raging obsession of the imagined black ‘other’ paves the split identity for the black colonized. On the other, the white colonizers’ lack of anticipation of their imagined selves paves a position of alarming naiveté. By focusing on Fanon’s case study of a white woman who suffers from neurotic tics, I will conclude by pointing out the salience of transposing psychoanalytic discussion of the unconscious to the field of imagination.

## **Behind the Disillusionment of the First World War. Freud on Aggression and the Limit of Civilization**

*Sandrine Hansen (KU Leuven, Belgium)*

Six months after the outbreak of the first world war Sigmund Freud's diagnosis in 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death' was clear, the bewildered and distressed European citizen suffered from disillusionment. On the basis of his psychoanalytic work Freud could write that human beings welcome illusions because they spare her or him from the unpleasure of reality, but the atrocities of the war had according to Freud pierced a hole in the communal illusion and the hope of civilization. "In reality" Freud writes "there is no such thing as 'eradicating' evil". In an open letter, later written to Einstein, Freud directly affirms the existence of an inherent instinct of aggression. But in the midst of war Freud saw something more than instinctual forces breaking through the harness of culture, he saw the tragic limit of the human condition. Not only is there a limit to the "susceptibility to culture" but there is in the human mind a "special capacity for involution" he wrote. Amidst the destruction of war Freud found something imperishable in the human mind, unlike any other materiality, the earliest structures of the mind will, he claims, co-exist with the forms that succeed it. This is the condition of possibility what Freud later will define as organic elasticity, better known as the death drive. In this paper I wish to explore the relation between aggression and Freud's idea of the imperishable character of the human mind, in perspective to the current conception of the plasticity of the human being.

# AESTHETICS

*Saturday, May 13, 2017*

*10.00-11.30*

*Institute of Philosophy, Raadzmaal*

## Walter Benjamin: Image-Violence

*Laura Smith (University of Leuven, Belgium)*

In Walter Benjamin's essay "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (1919-1922), bourgeois life is characterized by an ambiguous, demonically mythic relation to Nature. To live under mythic fate, according to Benjamin, is suffocating. Alison Ross notes that in Benjamin's early work, it is the concept of the image—semblance—that is linked to this negative, demonic ambiguity; a vertigo of impossible meaningfulness. However, with regards to the concept of the image in general, Ross notes: "the image is *indispensable for human life* because it allows human beings to step outside their ordinary existence". Indeed, Ross shows that Benjamin took the negatively ambiguous concept of the image and transformed it—displaying its dialectics—to his advantage in his later work.

In line with work by Alison Ross, Eli Friedlander, Werner Hamacher, and Alexander Düttman, I posit that to understand Benjamin's 'image' necessarily involves his concept of 'violence'. As such, this paper looks to Benjamin's artistic project of rejuvenating literary criticism as indistinguishable from what can be understood as his 'destructive' violence.

It is well-known that Benjamin distinguishes between 'mythic' and 'divine' violence. Regarding Benjamin's 'divine violence', Hamacher underscores that 'what is at issue here is not 'brutality''. Düttman agrees that Benjamin's 'divine violence' is a "non-violent, violence". By contrast, Benjamin's understanding of mythic violence centres on what Friedlander calls 'arrogation'. Friedlander adds that, "a critique of violence has as its task to reveal the truth content, *the highest reality*, underlying the forms violence may take". According to Benjamin, far from being rid of a mythic fate comprised of an ambiguity inducing anxiety, it is the historical norm. It is here—at the crossroad of a human experience of anxiety—that we can recall Ross' definition of the image as "indispensable for human life". This paper therefore argues that, for Benjamin, the image becomes *the* strategic tool, not only of survival (against anxiety), as Ross has already outlined via Hans Blumenberg, but of a *hopeful process of resilience*. While Ross deems the image a 'remedy', psychoanalyst and philosopher Mathilde Girard underscores that while the image is no cure (*la guérison*), "*ça fait passer la maladie*". Furthermore, Georges Didi-Huberman—whose work on the image is in a distinctly Benjaminian lineage—notes that the image is the capacity to 'treat' (*soigner*). This particular language of 'treating' (a continual *process* not an end) a subterranean mythic violence will be explored as *the* intersection of Benjamin's concepts of 'image' and 'violence'. Indeed this process is Benjamin's renewed '*seeing*' and '*reading*' other-wise (notions advanced by Rainer Nägele, Timothy Bahti, and Samuel Weber).

## Political Violence and the Violence of the Image: Baumgarten on ‘Confused Representations’ and Disgust

*Herman Siemens (Leiden University, The Netherlands)*

This paper is part of a larger NWO project in which we are investigating political violence and the (violence of) the image. In our fully mediatized environment, an adequate understanding of political violence must be informed by an aesthetics of the image and perception that tackles two fundamental questions: what is an image or representation “of violence”? And what makes an image violent, in the sense that it provokes acts of political violence? In this paper, I tackle the preliminary question: What kind of philosophical vocabulary best enables us to describe the power some images have to affect us in ways that words / discourse cannot?

There are at least 3 desiderata for such a vocabulary. That it:

1. shows how images (unlike words or speech) resist conceptual analysis. A vocabulary for the non-conceptual character and logic of images;
2. resists the naïve account of images of violence, as representing violence in reality, and its presupposition in the subject – object opposition. A non-representational vocabulary that acknowledges that images create a ‘world’ that, while fictional, has a unique capacity to reveal underlying structures and relations that remain opaque to empirical experience;
3. explains how the perception of certain images can unsettle and change the ways in which we perceive things around us.

The argument is that in the mediatized environment we inhabit our perception of things has become damaged by the generalized logics of image-exchange and -sharing, so that we have become immunized against perceiving concrete particularity. Certain images, however, have the capacity to break and break through this immunity and return the particular to our perception. These are what I would call ‘violent images’: those that provoke violent reactions and can have political consequences.

The thesis of this paper is that Alexander Baumgarten, the founder of modern aesthetics (1714-1762), offers conceptual tools for thinking about images that go some way towards addressing these desiderata. The argument focuses on the concept of clear and “con-fused” or “fused” (“verworren”) representations, understood by Bg as sensate representations that resist conceptual analysis and subsumption (cf. desideratum 1). They serve him to describe the kind of insight (“cognitio sensitiva”) unique to our sensate faculties: their capacity to capture the concrete particular in its qualitative singularity, understood as a plurality of shifting relations and meanings.

On this basis I develop a notion of the image as a dynamic complex of shifting relations, which cannot be resolved into their relata, but remains all the while an identifiable whole. Such images are capable of breaking through the mediatized logics of image-exchange and -sharing and impact on our damaged perception (cf. desideratum 2). But as sensate images of particulars, their complexity and plurivocity (“infinitely many meanings”) defeat our cognitive capacity to determine truth/untruth univocally, provoking fear or disgust (“Abscheu”). This fear or disgust of indeterminacy, I suggest, is one of the ‘the small beginnings’ of violent political acts and events.

[Doing justice to political violence requires that we keep open the question of the image and reality, and in the last of the paper I draw on Bg’s constructivist notion of “heterocosmic fictions” to formulate a non-representational account of images ‘of violence’ (cf. desideratum 2) as heterocosmic fictions that stand in a relation of radical dis-analogy to the logics of our mediatized environment.]

# PHENOMENOLOGY

*Saturday, May 13, 2017*

*10.00-11.30*

*Institute of Philosophy, Room N*

## **Heidegger's Violence: From Ontology to the Holocaust**

*Adam Knowles (Drexel University, United States)*

This paper will explore the role of violence in the work of Martin Heidegger in the light of the *Black Notebooks*. It argues that *Walten* is the fundamental term for understanding Heidegger's thinking and politics in the 1930s and 40s, until the emergence of his later thinking of releasement (*Gelassenheit*). In his 1929-30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger introduced a new terminology of violence. While he initially introduced the term *Walten* (to reign or prevail) as a translation of the Aristotelian term *phusis*, a manifold set of cognate terms also begin to proliferate in Heidegger's work in the 1930s. These terms include *verwalten* (to administer), *obwalten* (rule), *Gewalt* (force) and *gewalttätig* (violent). In his usage of the terms, Heidegger oscillates between the ontological use of *Walten* as the fundamental force of *phusis* and the ontic identification of specific acts of violence using the cognate terms.

The first section of this paper will analyze the ontological use of *Walten* as a translation of *phusis*, a term which in turn serves as a translation of being. As a name for being, *Walten* is also a name for the force that creates the ontological difference between being and beings. The differentiation of what Heidegger calls the same (*das Selbe*) into being and beings is the originary site of this violence, and being is fundamentally violent according to Heidegger. In his thinking throughout the 1930s, especially his *Ereignis* manuscripts, he attempts to develop a language and phenomenological practice appropriate to tracing the contours of this violence.

Yet even while Heidegger introduces the language of *Walten* as an ontological term in the *Ereignis* manuscripts, simultaneously in the *Black Notebooks* he applies the language of *Walten* to actual acts of violence. The second section of this paper will explore Heidegger's response to the Holocaust in his *Black Notebooks, 1942-48*—one of the most regrettable and morally obtuse aspects of his entire thinking. For Heidegger, both the German casualties of WWII and the Holocaust are comparable acts of violence, for he regards both as stemming from the same cause: humans uprooted from being, saturated in technology and incapable of treating the earth or other human beings as anything more than quantifiable and, ultimately, expendable resources. For Heidegger, grappling with the actual motives and methods of the perpetrators and the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust is unnecessary until philosophy has first come to terms with this ontological problem. Hence, he regards the ontological exploration of violence as an ethically sufficient response to actual acts of violence.

In conclusion this paper will offer a critique of this response by questioning the motives behind Heidegger's turn to a philosophy of letting-be and releasement after WWII. Precisely as he is undergoing denazification and writing privately on the Holocaust in this manner, Heidegger's thinking conveniently begins to move away from the language of violence and turns to *Gelassenheit*. What does it mean that Heidegger turns away from the ontological language of violence at precisely this moment? How does this focus on violence force us to rethink the trajectory of Heidegger's thinking?

## **The Violence of the Gaze – The Violence of the Image. Some Considerations on an Ethics of Seeing**

*Hana Gründler (Max-Planck-Institut, Germany)*

The question of seeing is crucial for reflection on the relationship between art and violence. The dimension of power, but also of the powerlessness of the glance always combines in an ambivalent way the subject that sees, and the subject exposed to being seen. Based on the theoretical considerations of Sartre, but also of Levinas and Foucault, in visual culture and film studies the focus has for a long time been placed on the analysis of the so-called ‘scopic regime’ and on the violence of the gaze. Starting out from cultural-anthropological reflections, in art history an opposite tendency can be observed in more recent years: namely, that the object has come to be conceived not only as a focal point, but as itself an agent. The object becomes a subject, is enlived, in a maneuver that goes hand in hand with an almost metaphysical hypostatization of the image, which is set up as an absolute, and violently affects the perceiving subject, that becomes to a certain extent a passive, powerless recipient.

In this paper I seek to investigate both the objectifying “violence of the gaze” as well as the potential “violence of the image”. In a first moment I will focus on contemporary artworks and images of violence and migration. Significantly, artists such as Marina Abramović or Ai Wei Wei problematize the question of identity, body and pain, challenging art history and visual culture studies to rethink the complex relationship between art, violence and vision. Connected to this, I will critically reflect upon an ethics of perception or of seeing, which was discussed, among others, by Mieke Bal, Judith Butler and Martha Nussbaum. If, for instance, we think of the ruthless images of the 2016 documentary *Fuocoammare* by the Italian film director Gianfranco Rosi, in which he depicts the living and dying of migrants, we start to realize that a reflection on violence, voyeuristic strategies, the objectification of subjects and the responsibility of seeing is more necessary than ever.

# POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

*Saturday, May 13, 2017*  
*11.45-13.15*  
*Institute of Philosophy, Raadzaal*

## **Civil Disobedience Amid and Against Political Violence**

*Carlos Bernardo Caycedo (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands)*

It is difficult to develop a philosophical understanding of political violence, in part, due to the diversity of instances and multiplicity of contexts in which it takes place in the world. On the one hand, there is the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of this phenomenon by developing an overly abstract theory of it; on the other hand, there is the danger of overlooking the commonalities among its multiple forms. In this paper, I try to avoid these risks by examining how our understanding of political violence could be enhanced by focusing on some features of current practices of civil disobedience, and how a philosophical reflection on political violence contributes to on-going debates on civil disobedience.

In the first part of the paper I advance a conception of political violence as the prevention of an individual or a group from appearing in the public sphere. Here, political violence is presented in Arendtian terms as the violation of the right to have rights. I argue that this prevention is of a political nature because it threatens the human condition of plurality on which politics depends. From this perspective, preventing someone from appearing in front of others constitutes an attack against the conditions of possibility of the political realm. I illustrate my argument with the analysis of the violence suffered by Colombian unionists in areas under the control of paramilitary groups.

In the second part of the paper I apply this understanding of political violence to current debates about new practices of civil disobedience and the challenges they imply for its traditional definitions. I discuss the liberal definition of civil disobedience provided by John Rawls in relation to new practices of political contestation. Specifically, I study the case of the Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó (Peace Community of San José de Apartadó). I show the commonalities between their practice of resistance and paradigm cases of civil disobedience, but I also highlight why this case can provide new insights about civil disobedience, in particular when it occurs under ‘illiberal’ circumstances.

As a conclusion, the paper points out both the potential of this new Arendtian conception of political violence in relation to the debates about civil disobedience and the potential of some practices of civil disobedience as means against the political invisibility of this kind of violence. This paper points out a new way for the justification of civil disobedience — afar the defense of individual political rights, and beyond its understanding as a means for democratization—, namely the defense of the conditions of possibility of a public realm, the defense of the right to appear.

## Resistance, Will and Violence: A Discussion Between Foucault and Caygill

*Guil Treibel (KU Leuven, Belgium)*

According to Peter Hallward, no one has done (in recent times) more than Caygill to drive forward the analysis of resistance by emphasizing the distinctions to be made between resistance and revolution, vitality and consciousness or between endurance and emancipation (Hallward, 2014). However, Hallward ends his discussion of *On Resistance* by a challenge – that in the analysis of resistance there is more to be gained by trying to reconnect these than by disconnecting them. This paper aims to take on this challenge and propose a critical engagement with Caygill's notion of resistance and its relation to will and violence.

Caygill starts *On Resistance* with signaling Foucault's contribution to the analysis of the concept, specifically by highlighting the important role of Clausewitz for a strategic model of power. Given the importance of Clausewitz for Caygill's own position this is indeed a significant contribution on the part of Foucault. Caygill implies that he will develop what Foucault is somewhat silent about (Caygill, 2013). However, Foucault is not as silent as Caygill suggests and 'a politics of resistance' does seem to be at the heart of his interests from the Iranian Revolution until his death in 1984.

For Foucault, as for Caygill, the distinction between revolution and resistance is crucial and they would seem to concur that reducing resistance to revolution is problematic because it subjugates all practices to a realization of an abstract freedom, a freedom that may lead to domination and oppression (Foucault, 2001a (1980)). Nonetheless, Foucault wouldn't agree with Caygill's Genet that the mutation of resistance to revolution must be resisted (Caygill, 2014: 128-133). For Foucault the revolutionary event cannot be reduced to the political practices that preceded it or will be followed by it and he proposes the term of 'uprising' to capture its almost 'miraculous' character, irreducible to any historical or political explanation (Foucault, 2001a (1979); Honing, 2008; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016). It is in a text published last year in English that Foucault highlights that for him there is no way to think of resistance but through the idea of will (Foucault, 2016). It is with this in mind that I propose to read Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1984 and expose the possibility he opens of building an idea of a practical will that is crucial for any future thought of resistance. It is in this vein that Foucault developed his concept of spirituality (Foucault, 2001b) – to capture the willing transformation that is the condition of possibility of resistance, a possibility that exists only in relation to the risk one is willing to take. This concept of risk has to be related to the violence one is ready to suffer both in mind and body, both on the ethical and the political level.

## CRITICAL THEORY

*Saturday, May 13, 2017*

*11.45-13.15*

*Institute of Philosophy, Room N*

### **Understanding Suffering from Social Violence: Arendt's and Adorno's legacy**

*John Emanuel (University of Potsdam, Germany)*

In my talk I lay out the thesis that the meaning of social violence can only be understood properly, if we understand what it means to suffer from it. I develop this thesis by comparing and furthering Hannah Arendt's and Theodor W. Adorno's reflections on the Holocaust and 20th century totalitarianism. I will show, approaches seeking to bestow sense to occurrences of social violence, as oppression, exclusion, and intrusions into conduct, from perspectives other than the suffering person's affirm it, and thus leave no space for overcoming it. Scrutinizing aspects of Arendt's and Adorno's thoughts on violence lead to a conception of the perspective and conscious of the suffering person, in which the disposition for overcoming violence is founded.

I begin with Arendt's conception of the banality of evil. This leads to an understanding of the subject, who does not entertain thought about her social activities, as the source of social violence. It will be shown that Arendt's approach leaves a blind spot for those who suffer within social structures, because she merely focuses on particular persons who commit evils and are thereby the source of violence.

Secondly I discuss Adorno's reflection on the relation between moral philosophy and society, referring to his lectures "Problems of Moral Philosophy", in order to fill out the blind spot Arendt leaves us with. As Adorno says that moral philosophy is only possible as resistance against social structures, which are sources of violence, his approach leads us to an understanding of suffering in terms of negativity of freedom and reason. However, Adorno's reflection only leads to an understanding of the negativity of freedom and reason in society, but cannot provide an understanding of the experience of suffering of a particular person.

While Arendt's approach merely focuses on the particular person as a source of violence, Adorno's reflection seems too be to general for understanding suffering. I show in a third step that in order to overcome these shortcomings, we first have to further Adorno so that we can grasp the actual experience of suffering in particular social relations as consciousness of negativity of freedom and reason. Second, then we can develop an understanding of the particular person, who suffers from violence, as a political subject that may address or stop the evil Arendt points out.

## Derrida, "the lesser violence" and the Politics of Deconstruction

*Mihail Evans (University of the West of England, England)*

Violence has been a continuous theme in Derrida's work. Time and again, from his early critique of Levi-Strauss, 'The Violence of the Letter', on, he has exposed an 'originary violence' at work in naming and the drawing of distinctions in language. With a remorseless logic he finds violence at work in even the apparently most innocuous situations. In *Politics of Friendship* he speaks of 'the silent unfolding of that strange violence that has forever insinuated itself into the origin of the most innocent expressions of friendship or justice'. My paper will focus on a famous early essay, and on the way in which an important strand of the secondary literature on Derrida has become over-reliant on a single expression used there, while drawing on the full range of Derrida's work for further insight.

In the 1960s, Derrida wrote a seminal paper on Levinas entitled 'Violence and Metaphysics' which engages in a detailed criticism of Levinas' 'Totality and Infinity', and in particular, the value assigned to peace there. In making violence a major theme of his essay Derrida takes on Levinas's suggestion that in the original sociality of what he calls 'the face to face' there is a priority of peace. Levinas, in attempting to counter the long tradition in philosophy that begins with Hobbes and that characterises the state of nature as war of all against all, argues there is an originary sociality which precedes the competition of individual against individual. In rejecting Levinas' pathos of peace, Derrida is not arguing for a reversion to a Hobbesian view but challenges the idea that there can be a relation to the other that is entirely free of violence.

In the face of Derrida's insistence on the ineradicability of violence many readers have sought in his works ways of distinguishing among violences. Mostly notably, Richard Beardsworth in *Derrida and the Political* (1996) alights on a single phrase in the Levinas essay concerning 'the lesser violence' which he makes central to his consideration of the politics of deconstruction. My paper will argue for the formative influence of his reliance on this single use of the phrase. Among other prominent readers of Derrida, Hägglund also states: 'the starting point for my argument is that all decisions made in the name of justice are made in view of what is judged to be the lesser violence'. The cumulative effective of such a stress has been that Martin McQuillan has recently felt comfortable in using Derrida's work as the basis for attacking a 'violent tone' he sees as having emerged in recent continental philosophy.

In attempting to come to terms with the inescapability of violence, noting that Derrida in the many publications he made after the Levinas essay never repeated the formulation concerning 'the lesser violence', I will look beyond Derrida's early essay. I will note how in his work on the decision he would deny us the means to calculate what the consequences of a particular act might be. I will suggest that rather than futilely attempting to calculate a lesser violence, we must heed Derrida's injunction to avoid the worst (*le pire*). Repeatedly in his work he comes back to make this point. I will outline how when it comes to violence Derrida would have us avoid 'the worst'.