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## **Taking place: Parrhesiastic Theater as a model for artistic practice**

Kamma, E.

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**Eleni  
Kamma**

**Taking Place:  
Parrhesiastic Theater as a Model  
for Artistic Practice**



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**Promotores**

Prof. dr. Janneke Wesseling  
Prof.dr. Bart Verschaffel (Universiteit Gent)

**Copromotor**

Jean Bernard Koeman (Gerrit Rietveld Academie Amsterdam)

**Promotiecommissie**

Dr. Paula Albuquerque (Universiteit van Amsterdam)  
Prof.dr. Rudi Laermans (KU Leuven)  
Prof.dr. Erik Viskil  
Dr. Thijs Witty

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## **Introduction**

The topic of this dissertation is the relevance of the practice of parrhesia — which I understand as ‘courageously speaking one’s mind’ — for critical contemporary artistic practices. I approach the issue as an artist-researcher concerned with socially engaged artistic practices. As I will describe below, my experience of the playful, humorous, and sharply critical attitude of Gezi Park protesters speaking their minds in Istanbul in 2013 not only inspired and motivated me, but also led me to critically reconsider my own courage in positioning myself within contemporary artistic production. This dissertation aspires to provide new insights into how tensions between the roles of individual and group, “I” and “we,” may open up a parrhesiastic space for critical artistic practices.

I examine parrhesia both through a discursive process (the writing of this dissertation) and through *Casting Call*, a series of artistic attempts, events, and manifestations. In *Casting Call* I employ performative strategies inspired by characters from European popular culture, art, theater, and cinema – characters who purposefully risk speaking their minds through scenes of laughter and excess – to address aspects of miscommunication between citizens of the European Union due to its many languages and regional rituals. This has enabled an investigation of whether a parrhesiastic space may be possible among viewers and participants.

Throughout this dissertation I work along a Moebius strip schema, which continually shifts from me as individual artist to dialogic collaborations to writing about the process. My research subject is investigated through a circulation process within which concepts such as communication, dialogue, and listening are continuously performed and put to the test. By creating artistic works and reflecting on the works being made, I attempt to answer the following research questions:

### **Research Question**

Would it be possible for local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater – by which I mean events, actions, and performances staged by characters who courageously speak their minds through scenes of excess and laughter, that take place in public view and incite the spectator’s agency to speak their own minds – to relate to and/or provide new insights into critical artistic practices today? If so, how? What is the place and role of caricature today?

### **Sub-questions**

In looking at parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, would it be possible to think of it as both the process toward an event and as the event in itself?

Would it be possible to think of the parrhesiastic theater artist as a hybrid\*, assuming a role between archive, amplifying instrument for other voices, and caretaker? A caretaker functioning both as an individual enacting parrhesia him/herself *and* as an “assembler” — in the sense of Charles R. Hulbeck’s “Let it run until it happens: this is in my opinion the slogan, or *should* be the slogan, of the assemblers” (Shattuck 1992, 135) and keeping in mind Louise Bourgeois’ remarks on assemblage as a work of love, emphasizing its restorative and reparational powers (Bourgeois 1998, 142-3)? A caretaker inviting and enabling several voices to run until a polyphonic testimony emerges through a curatorial (caring, healing) artistic practice?

How can I, as an artist, investigate what happens in this process of attempting to speak up, share a joke, address listeners, grasp their attention, and provoke dialogue through a hybrid post-media artistic practice, ranging from drawing and writing to time-based media and performance?

### How I Got Involved in the Topic: *Oh, for some Amusement!*

The notion of parrhesia entered my life and became my personal “basanos” or touchstone during an artist-in-residency placement in Istanbul in 2012-13 – during the time of the Gezi Park events. I went to Istanbul to work on my project *Oh, for some Amusement!*, which was originally an artistic investigation into two forms of entertainment belonging to the Ottoman popular theater tradition: *Karagöz* and *Ortaoyunu*.<sup>1</sup> Traditional Ottoman theater is characterized by a loose episodic structure of unconnected and fragmentary scenes; in *Karagöz* shadow theater, two-dimensional figures cast their shadows on a screen, laughing, singing, dancing, and engaging in “acts of communication that are paradoxically non-communicative,” according to Turkish theater historian Metin And (2008, 25-9). He emphasizes that misunderstanding is exaggerated in the dialogues between figures of different ethnicities in *Karagöz* in order to produce laughter. The protagonist is always a local character who symbolizes the “little man” living within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. He possesses limitless power to criticize social and political misconduct, despite the authoritarian regime.<sup>2</sup>

*Ortaoyunu* was a popular theater form (now extinct) with a plot similar to *Karagöz*, but performed by human actors in any given space. Literally meaning “theater in the round,” *Ortaoyunu* took its name from the circle created by the audience sitting or standing around the actors and their two theatrical props: the “screen” and the “shop.” By visiting the *Karagöz* Museum in Bursa, watching performances, meeting and interviewing *Karagöz* puppeteers (*hayali*), and diving into archival and historical material, I sought to understand how these traditions encourage feelings of inclusivity among the members of their multi-ethnic audiences. My interest was strictly from a perspective of an artist whose work is situated in process-based, in-between-media, and socially engaged artistic practices.

By June 2013, six months after my initial trip to Istanbul, the focus of my project *Oh, for some Amusement!* had changed from the traditional context of theater devices to the contemporary practice of public speech in relation to the Gezi Park events — the sit-in protests against urban development plans to transform Istanbul’s Taksim Gezi Park into a shopping mall. These public protests developed into anti-government manifestations that spread to other cities in Turkey. I was living one metro station away from Taksim Square. With my new Turkish friends and colleagues, I visited the park on a daily basis during the events, until tear-gas attacks forced the protesters to leave the park on June 16, 2013. These protests were characterized by an unusual degree of creativity, where satire, irony, and outright mockery were deployed as weapons against the political regime. The figures of *Karagöz* came swiftly to my mind — actual people taking the place of *Karagöz* to embody the little man, setting up the stage for their own protest purposes. Through their actions, the protesters intensified

<sup>1</sup> *Oh, for some Amusement!* was initiated in December 2012, following an invitation to research and produce a new art project during a four-month residency at PiST///, an artist-run platform based in Istanbul.

<sup>2</sup> *Karagöz*’s glorious period of fearless speech and fierce political satire came to an abrupt end during the authoritarian reign of Sultan Abdulaziz (in power from 1861 to 1876).

and eventually transformed Gezi Park’s social space into a podium for critical and humorous interventions, open to everyone. Witnessing the Gezi Park protesters using theatrical tools to speak out for their cause helped me establish links between traditional, local forms of theater and the current re-articulation of public space. This also made me question how such humorous and local practices of protest and free speech may be of relevance to the practices of socially engaged contemporary art.

### Taking Place: “Parrhesiastic Theater”\* as a Model for Artistic Practice (2016-ongoing)

Following my work period in Istanbul and the realization of my 40-minute single-screen film *Yar bana bir eğlence. Notes on Parrhesia* (2015), I incorporated the insights I was afforded in that city and shifted the focus of my attention to Europe.<sup>3</sup> The revitalization of semi-forgotten practices that encourage inclusivity through entertainment is important to me, because I tend to the diagnosis that Europe (and the world at large) needs to reflect anew upon the sources and fundamentals of democracy. Laughter, irony, and mockery have always been indispensable carriers in the development of a public discourse in which “the people” speak back.

I decided to investigate the conditions for opening up a parrhesiastic space in the field of art through a PhD program, namely PhDArts. In this way I would develop a method and strategies for a systematic investigation of my topic through the use of artistic tools and situate my research process within the discourse of contemporary critical artistic practices at the intersection of visual arts, performance and film, to communicate\* it, and to critically contribute as an artist to public debates on the arts, engagement, and the role of play, participation, laughter, excess, and provocation. I would do this through a focus on theatrical tools and performative strategies deriving from old popular practices.

My research subject requires developing ways of working with others that test the limits of what it means to speak up today and, eventually, what this means for a community of people living together. I examine my research questions through three axes, which I consider crucial for evaluating parrhesia’s relevance for contemporary artistic practices.

#### I. The Trouble with the Social and Shared Experience in Contemporary Art Practices

Departing from my own experience of working on long-term self-initiated artistic projects, in a process-based and community-engaging direction since 2010, in the dissertation I consider examples of shared experience within contemporary artistic production in recent years. In doing so, I look at relations between artist, spectator, and participant, thinking along the lines of participation and collaboration, together with, through, and against art movements such as Fluxus, Dada, Situationism, Relational Aesthetics, and artists, thinkers, art historians, philosophers, critics, Peter Bürger, John Dewey, Claire Bishop, Allan Kaprow, Hal Foster, Peter Dews, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Rancière, to name but a few. In examining manifestations of the term “social” in art, I focus on specific approaches, from social interaction as the actual work and the production of a social space in relation to “conviviality” in Relational Aesthetics, to happenings, events, participation, and the appropriation of

<sup>3</sup> I use the term “Europe” here as it is defined by and framed within the current European Union and its cultural and political heritage policies (see, for example, <https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/country-links>).

social forms by artistic practices, specifically the blurring between art and everyday life in the 1960s and 1970s. I also briefly discuss the role of the process for the development of an “experience,” and individual versus collective reception.

## II. The Competitive Claims Made for Truth by Different Media

If everything is possible, then nothing is true.  
And that, to me, is the abyss we stare into.  
(Ken Burns quoted in Brin 1998, Chap. 1)

Today suspicion rules: is what I see on internet true, or is it a hoax? Increasingly, it can be argued, there is a lack of trust in the role of the image as evidence, a lack of clarity about how image and words relate, a depreciation of both images and words. They are often perceived as products for immediate circulation and consumption, immaterial and therefore “weightless” in a virtual reality. What is the role of the senses when images and words endlessly proliferate and are transmitted around audiences of contemporary online users?

Through online social media and devices such as selfie sticks, virtual communities and networks are currently witnessing a different type of participation. The selfie de-subjectivizes in the sense that the individual tends to be just a figure in a context instead of someone who speaks up and changes that context. Instead of emphasizing subjecthood to establish individuality, a selfie stick enables one to flatten oneself as an image.

According to Italian communist theorist and activist Franco “Bifo” Berardi, we are witnessing a mutation “in the texture of human experience, and in the fabric of the world itself,” because the dominant mode of social interaction is shifting from “conjunctive concatenation” to “connective concatenation” (Berardi 2014, 12). In conjunction, the communication process between living and conscious organisms can be understood as a singular event that does not follow a preconceived logic or model, allowing for the organisms to be affected by each other; in the connective mode, interactions follow the logic of digital communication systems, whereby distinct units and structures indicate or permit links with other similarly identified elements, each element remaining distinct throughout the process and interacting only functionally.

What media can reveal truth today? I suspect that the experience of collectively leading our lives on and off social media, alternating between physical and online presence, has a direct effect on how we speak our minds and therefore on parrhesia’s contemporary role. I sense that a cross-examination of media (performance, digital film, and social media) might be a way through which words, actions, and images, can be directed toward a revealing of truth.\*

## III. Desire for change/transformation: How to develop parrhesiastic emancipatory tools?

He (Demonax) was Cypriot by birth, from a family not undistinguished for wealth or position. ... He despised worldly success and devoted himself entirely to freedom and the frank expression of ideas. Until the end, his life was upright, sound and morally unimpeachable, furnishing proof of the keenness of his own mind and philosophy’s inherent worth. (Dobbin 2012, Lucian 133 Demonax [3])

The urge to exercise parrhesia myself, to take my place as an artist and share it with others by critically addressing the system of artistic production, without becoming didactic or manipulative, became my main driving force. I feel affinity with Lucian’s Cynic philosopher Demonax, “for whom the practice of truth is a mild, curative, therapeutic practice, a practice of peace and not of insults and assaults,” according to Foucault (Foucault 2011, 199). I suggest that parrhesia can have a place within the field of contemporary art through mild, curative, therapeutic practices,<sup>4</sup> and it is my intention to lead spectators or participants there. Such practices are suited to my personal traits. Furthermore, I diagnose a lack of care within individualistic Western European societies, a toleration rather than an acceptance of other positions; it is certainly possible to speak, but there is an unwillingness to deeply listen to the other. I examine this in relation to political theorist Bonnie Honig’s reflections on the importance of a holding environment for a democracy. Voicing these concerns both on my own and with\*, against\*, and through\* others became essential in order to address them in a satisfactory way.

### 1. Writing as an Emancipatory Tool

I understand engagement with oral and written language as self-emancipatory, because it allows me to take a critical distance from my own artistic practice, and re-evaluate it by intertwining making, thinking, and writing.<sup>5</sup> Being able to use words to communicate and reflect on my research and artistic processes means putting myself in a position of autonomy. To clarify: I do not claim to take the position of an autonomous modern subject; I mean that instead of expecting people from other disciplines (such as art historians, curators, and theorists) to speak on my behalf about my artistic practice, as the case has traditionally been, I find my own voice not only through art but also through language, making my own law for myself on how to communicate. I consider “artists’ writing”\* an indispensable tool for artistic research and situate myself among a rapidly increasing number of art practitioners and researchers who are engaging in developing methods and strategies that reflect on their practices, and claiming a space of articulation through a variety of tools, from language to image to performance.<sup>6</sup>

### 2. Truth / Verité / Waarheid / Αλήθεια: Parrhesia After Babel?

In writing this text, I may be able to write “truth” in English, say “*verité*” in French, understand “*waarheid*” in Dutch. I may also question the term “post-truth” and delve into etymologies. The English etymology of “truth” suggests it is to be understood in terms of faithfulness, and “*verité*” as the quality by which things appear as they are. I do not relate to the English etymology, nor am I interested in debates about what is true or not true. None of the above can act as a substitute for my primordial understanding of the Greek word: αλήθεια.\* For me, parrhesia is a question of ethics and of passion. I am therefore very much interested in addressing these questions: What is essential — cannot be concealed or forgotten — for hetero-

4 These practices would aim to transform the viewer’s consciousness, enabling them to speak up their minds, repairing fear or anguish to do so.

5 Janneke Wesseling’s publication of her inaugural lecture as the Chair of Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts at Leiden University on September 19, 2016, titled “Of Sponge, Stone and the Intertwinement with the Here and Now,” has been a source of inspiration and valuable guide in my understanding of how writing and making may complement each other within the context of artistic research.

6 An interesting article on why artists turn to writing and performance is: Dieter Roelstrate, “Word Play” in *Frieze* 139, May 2011: <https://frieze.com/article/word-play>.



geneous cultures to live well together? How to articulate and challenge opinions in a world of broken English, which conceals, pacifies, and smooths out the particularities of terms in each native language? How much is omitted in communication between foreign cultures that use English as a common denominator? We tend to believe we understand each other very easily, despite our different cultural backgrounds and native languages, when communicating in today’s lingua franca.



Η Άρνη σύμφωνα με την αρχαία ελληνική μυθολογία ήταν η πηγή που βρισκόταν στον κάτω κόσμο, στη Λήθη, από όπου έπιναν οι νεκροί για να ξεχάσουν τι άφηναν στον πάνω κόσμο... According to ancient Greek mythology Arni was the underworld’s source, in Oblivion, from which the dead would drink to forget what they left behind in the upper world...

3. Theatron\* and the Performative



To investigate how performativity, theatricality and the performative may be implicated in parrhesiastic practices, I will look into French philosophers Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou, US philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler’s performativity, and German curator Ute Meta Bauer’s proposition of theatricality as a critical device.

4. Public Time: Remembering as an Act of Resistance

In approaching parrhesia as a concept related to acts of not forgetting, I take into consideration artistic practices concerned with memory as an act of resistance, as well as Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis’ concept of *public time*,<sup>7</sup> and media theorist Sara Sharma’s call for “politicizing how we inhabit time” and “reimagining time as a collective struggle” (Sharma 2014, 142).

7 Castoriadis defines public time as “the emergence of a dimension where the collectivity can inspect its own past as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as a domain for its activities” (Castoriadis 1991, Chap. 5).

A description of the dissertation’s content

Prior to analyzing my method — setting up and rehearsing\* a parrhesiastic theater parade — I briefly introduce certain characteristics and conditions of parrhesia. This serves as Chapter One. In Chapter Two: Parrhesia in art, I examine the methodology of the parrhesiast artist. To do this, I draw from seven artists and their practices, based on the characteristics examined and analyzed in Chapter One. I then analyze my own method in Chapter Three, interweaving different narratives, ranging from the parade’s elements (Characters, interactions, and strategies of visualization) to the Moebius strip as a schema that guides my research. Finally, Chapter Four contains a summary of the film treatment for my project *Casting Call* as well as its structural elements. Chapters Three and Four both include documentation of various attempts — which I call rehearsals\* — to activate these elements and a reflection on them: I consider what it means to develop an artistic project in continuous discussion and exchange with both the artistic and academic world, as well as with local communities. Chapter Four is followed by my conclusion to the dissertation. The complete list of Characters, the Script, and the commissioned jokes can be visited in Appendix 1 and 2. These are succeeded by a correspondence between Sahra Huby, a dancer and collaborator on the Casting Call project and myself, regarding our test shoots in November 2019 in Maastricht.

My method of writing takes place through a Narrator who speaks in four distinct voices, those of the four Meta-Characters of the parade (The Ghost, The Glossary, The Academic/Philosopher, and The Engaged Artist). The main voice of the Narrator is that of the Engaged Artist\*. The three other voices, those of The Ghost, The Glossary, and The Academic/Philosopher, come to her aid as other fields of knowledge. The four voices — we — “speak” differently throughout the dissertation. The Ghost’s voice is that of imagination and has a historic dimension, which needs to be deciphered by the reader. The Glossary consists of a selection of concepts and terms that have been crucial for the Narrator’s process of writing. It occupies an autonomous space in the dissertation, informing the other voices. The Glossary offers insight into the Narrator/Engaged Artist’s personal understanding of these terms, indicating affinities with specific thinkers through a subjective and idiosyncratic reading of the terms’ histories. The terms’ presence throughout the four main chapters is indicated by a star.

I. Regarding Parrhesia

“Asked what was man’s most precious possession, he answered, ‘Freedom of speech’...”  
(Dobbin 2012, DL 6.69)

Etymology – Origin

To a native Greek speaker like myself, there is nothing particularly peculiar or exotic about the word “parrhesia”. Etymologically speaking, it is a composite word, consisting of the words παν (= everything) + ρήσις (= speaking, expression, or a writer’s passage) (Symeonidis, Xenis, and Fliatouras n.d.),<sup>8</sup> literally meaning “all the words,” or “to speak everything.” In an online Greek dictionary, parrhesia is defined as: A) free expression of opinion, to express one’s opinion with courage and sincerity, and B) *athyrostomia*, to carelessly and disrespectfully express one’s opinion (Kazazis et al. n.d.).

The notion of parrhesia can be traced in various contexts in Greek antiquity, spanning from primarily political speech (the citizen asked to defend his position, i.e. in the public orations of Demosthenes or Isocrates), to philosophy (Socrates, the Cynics, Epicureanism), to theater and satire (Euripides, Aristophanes, Lucian), to psychotherapy and pedagogy (Philo-demus). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French philosopher Michel Foucault problematized the term in the context of his lectures at the College de France (1981–84), putting forth a trajectory of European manifestations of parrhesia, from Greek antiquity and Christianity to political and artistic schemas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I will briefly introduce the characteristics of and conditions for parrhesia that are both crucial for a general understanding of the term and relevant to my own research question, which examines if and how local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater\* and urban scenography relate to and/or inspire critical artistic practices today. I am approaching this question from the perspective of artist-researcher concerned with socially engaged artistic practices. In doing so, I both write about parrhesia and enact it myself. For the purposes of this Chapter, I will move in retrograde, using Foucault’s writings as my entry point and locating examples of the word’s use in original Greek texts. Regarding my theoretical framework, I rely on Foucault as a guide, since he developed a genealogical analysis of parrhesia, through which I am able to visit the term’s various manifestations from antiquity to modern times.

Good and Bad Parrhesia

The two definitions of parrhesia – A and B – as indicated in the Greek online dictionary mentioned above, coincide with Foucault’s observation that “the word may be employed with two values.” “Good” parrhesia (A) is characterized by a combination of sincerity and courage,

8 All translations from the Greek by Eleni Kamma.

lack of fear. In the majority of sources from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E., it is considered a virtue, both on a personal and a social level. An example of positive, courageous parrhesia is to be found in Aristotle's description of the magnanimous man who "...speaks and acts openly; indeed, he is distinguished by parrhesia, because he gives himself the right to be disdainful" (Aristotle, Book IV, 1124a–1125a).

We encounter parrhesia as *athyrostomia*, the careless expression of opinion (B), in Plato's *Symposium*, specifically in Apollodorus' description of how Alcibiades' "freedom of the mouth" made everyone burst into laughter, by letting his ongoing love for Socrates be shown (Plato, 222c–223a). Parrhesia as careless *and* disrespectful expression of opinion (B) is to be found in several ancient Greek passages criticizing the city's bad governance. Attic orator Isocrates addresses his Athenian fellow-citizens in his speech *Regarding Peace* thus: "I know well that it is difficult to go against your way of thinking and that although we have democracy, there is no freedom of speech anywhere but here in the assembly for the unwise, who do not care at all for you, and in the theater for the comic poets" (Isocrates, 8.1–16).

### In the Zone of Parrhesia I: Forms

Parrhesia "...must be this other thing, which is both a technique and an ethics, an art and a morality," Foucault tells his students in his lecture of March 3, 1982 (Foucault 2005, "3 March 1982, Second hour"). Two years later, in his lecture of February 1, 1984, he argues that parrhesia is neither a profession nor a technique. Nor is it an art. It is a practice, a stance, a way of being. Foucault calls it a modality of speaking that centers around the courage to tell the truth (Foucault 2011, 14). In a nutshell, parrhesia is a verbal, critical activity that stems from a feeling of moral, social, and political obligation and responsibility, and is directed towards oneself and/or a popular opinion or culture, aiming at its transformation. The one who exercises parrhesia holds and reveals a credible personal relationship (his/her honest opinion) to the truth, which he/she transmits/communicates by employing theatrical means. In doing so, the parrhesiast places him/herself in a position of danger, as he/she is in a less empowered position than the one(s) to whom he/she is revealing this truth.

#### How is Parrhesia Enacted? Forms of Truth-Telling in Ancient Greek Culture

According to Foucault, the problem of the "courage of truth" is manifest in ancient Greek culture in political boldness, (meaning the political bravery of speaking up in front of the assembly or the prince), in Socratic irony and in the Cynic scandal (Foucault 2011, 233–34). To Foucault's three forms of truth-telling, I would add the practice of frank criticism in the community of the Epicureans, used by them in a friendly manner through teaching Epicurean philosophy and offering psychotherapy.

#### Parrhesia as Political Boldness

"I want them to live in glorious Athens as free citizens, free to speak their minds and to live well, and, as far as their mother is concerned, enjoying an honourable reputation" (Euripides).

The above fragment comes from Euripides' theatrical play *Hippolytus* (performed in 428 B.C.E.). It is parrhesia's earliest appearance in a surviving text, clearly suggesting a political dimension, the citizen's freedom of opinion regarding the affairs of the city. In ancient Greek democracy, parrhesia was the result of *isegoria* (equal speaking time for all citizens), *isonomia* (citizens' legal equality), and *isocracy* (equal political rights), and used to advocate for publicity, transparency, and deliberation. Foucault provides a different reading of parrhesia in ancient Greek democracy, explaining how in its transition from a right, a privilege, and a duty of the well-born citizen — as several plays of Euripides, including *The Phoenician Women* (c. 411–409 B.C.E.), allow us to observe — to a freedom for everyone to say anything, the role of parrhesia became dangerous and heavily criticized (Foucault 2011, 34–52). He argues that parrhesia as political boldness is perfectly demonstrated in the relation of an advisor to a sovereign, exactly because in such a situation, unlike in democracy, there is space for ethical differentiation. The latter takes place through the individual who, in communicating his/her courage to tell the truth, forms him/herself as an ethical and political actor in relation with others. This cannot happen in democracy as a structure, where freedom to speak is granted to all and, because the many govern over a few, differentiation is quantitative rather than ethical (Foucault 2011, 35–52 and 57–64).<sup>9</sup> The transitions in parrhesia's political role in ancient Greece are summarized by Panagiotis Papavasileiou, member of "Thessaloniki Garden" — Friends of Epicurean Philosophy, a group established in Greece in 2007 to reconstitute the experiential approach of Epicurus' philosophy, as follows: "With the rise of the Hellenistic kingdoms and the gradual transformation of citizens into subjects, the notion of free political discourse ceased to exist, and parrhesia was confined to a private virtue, a basic feature of friendship, as had already begun to emerge since Isocrates' time" (Papavasileiou 2015). To give an example, the decline of free political discourse is obvious in Demosthenes' third Olynthiac speech, where he expresses surprise to his fellow Athenian citizens, because although they don't always tolerate free speech for all subjects, he finds he himself is allowed to exercise this right (Demosthenes, "Third Olynthiac"). A testimony of parrhesia's place in Alexander's kingdom (336–323 BCE) can be found in Arianus' *Alexander Anabasis*: "Alexander, however, was saddened both by Koino's parrhesia and the hesitation of the other leaders, and dissolved the gathering" (Arrian, Book V, 5.28.1–5.29.3).

#### Socratic Irony

In Socratic irony, parrhesia takes place through a game of questions and answers, where the one who poses the questions pretends ignorance, seducing the respondent into making statements that can then be challenged. Parrhesia here is not taking place in public, but in private. It is primarily understood as a moral obligation and responsibility, to care for one's fellow citizens and develop the kind of relationship with them that is the most "useful, positive, beneficial" (Foucault 2011, 80–1). It is a mission that needs to be constantly practiced, and aims to care for others by encouraging them to take care of themselves. The mission is accomplished through an investigative process that takes the form of a discussion in order to check, dispute, and test the truth. Socrates encourages each citizen to question the way in which he lives, by exposing "the relationship between himself and logos (reason)" (Foucault 2011, 144). He (Socrates) fulfills his mission by walking in the city and through the body of citizens that he examines (Foucault 2011, 83–6).

### The Cynic Scandal: Between Philosophy and Way of Life

The Cynic philosopher practices unlimited freedom of speech and exercises parrhesia by addressing local political and social misconduct through laughter. Cynic philosophers, speaking from the stage of the street, often narrated stories, comic jokes, ironic anecdotes, and aphorisms (*chreiai*), to provoke laughter from their audience, aiming at passing on “schemas of conduct” through these rather than through doctrines (Foucault 2011, 208–9). Here, “mode of life and truth-telling are directly and immediately linked to each other” (Foucault 2011, 166). In the tradition of Cynicism, “bearing witness to the truth by and in one’s body, dress, mode of compartment... the very body of the truth is made visible, and laughable, in a certain style of life” (Foucault 2011, 173). The figure of the Cynic occupies a peculiar, marginal position in society. For Epictetus, the Cynic’s role is that of a *kataskopos*, a spy, a scout. To fulfill this role, the Cynic needs to travel light. He should have no obligations (children or marriage), and no possessions more than what is absolutely necessary (Foucault 2011, 167). Cynics’ freedom to speak their minds is possible because of the specific quality of the space allocated to them; a space for those who are weird, poor, ridiculous, and on the fringes of society. The Cynic continually crosses the borders between good and bad parrhesia, A and B. This is the area in which he/she operates. The constitutive ambiguity within the parrhesiastic tradition, as started by the Cynics, is analysed in depth by German philosopher and cultural theorist Peter Sloterdijk, a contemporary of Foucault. In his publication *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk considers German culture in relation to political disillusionment and shattered ideals of 1968. He claims that cynicism is not the exception but the dominant mode in contemporary society. Sloterdijk dedicates several pages to Dada, an intellectual avant-garde movement which begun as a reaction to the folly and monstrosities of the First World War and evolved to an art movement. For Sloterdijk, Dada is “the first Neokynicism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Sloterdijk 2001, 391). He detects both a kynical (liberating and subversive frank or candid truth-speech rooted in the ancient greek tradition of Diogenes the Cynic) and a cynical (hard cynicism) stance co-existing in it. Sloterdijk defines Dada’s kynical atmosphere as “playfull and productive, childish and childlike, wise, generous, ironical, sovereign, unsailably realistic”; whereas Dada’s cynical aspect “reveals strong destructive tensions, hate and haughty defensive reactions against the internalized fetish of the citizen, ...a dynamic of affects of contempt and disappointment, self-hardening and loss of irony”. These two aspects are inseparable in Dada (Sloterdijk 2001, 394-395). As with the Cynics, Dada is an extreme movement, existing at the borders of Art, aiming at its dissolution. In his *Theorie of The Avant-Garde* Peter Burger claims that Dada revolts against bourgeois “institution art”, whereas for Sloterdijk Dada “turns against art as a technique of bestowing meaning” (Sloterdijk 2001, 397).

### Parrhesia in the Garden of Epicurus

Here I deviate from Foucault and include the practice of frank criticism in the garden of Epicurus as a concrete case of a collective practice of parrhesia within an organized community. For Epicurus, philosophical speech is without content unless it can heal human passions (Yapijakis in Philodemus, 13). He founded his school, the Garden, outside Athens in 306 B.C.E., based on the principle that everyone — regardless of social class, gender, or education — may achieve happiness, provided one leads a life based on the study of nature and respecting virtues such as justice and friendship. Men, women, and slaves all had the right to heal and to access the Garden. Freedom of speech (parrhesia), friendship, and psychotherapy were the three main pillars of the Epicureans’ psycho-pedagogical counselling method. Philodemus’ treatise *Peri Parrhesias (On Frank Speech)* is a description of this method. It

was a participatory method used by both students and teachers. The most important ethical teaching of Philodemus’ treatise is «δι’ ἀλλήλους σώζεσθαι» (Philodemus, 82–83), meaning that in the garden of Epicurus, each friend may improve through the others, as “due to our good qualities we will contribute to changing the friends’ character with the discussion” (Philodemus, 88–89). In such an environment under these participatory circumstances, students would improve both themselves and each other, and teachers would be subjected to correction by other teachers, throwing away as useless the endless endoscopy of self-awareness.

I find it important to include the Epicurean approach here as a counter-balance to Foucault’s three forms of truth-telling, in which the parrhesiast always appears in opposition – against other(s), be it one or many. The Epicurian approach considers parrhesia from the perspective of inclusivity, within a heterogeneous community. In *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault acknowledges that parrhesia “designated a virtue, a quality (some people have parresia and others do not); a duty (one must really be able to demonstrate parresia, especially in certain cases and situations); and a technique, a process (some people know how to use parresia and others do not)” (Foucault 2010, Chap. 3). Unlike the rest of the philosophical schools of the times which were exclusively open to free men (Athenian citizens), the Garden also offered the possibility for women and slaves to train and learn how to practice parrhesia (Yapijakis in Philodemus, 17).

The fiction<sup>10</sup> of Foucault’s courage of truth centers around male individuals trained in rhetoric (Athenian citizens), or marginal figures perfectly capable of mastering offensive language in public (Diogenis), whereby parrhesiastic transformation takes place strictly through discourse.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, Foucault omits other groups and precludes other possibilities for speaking up. I am thinking for example of female philosophers Hipparcheia of Marneia and Timycha of Sparta. My fiction sits with Judith Butler’s call for an expanded version of parrhesia, including possibilities for those who do not know, the not-yet-trained, to claim their right to “appear” by/in finding other ways together, such as through their bodies.

## In the zone of Parrhesia II: Conditions and characteristics

### 1. Holding a Credible Relationship to Truth

#### TRUTH

...I do not have to listen to what I have already known for a long time.

#### PHILOSOPHY

But it would be necessary for us for Truth to join us in the trial and to inform us of everything.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault acknowledges his writings as fiction in order to address the complexities inherent in attempting to “provoke an interference between our reality and the knowledge of our past history” (Foucault 1996, 301): “It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or ‘manufactures’ something that does not as yet exist, that is, ‘fictions’ it. One ‘fictions’ history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one ‘fictions’ a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.” (Foucault 1986, 193).

<sup>11</sup> Iara Lessa, Professor in the Social Work department at Ryerson University, Toronto summarizes Foucault’s definition of discourses in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Lessa 2006, 285).

**TRUTH**

Shall I take with me these two maids, who are my best cohabitants?

**PHILOSOPHY**

Certainly, and indeed as many as you want.

**TRUTH**

Follow us, Freedom and Parrhesia, so that we can save this unfortunate little man, who is our admirer and who is in danger of being accused, without any fair pretext. (Loukianos, 17–20)

The above passage is from *Alieus*, part of a larger group of satirical plays by ancient author Lucian, within which masters of philosophy are ridiculed to the extreme. This dialogue between Philosophy and Truth jokingly confirms the relation between ethics, parrhesia and truth in Greek antiquity; Parrhesia is morally obliged to serve Truth.

Frédéric Gros, editor of the 1982 Foucault course quoted above, summarizes an important distinction Foucault makes concerning how antiquity's relation between ethics, parrhesia, and truth is challenged by 17<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher René Descartes:

Philosophy since Descartes develops a figure of the subject who is intrinsically capable of truth: the subject will be capable of truth a priori, and only secondarily an ethical subject of right action: "I can be immoral and know the truth." This means that for the modern subject access to a truth does not hang on the effect of an ethical kind of internal work (asceticism, purification, etcetera). Antiquity, rather, would have made a subject's access to the truth depend on a movement of conversion requiring a drastic ethical change in his being. (Foucault 2005, "Course Context")

In *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*, Foucault clarifies that his own intention is to deal with "the problem of the truth-teller or truth-telling as an activity." He distinguishes parrhesia from other basic modalities of truth-telling in antiquity such as prophecy, wisdom, teaching, and the truth-telling of the technician. He describes the truth-teller as follows: "the one who uses parrhesia, the parrhesiastes, ... opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse... The word 'parrhesia' then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in parrhesia, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion." (Foucault 1999). Foucault concludes that the parrhesiastic modality of speaking disappears later on in Western society, where the task of listening and writing takes over and truth-telling becomes confined to the obligation of telling the truth about oneself in confession (Foucault 2005, 18). He claims that the parrhesiastic modality may still be traced in criticism, critique, and reflection within the realms of the other three modalities of truth-telling, namely prophecy (shifting to political/revolutionary discourse in modern society), wisdom (philosophical discourse), and the truth-telling of the technician (organized more around scientific, research, and teaching institutions) (Foucault 2011, 30).

## 2. It Takes At Least Two to Parrhesiazesthai

For parrhesia to take place, a desire to interact in a dialectical game is required, according to Foucault. It is "a 'game' between the one who speaks the truth and the interlocutor" (Foucault 1999). And they are both preconditions for this game to happen; the one who speaks

the truth, the parrhesiast, aims at transforming the ethos of the one who listens. Speaking for the purposes of the parrhesiastic game is in direct opposition to the rules of rhetorical speech and/or flattery. The transformation is not to be achieved by manipulating or misleading the listener (as in rhetoric, the speaker may know the truth but not necessarily share it wholly), but by convincing him/her through "the naked transmission, as it were, of truth itself" (Foucault 2005, 19).

In situations where neither party wants to listen to the other and both parties nullify and make a parody of the function of the stage, we are — as Foucault notes — confronted with parrhesia practiced in a "bad democratic city", where "anyone can say anything" (Foucault 2011, 10). Evidence of the parrhesiastic game gone wrong is to be found in several public orations of Isocrates and Demosthenes, among others.

## 3. Parrhesia is a Moral, Social, and Political Obligation

"All citizens... are under moral obligation to speak their minds (parrhesia)" (Castoriadis 1991, Chap. 5), contemporary Greek-French philosopher social critic, economist and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis reminds us in his book *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. Parrhesiastic practices are deeply concerned with ethics and a sense of justice. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, the word parrhesia is contextualized as a responsibility and a privilege, a right and an obligation (Euripides). Parrhesia as a political, social, and moral obligation is addressed in several theatrical plays by Euripides, who according to theater writer Kostas Georgousopoulos, was "more for the people than his predecessors, as his topics indirectly refer to the moral and political problems of the times" (Parras, Ploritis, and Georgousopoulos 1988). Euripides invents characters, often female ones such as Faidra and Ekavi, who object and oppose the existing order of things, breaking/rupturing the limits in order to emphasize "the right of man to fight for his right". Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, gives the tone: "To our comrades, again, and to our brothers, we must grant the right to speak to us freely and to share with us what we have" (Aristotle, Book IX, 1164b–1165a). Direct manifestations of parrhesia as political obligation are to be found in political boldness, meaning the bravery of speaking up in front of the assembly or prince, or by addressing fellow citizens of the demos or anyone in power. Parrhesia as an ethical obligation (which although non-political is still useful to the city) manifests primarily in philosophical systems. Examples include Socratic irony and Philodemus' treatise *On Frank Speech*, which makes part of his general oeuvre «*Περί Ηθών και Βίων*» and is clearly located in the ethical realm of Epicurean philosophy (Wurster n.d.). Both of these are analyzed above (pages 17,18 and 19).

## 4. Serving as a Critic is a Condition for Parrhesia

A critical attitude is inherent to parrhesiastic practices. From my perspective as a visual artist and researcher, I draw attention on how both senses and intellect collaborate for parrhesiastic purposes. In placing emphasis also on looking, touching, not only on discourse, my observations may be understood as deviating from Foucault. In her article "How Parrhesia Works through Art. The Elusive Role of the Imagination in Truth-Telling," Dutch scholar MARRIGJE PAIJMANS draws attention to the fact that although Foucault regards "art as the modern site of parrhesia", his "limited notion of discourse precludes transformation beyond discourse" (Paijmans 2019, 42). I argue that parrhesiasts control, inspect, and judge both through the senses (witnessing with their own eyes, listening to words as evidence with their own ears) and the intellect. The parrhesiast's critical gaze constantly compares, weighing any discordance, tension, or disagreement *between those words and that life*. It keeps shifting, circulating,

alternating between these two positions; looking inside, to examine the self (a key element of Philodemus' doctrine is the self-diagnosis of the student, who must first recognize their character flaws (Wurster n.d) and looking outside, to examine society. The critical spirit of a parrhesiastic practice is situated between self-reflexivity and social engagement. Although the kind of self-reflexivity and engagement differs enormously between Socrates, who plays the game of examination (exetasis) with others and takes care of his fellow citizens through logos (Foucault 2011, 122), and the mode of life of the Cynics which, as a "reduction of all pointless conventions and all superfluous opinions," assumes "a role of test with regard to truth" (Foucault 2011, 171), the critical aspect of an ethical parrhesia is evident in both cases.

### 5. Speaking One's Mind is a Dangerous Game

"... begging you to not be angry at me, if I boldly tell the truth" (Demosthenes, "Fourth Phillipic")

"(and in the name of gods, when I speak of what is best for you, let me speak freely)." (Demosthenes, "On the Chersonese")

For Foucault, what differentiates parrhesia from other types of speech is the element of risk it entails, the danger incorporated in the parrhesiast's position, which is a consequence of his/her decision to reveal, to speak the truth. In Plutarch's *Lives*, we read about Themistocles, who "aroused the envy of the powerful, because they believed he had dared to speak courageously to the king against them" (Plutarch). The parrhesiast risks paying a high price for temporarily occupying the precarious free space of speech, the price ranging from ridicule and losing credibility to losing friends or even his/her life. This is because by speaking one's mind, one does not stay confined in the realm of speech, but stands out and looks beyond it. Words aim at a certain result, at an action that can produce change, at a transformative event. Parrhesia is exercised in the space that opens up between speech and its potential consequences. Foucault calls parrhesia an act, a practice, within which "already we are in a dimension which is not one of verbal presentation, of the ability to present verbally what one is supposed to be able to do; we are in the domain of the test, but of the direct, visual test" (Foucault 2011, 130). By this phrase he specifically refers to the Socratic examination, which asks one to judge with one's own eyes — the eyes serving as witnessing tools. The one who speaks his/her mind operates within a space between observation (using eyes as the instrument to examine, control, judge) and imagination (looking ahead, projecting, envisioning). The multidimensionality of this game makes it dangerous, as it feeds from the tension between the double role of the gaze — alternating between an actual and a projected space: speaking, acting, and the consequences of words. At that very moment in which the parrhesiast speaks boldly, not only does he/she tackle truth and existing power relations, but also his/her own subjectivity. In finding the courage to examine one's self and by putting his/her beliefs to the test on a daily basis, the one who practices parrhesia is freed from previous experiences, prejudices and forms of control imposed on him/her through the "common opinion". In this sense the parrhesiast is constantly subjected to self-transformation and/or self-de/reconstruction.

### 6. A Theatrical Space as a Condition for Parrhesia

Publicity, exposure, and calling to public attention characterize parrhesia. Cornelius Castoriadis reminds us that parrhesia is a commitment by all citizens "to really speak their minds concerning public affairs" (Castoriadis 1991, Chap. 5).

Parrhesiastic practices are here understood as exercises in finding the courage to speak one's mind, and are enabled by the particularities of theatrical space. By theatrical space I mean a physical space where an action can take place in common view, a space in which the viewer's agency is mobilized through the physical relationship of their body to the architecture within which the action is taking place. The origin of the public stage is the ancient bema, an elevated platform made out of stone, which was part of the Greek agora in the period from the 6th to the end of the 4th century B.C.E. By taking a small step up onto the bema, the speaker made a simple symbolic gesture that transformed the stone into a podium. The parrhesiast speaks from that position, being an actual or a projected bema, ranging from an exterior public space to — in the case of the Cynics — one's own body, "as the visible theater of truth" (Foucault 2011, 183).

### 7. Parrhesia's Transformative Power

In examining Plato's Socratic dialogue *Laches*, Foucault demonstrates how Socrates' intervention brings about three transformations: a) shifting from the political to the model of technical competence, b) transforming the procedure from technical competence to playing a game of questions and answers, and c) re-orienting the game of parrhesia towards the problem of ethos (Foucault 2011, 134–8). Not only does parrhesia aim at transformation, it also transforms and reinvents itself and its place throughout the centuries, from the political field to problems of ethos and philosophical truth, to its radical reevaluation through Cynicism, to Christian asceticism, to political revolutionary movements and modern art in the 19<sup>th</sup> century — confirming Foucault's claim that "the parrhesiastic standpoint tries precisely, stubbornly and always starting over again, to bring the question of truth back to the question of its political conditions and the ethical differentiation which gives access to it" (Foucault 2011, 68).

In their transformative processes, parrhesiastic practices entail caring and healing, therapeutic qualities. Foucault draws attention to this very close relation between curing and caring in Socrates' parrhesiastic approach. This is evident in Crito, who "was cured when in discussion with Socrates, he had been freed from the common opinion, from the opinion of corrupting souls, in order, on the contrary, to choose, resolve and make up his mind through opinion founded on the relation of self to the truth" (Foucault 2011, 105–6). In Epicurean philosophy, Philodemus draws parallels between the temporary pain of parrhesia and the healing state it brings with the bitter medicine that doctors use to heal.<sup>12</sup> Although transformation in the Cynics assumes more provocative and often violent forms, Foucault also brings into conversation a counter-example: Lucian's description of the Cynic Demonax, "for whom the practice of truth is a mild, curative, therapeutic practice, a practice of peace and not of insults and assaults" (Foucault 2011, 199).

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I come to this conclusion through an examination of Philodemus, "Fragment 14," "Fragment 30," "Fragment 63," and "Fragment 64," and Yapijakis' "Comment 10" in Philodemus, 177.



## Beyond Foucault: The Notion of Parrhesia in Thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

Is the notion of parrhesia relevant for other contemporary thinkers and writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and if yes, in which ways? I will close this chapter by looking briefly at how other contemporary writers approach the notion of parrhesia in a range of disciplines. With the exception of Dutch scholar Marrigje Paijmans who examines how parrhesia works through art by employing Foucault's positioning of art at the limit of discourse, my (limited) selection of thinkers places an emphasis on voices that explore an ethical framework for truth-telling and/or offer contemporary societal, political, and ethical perspectives on the notion of parrhesia and phenomena that limit or enable it. From this broader viewpoint, in the following chapters I zoom in to examine parrhesia within art contexts and frameworks.

I would like to mention three other thinkers alongside Foucault here. I have already briefly referred to Greek-French Cornelius Castoriadis (1922–97) in my Introduction, as well as in section 3 (parrhesia as a moral obligation of the citizen) and section 6 (parrhesia as the commitment of the citizen), pages 21 and 23 of this Chapter respectively. Castoriadis discusses parrhesia within the “project of autonomy,” by which he means both individual and social autonomy. Two roots exist within the Greek word autonomy: *autos* (εγώ ο ίδιος = myself) and *nomos* (law). An autonomous person makes their own law for themselves. Castoriadis argues that, historically, the first time a political society was created within which the participants wanted to take their lives and the regulations of social relations upon their shoulders — in short wanted to be autonomous — was in Ancient Greece. The problems that arose from this new society, according to him, relate to what social autonomy means and the limits of individual autonomy in relation to social rules. There can be no social, collective life without organization and a minimum of common rules, values, and goals which all members of society share. Every society creates its institutions: its language, religion, values, and so on. Castoriadis says that he is particularly interested in the Greek-Western tradition because it includes the possibility for this tradition to be challenged, the possibility to think and talk differently, to pose questions regarding the institutions of society as an individual or a group.<sup>13</sup> In this tradition citizens contribute to the creation of public space through the co-existence of three necessary and decisive traits: parrhesia (courage), responsibility (*euthini*), and shame (*aidos*, *aischune*). “Lacking these,” he argues, “the ‘public space’ becomes just an open space for advertising, mystification, and pornography — as is, increasingly, the case today” (Castoriadis 1991, Chap. 5). Parrhesia then can only be effectuated if it is accompanied by responsibility and shame.

The second thinker I would like to briefly discuss is Czechoslovak playwright and politician Václav Havel (1936–2011). His most famous political essay *Power to the Powerless*, written in October 1978, became a manifesto of dissent in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and other Communist states of the Eastern bloc. It analyzes and exposes the mechanisms under which a system that he calls “post-totalitarian” operated in daily life. The system used ideology as a tool to oppress the individual, forming a society that was forced to live and serve a collective lie. To this Havel proposed that the power of the oppressed lies within themselves. By differentiating one's self from the system, speaking truth to power, one can overcome one's own powerlessness. In this essay Havel makes the diagnosis and offers the remedy. As long as you continue to submit to the lies of the system and feed it with more lies, you think you are powerless. But the moment that you stand for your own truth, you lead the way for the system to fail. In “living within the truth,” Havel sees several dimensions — existential, mor-

al, and certainly political — because “if the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth” (Havel 2018, Chap. 7). By “living in truth” Havel does not imply a universal common truth. For him the search for truth is a subjective process, depending on the individual's conscience, acting in accordance to a personal sense of what matters. Like Castoriadis, Havel stresses the importance of responsibility (responsibility as destiny) for the political role of the individual. He concludes the essay by suggesting that it is an ethical reconstitution of society which will lead to its political reconstitution. (Havel 2018, Chap. 20). He envisions “more meaningful ‘post-democratic’ political structures that might become the foundation of a better society” (Havel 2018, Chap. 22). Such structures would entail a sense of “higher responsibility” in relating to other human beings and the human community's positioning within the universe (Havel 2018, Chap. 21).

Twenty years later, in 1998, American scientist and science-fiction author David Brin published his non-fiction book *The Transparent Society*, within which the reader is presented with the dilemma of freedom versus privacy, a result of the technological advances of societies in the near future. In terms of who gets access to and controls the cameras, surveillance devices, and the flow of information, Brin offers two hypothetical scenarios: a) central police have these powers or b) citizens can access and use the images from any camera in town. In line with the famous statement by activist, entrepreneur, and civil libertarian John Gilmore that it is in the nature of the medium — the internet — to “interpret censorship as damage” (Gilmore 1993), Brin suggests that “the Internet and other new media may resist and defeat any attempt to restrict the free flow of information” (Brin 1998, Chap. 2), turning security to an unattainable goal. Brin advocates for a transparent society instead. He specifies that “transparency is not about eliminating privacy. It is about giving us the power to hold accountable those who would violate it” (Brin 1998, Chap. 11). In this context, parrhesia translates to finding the “courage to stand in the light and live unmasked” (Brin 1998, “Dedication”). The price for such a society that favors openness is that increased vigilance would be required from its citizens:

In real life, the “bitter fruit” is realizing that we must all share responsibility for keeping an eye on the world. ... So? Do we shake our heads and announce the end of civilization? Or do we try to cope by bringing in additional testimony? Combing the neighborhood for more and better witnesses. (Brin 1998, Chap. 1)

Brin introduces the term “reciprocal transparency” (Brin 1998, Chap. 3) and approaches the internet and new media as a panopticon of shared accountability accessible to all and within which citizens interchangeably assume the reconfigured old roles of guard and inmate (observing-controlling and being observed-controlled). Under this condition, internet technologies may be considered as witnessing tools that are empowering weapons in the hands of individuals. Brin does explore possible pitfalls of his proposition on transparency (surveillance elites taking over, a surveillance obsession, surveillance overload, and so on), but decides to finish the book by advocating for transparency and openness.

Despite their different approaches and concerns, Castoriadis, Havel, and Brin seem to converge on the political dimension of parrhesia, placing emphasis on citizen responsibility. What drives them could be summarized in Castoriadis' definition of “genuine politics” as scholar John V. Garner brilliantly summarizes it:

genuine politics is a way of life in which humans *give the laws to themselves* as they constantly re-engage in deliberation about what is good. In short, genuine politics coincides with the question, and the ability of individuals and society to pose the question, What is a good society? (Garner 2015)

For Castoriadis, Havel, and Brin it is evident that “genuine politics” cannot be separated from its moral and social dimensions. If what they all explore is the question of “what is a good society?” two questions that directly stem from that would be: How can the citizen practice his/her ability to pose the question and act responsibly, as an individual *and* within society? What qualities need they possess and how can they be best equipped for this?

Here I would like to make a small detour and bring philosopher Daniel W. Smith into the conversation. Smith’s essay “Deleuze and the Question of Desire: Toward an Immanent Theory of Ethics” explores how the philosophical question of desire links to French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s idea of immanent ethics. Smith summarizes the traditional distinction between “ethics” and “morality” as follows: the first places emphasis on the good life (i.e. Stoicism) and asks the fundamental question “What can I do?”, whereas the latter asks “What must I do?” based on the moral law, by which he means German philosopher and central Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant’s idea of a transcendent law. The ethics of immanence considers the concept of transcendence and the illusions stemming from it as the main factor that “separates a mode of existence from its power of acting”, preventing the individual from fulfilling what he/she is capable of doing (Smith 2007, 66–67). If transcendence translates as “the concept of impotence raised to infinity,” the “political problem posed by an immanent ethics,” says Smith, is how people end up desiring transcendence, how we can “desire to be separated from power, our capacity to act” (Smith 2007, 68).

These questions strongly resonate with South Korea-born, Berlin-based philosopher and cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han’s book *The Burnout Society*, published in 2010. Han claims that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Foucault’s disciplinary society, a society of negativity, is now replaced by an achievement society. He argues that “The positivity of Can is much more efficient than the negativity of Should. Therefore, the social unconscious switches from Should to Can” (Han 2015, 8–9). Han contends that the achievement-subject has a very paradoxical relation to freedom. Although achievement-subjects consider themselves free, as there are no external forces constraining them, they voluntarily exhaust themselves “under the injunction” to perform and maximize achievement. Smith, asking “how can desire (the state of the unconscious drives in Deleuze) desire its own repression?”, answers that it is not one’s own desire that is being repressed, but rather “desire invested in the social formation” — drives and affects assumed as one’s own through manipulation by “the capitalist infrastructure” (Smith 2007, 74).

A society consisting of self-exploited subjects turns out to be a burnt-out, unfree society rich in psychic disturbances. Observing that burn-out precedes depression, Han brings French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg into the conversation. In his book *Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (2010), Ehrenberg argues that the social phenomenon of modern depression is a pathology linked to feelings of inadequacy, the failure of the subject to meet his/her own personal expectations of becoming him/herself. Han counter-argues that in approaching the topic in terms of a pathology of the self, Ehrenberg fails to see how factors such as social fragmentation of life, the social pressure to achieve, and economic contexts play a role in the phenomenon of depression. In the burn-out society the achievement-subject may self-exploit and manipulate herself to the point of exhaustion, as “the unconscious plays no part in depression” (Han 2015, 41). Han distinguishes depression from melancholy, which he says is “preceded by the experience of loss” and consequently “stands in a relation — namely, negative relation — to the absent thing or party,” whereas depression is “cut off from all relation and attachment.” Ehrenberg situates depression in an absence of conflict and associates the rise of depression with the conflict model upon which the formation of self was based in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a psychiatric point of view. Han disagrees, locating the contemporary problem of “deconflictualization” in the

“general positivization of society which entails its de-ideologization.” He reminds the reader at this point that conflict forms the basis of democratic culture (Han 2015, 43–45). Within this forced positivity of consensus, I would add, the space for agonism and parrhesia shrinks. Foucault’s idea “that the confrontation with otherness is crucial to the articulation of truth about ourselves” becomes redundant (Paijmans 2019, 53).

Following this analysis, I wish to repeat the question and add a second one: How can the citizen practice his or her ability to pose the question “what is a good society?” and act responsibly, as an individual *and* within a burn-out society? Can art contribute to this discussion and if yes, how? In her article “How Parrhesia Works through Art. The Elusive Role of the Imagination in Truth-Telling,” Dutch scholar MARRIGJE PAIJMANS explores “how an artwork can articulate an inconvenient truth in such a way that it initiates a process of transformation in the imagination of the beholder” (Paijmans 2019, 43). To do so, she dives into Foucault’s earlier and later discussions on art, focusing on his problematic positioning of art at the limit of discourse, art’s critical potential, and how imagination works through parrhesiastic art. She uses the Deleuzian notion of “dramatization,” through which “actions and propositions are interpreted as so many sets of symptoms that express or ‘dramatize’ the mode of existence of the speaker” (in this case Foucault), to dramatize his concepts of “truth” and “the basic” (Smith 2007, 67). Paijmans’ first conclusion is that art as a site of truth-telling for Foucault includes the making, seeing, and thinking of art, which may be considered self-technologies within which the self enters into an encounter with imagination, which is always on the move and keeps transforming. In the process between making, seeing, and thinking, correspondences between work of art and life occur: the viewer enters the artistic life and the artwork affects the life of the viewer; the viewer and the artwork become “partial subjects in the thinking of art.” Secondly, Paijmans concludes that Deleuze and Foucault converge “in their anti-Platonic effort to expose the obscure dynamisms beneath the representations.” To this she adds that “both thinkers show ethical commitment to the aesthetic pursuit to bring life back into philosophy” (Paijmans 2019, 59).

To conclude: In this Chapter, I examined the etymology of the word parrhesia and looked into contexts within which parrhesia was practiced in Greek antiquity. Through Foucault’s genealogical approach and his problematization of parrhesia in the 1980s, I was led to several original ancient Greek texts. I focused on seven characteristics and conditions for parrhesia, which I consider crucial both for a general understanding of the term and for my own personal enlightenment in relation to my research question. I also moved beyond Foucault to examine how a number of thinkers, writers, and activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries relate to the notion of parrhesia and in which ways they may find it relevant for contemporary society and how art can contribute to this discussion. The question of “what is a good society?” runs through the writings and concerns of Castoriadis, Havel, and Brin. The notion of parrhesia appears in their concerns regarding “genuine politics,” which cannot be separated from its moral and social dimensions. In the cases of Brin and Byung-Chul Han, moral and ethical aspects of parrhesia are examined through contemporary societal lenses. Their writing reflects on the challenges and dilemmas presented to contemporary Western societies regarding what speaking one’s mind might mean today. These include the use of new media, the internet, and virtual reality (Brin), as well as a “general positivization of society” that leads to “burnout achievement-subjects” and the phenomenon of “deconflictualization” (Byung-Chul Han).

In short, revisiting old practices of truth-telling points to the timelessness of parrhesia’s social, political, and ethical aspects. The act of “appearing” by speaking one’s mind constantly requires redrafting the limits between one’s self and the other(s). The practice of parrhesia remains very relevant for contemporary societies because it puts under scrutiny their subjects’ ability to speak and be heard. By putting social coherence to the test, it enables society to take care of itself. The practice of parrhesia indicates the necessity for spaces of conflict



to exist within society so that an ethical space can appear in turn. As Pajmans illustrates, art contributes to this discussion, as it can offer dissent, disagreement, confrontation with otherness, and a critical stance, proposing other positions not through discourse but through the enhancement of imagination. I will examine this in detail in relation to contemporary art in the following chapter, *Strategies of Parrhesia in the Visual Arts*.

II. Strategies of Parrhesia in Visual Arts

Artists and parrhesia: The artist-parrhesiast

It is in this interplay between human beings and their blindness due to inattention, complacency, weakness, and moral distraction that the parrhesiast performs his role. (Foucault 2011, 16)

In this section I will attempt to build up the identity of the figure of the artist-parrhesiast and explore it. What is this figure’s profile? What distinguishes this figure from other artists and other parrhesiasts? Through looking into parrhesiastic practices in *Chapter I: Regarding Parrhesia*, I have come up with seven characteristics of and conditions for parrhesia:

- 1. *Holding a credible relationship to truth*
- 2. *Involving more than one person — it takes at least two to parrhesiazesthai*
- 3. *Functioning as a moral, social, and political obligation*
- 4. *Serving as criticism*
- 5. *Taking a risk — speaking one’s mind is a dangerous game*
- 6. *Taking place in a theatrical space\**
- 7. *Having transformative power*

I will focus on a limited number of contemporary artists and how they deal with parrhesia in their work, in an effort to position my argument within a broader context of contemporary art. The list is indicative and by no means exhaustive. It is however suggestive of the wide range of strategies and methods through which parrhesia can come into being — in short, of the parrhesiast-artist’s methodology. In the following descriptions of artistic practices, I look at artists from older generations who formulated their positions in the recent past, and whose positions may relate but do not overlap: Cindy Sherman, Bruce Nauman, Grayson Perry, Pierre Huyghe, Claude Cahun,<sup>14</sup> Christoph Schlingensief, and Louise Bourgeois. I am aware that in choosing the seven above-mentioned individual artists I exclude avant-garde movements such as Dada or Surrealism, despite the relevance their strategies may hold for parrhesia. I understand those movements and artists as historical<sup>15</sup> and consequently not enabling me to examine parrhesiastic strategies in the field of contemporary Visual Arts. Instead, I look into “contemporary” artists in the sense of art critic, media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys’ description of the contemporary as “constituted by doubt, hesitation, uncertainty, indecision — by the need for prolonged reflection, for a delay” and his definition of contemporary art as “art that is involved in the reconsideration of the modern projects” (Groys 2009a). Still, it can be argued that a ‘dadaist undercurrent’ has been running through the 20<sup>th</sup> century in an indirect way, from Dada to Punk, Fluxus, Neo-Dada and the Situationists, Conceptual Art and Performance. Several of Dada’s defining traits such as deliberate irrationality, negation of traditional artistic values, humor, satire and irony transverse various artistic practices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, albeit not in the extreme negating ways of the original Dada movement.

14 Although Cahun, historically considered a Surrealist artist, is not strictly speaking contemporary, I decided to include her in this list of artists for two reasons, which I explain on page 40 of this dissertation.

15 Dada was an intellectual avant-garde movement which arose as a reaction to the First World War and in opposition to bourgeois culture. Surrealism grew out of Dada and as a movement, it flourished between the First and the Second World Wars. It aimed at revolutionising human experience by placing emphasis on the workings of the subconscious mind.

I chose Sherman, Nauman, Perry, Huyghe, Cahun, Schlingensief, and Bourgeois for three reasons. First, because of the parrhesiastic elements in their practices. I will identify what aspect of parrhesia each artist clarifies for me and then elaborate on it. By focusing on one specific characteristic/condition of parrhesia for each artist, I will consider it as a building block leading to a general, more abstract profile of the artist-parrhesiast. As I will examine one characteristic/condition for each artist, I suggest that they are parrhesiasts only in relation to this specific characteristic or condition. The purpose of this Chapter is not to prove whether the above-mentioned artists fulfil all criteria and conditions for parrhesia, and/or which one of them might be the perfect parrhesiast-artist candidate. I argue that altogether they will indicate a broad spectrum that may offer interesting insights and lead to a more general conclusion regarding the profile of the artist-parrhesiast of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Second, I chose them based on my access to their texts, interviews, and other statements. In order for me to better understand how they use parrhesia, I consider their testimonies a primary source of information and interpretations by others as a secondary source. My third reason for this specific list of artists is the subjective, idiosyncratic affinities I feel for their practices, the amount of time I spent with them during my formative years, and the intensely transformational experience I had when exposed to or confronted by their practices. Two questions kept pushing me for answers. The first was Foucault scholar Marrigje Paijmans' central question in her article "How Parrhesia Works through Art": "how an artwork can articulate an inconvenient truth in such a way that it initiates a process of transformation in the imagination of the beholder?" (Paijmans 2019, 43). The second was how artists implicate themselves in this process. Here, I assemble selected excerpts of the chosen artists' existing writings or statements, texts about them by historians and critics, and my own observations in order to clarify why I chose them and what I find interesting for parrhesia through their different approaches.

### 1. Holding a Credible Relationship to Truth: Cindy Sherman (1954–)



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #2*, 1977

Thats me,<sup>16</sup>

Who is Cindy, what is she? It is almost impossible to fix upon her in this slippery image. As in life, so in art: Sherman makes herself up as she goes along; and her camera catches the truth, that we may all be strangers to ourselves. (Cummings 2019)

The US artist Cindy Sherman came into prominence toward the end of 1970s. So far her career spans over four decades, through which Sherman has persistently used herself as her subject. Or, more accurately, her subject has been her ongoing ability to create and record unlimited versions of herself performed for the photographic camera. As British journalist and writer Simon Hattenstone puts it, Sherman's photos "stuck two fingers at the then received wisdom that the camera never lies — her camera *always* lied. And, through her deceits, she looked for truths about identity, vulnerability and power" (Hattenstone 2011).

Holding a credible relationship to truth in the postmodern world could be described as mission impossible. In the third chapter of his 2001 book *The Frame and the Mirror*, "The Place of Truth," the US philosopher Thomas Brockelman reflects upon Plato's *chora* and its peculiar position, "strangely caught 'between' particular and universal, sense and intellect," and relates it to what he calls the "impossible truth of the postmodern, that as human beings we both are (and must be) and are not *in place*" (Brockelman 2001, 88–89). A short detour to the question of how art and truth should "work" from a Western European perspective: one can observe that in Greek antiquity, the Platonic approach considered the good, the true, and the beautiful as inextricably linked — the beautiful being the face of good and of truth. A few centuries later, for Seneca (c. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) and the Stoics, art was meant to give good examples to people by serving temperance and wisdom: "Temperance knows that the best measure of the appetites is not what you want to take, but what you ought to take" (Seneca 149). There is a limit, according to Seneca: "Truth is complicated and profoundly obscure" (Dobbin 2012, Seneca 115 Demetrius [5]). In modern philosophy, a third perspective had been established: art is beyond good and bad. Philosophers that have contributed to this line of thought include Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, who asked how much truth the spirit can handle.

For 19<sup>th</sup>-century French poet, essayist, and art critic Charles Baudelaire, modern artists were responsible for finding ways to express the moral attitude and aesthetic values of modernity: "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" (Baudelaire 2010, 17). Seen from this third perspective, beauty retains an ambivalence and is no longer linked to good or bad. There can be depth and truth in evil, for example in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*, 1857) and in Arthur Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer* (*A Season in Hell*, 1873).

In his *The Return of the Real*, the American art critic Hal Foster argues that Sherman's work perfectly demonstrates a shift taking place in contemporary art, theory and film. This shift concerns an understanding of the real as trauma, rather than "reality as an effect of representation," which seriously impacted artistic practices in turn, shifting focus from the image-screen to the object-gaze (Foster 2002, 146). In reading Sherman's work through Lacan's seminars on the gaze, on the real, and his diagrams on visuality, Foster suggests that her work articulates this shift in three steps: from "the subject caught in the gaze" (early work, 1975–82) to the subject "invaded by the gaze" (work from 1987–90) to the subject "obliterated by the gaze" (work after 1991), leading to a "double attack on subject and screen" (Foster 2002, 149). From this point, I will now focus on how Sherman's early work *Untitled Film Stills* relates to Foucault's "dramatics of truth-telling,"<sup>17</sup> taking as my point of departure Foster's argument of how the real is manifested in it: "Thus in the distance between the made-up young woman and her mirrored face in *Untitled Film Still #2* (1977), Sherman captures the gap between imagined and actual body images that yawns in each of us" (Foster 2002, 148).

Interviewed by Simon Hattenstone, Sherman acknowledges that "dressing up was partly 'a means of escape,'" and adds that "it was also partly, 'If you don't like me this way, how about you like me *this* way?'" Hattenstone notices how in proposing endless possibilities of transforming her image "her voice rises with mock joie de vivre" (Hattenstone 2011). Sher-

man's work produces "new" images by recycling existing stereotypes of women found in film and popular culture. Her work comments on these stereotypes in a critical but seductive way. Sherman has been a favorite of certain feminists and post-modernists (such as Laura Mulvey and Rosalyn Deutsche) precisely because her approach is emblematic of the ways in which notions of constructed and "true" identity were perceived and discussed in the 1990s. In her essay "In the company of Images: Untitled Film Stills," Erika Balsom writes that whereas the medium of photography is all about specificity, the here and now, as opposed to painting's "pregnant moment," Sherman reverses this in her *Film Stills* because she creates familiar images that refer to "an image-commons of popular representation" (Balsom 2019, 61). Regarding Sherman's series title and the genre it evokes, French curator, critic, and historian of photography Régis Durand observes that

a film still is not an image from the film, a photogram, nor is it a snap taken during the shoot; it is the photograph of the reconstitution of a given scene that is re-enacted in front of the photographer for documentary and publicity purposes. (Durand 2002, 154–5)

Sherman creates a voyeuristic set-up in which she invites the viewer to project, desire, and imagine through her ongoing production of re-enacted cinematic images capturing moments of ambiguity: anxiety, waiting, anticipation. Because the action is never disclosed, but rather anticipated, these images function as reflective surfaces; they depend on the viewer's imagination and ability to mirror themselves in them to receive meaning and become complete. To this idea I would like to add that the mechanisms and strategies Sherman uses to grasp and hold the attention of the viewer extend to her finding and maintaining her place in the artworld. Sherman's work has fulfilled the expectations of the artworld perfectly: I think her work probably looks how the majority of contemporary art lovers want a feminist critical approach to look.

McGushin considers Foucault's parrhesiastic modality of truth-telling as follows: "A modality of veridiction, at least in the case of parrhesia, requires a time and a place, in other words a dramatic scene where truth can emerge, where subjects can be recognized in the act of truth" (McGushin 2007, 9). Throughout *Untitled Film Stills*, Sherman is personally committed to identifying and positing herself in the middle of a scene staged for the camera, where she repeatedly jumps in and out of character, endlessly enacting possible versions of fictitious personae. With respect to the problem of "true" identity, Sherman proves herself a parrhesiast: through these manipulated self-centered imaging acts, she "appears" and reveals mechanisms involved in the construction of identity of a subject caught in the gaze.

## 2. It Takes At Least Two to Parrhesiazesthai: Bruce Nauman (1941–)



© 2018 Bruce Nauman / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

My work comes out of being frustrated about the human condition. And about how people refuse to understand other people. And about how people can be cruel to each other. It's not that I think I can change that, but it's just such a frustrating part of human history.

(Simon 2018, 52)

Here I will focus on one work, *Clown Torture* (1987), by US artist Bruce Nauman in order to look into how the second condition for parrhesia, *It takes at least two to parrhesiazesthai*, may transform into *It takes three to parrhesiazesthai* when it takes place between artist, artwork, and viewer.

What strategies does Nauman use to intensify the relation between artwork and spectator? *Clown Torture* is a four-channel video installation with sound. It consists of two large video projections and four monitors of different sizes, placed in pairs, one above the other, on plinths. Through these six video and audio channels, narrative sequences in color and sound loops of 60 minutes are presented, "each chronicling an absurd misadventure of a clown": "Clown Taking a Shit," "Clown With a Goldfish," "Clown With Water Bucket," "Pete and Repeat," and "No, No, No, No (Walter)." <sup>18</sup> The Art Institute of Chicago describes these misadventures as follows:

In "No, No, No, No (Walter)," the clown incessantly screams the word no while jumping, kicking, or lying down; in "Clown with Goldfish," the clown struggles to balance a fish bowl on the ceiling with the handle of a broom; in "Clown with Water Bucket," the clown repeatedly opens a door booby-trapped with a bucket of water that falls on his head; and finally, in "Pete and Repeat," the clown succumbs to the terror of a seemingly inescapable nursery rhyme. (Art Institute of Chicago n.d.)

"Clown Taking a Shit" confronts the viewer in a 60-minute, looped wall projection. With the circular loops endlessly repeating, the viewer may enter the installation at any moment. Sound comes out of the six displays, intensifying the sensorial experience for the viewer. As senior curator at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art Susan Cross observes, *Clown Torture* is one among several Nauman works in which the viewer is both "witness and voyeur" (Cross 2003, 17).

Under a one-and-a-half-minute clip documenting the work posted on YouTube, the reactions of viewers who had experienced it included: "being mesmerized for at least 10 minutes"; "The way I read it back then ... was that I was being tortured by the clowns, but the thing was that it took a while for me to realize how ill-at-ease I was made by the work. That is, it was only when I got so uncomfortable that I was pushed into a degree of self-consciousness that this dawned on me"; and "You can't escape paying attention to a clown." <sup>19</sup> Many of the commenters explicitly mentioned the importance of experiencing the work in real life and having a vivid memory of that experience.

As I haven't had the chance to experience *Clown Torture* live, I enter the piece by watching extracts on YouTube, looking at stills, and reading Nauman's interviews as well as reviews and texts on the work and others' experiences of it. I imagine how the intense emotions (irritation, repulsion, and hate <sup>20</sup>) the artwork evokes must multiply for the viewer upon physically experiencing it. Nauman does catch the attention of the viewer by amplifying the sound and multiplying the image, making the experience almost unbearable and thus sharing his own frustration about the human condition.

Nauman presented three different versions of *Clown Torture* in 1987: *Clown Torture*, *Clown Torture: I am sorry and No, No, No, No*, and *Clown Torture: Dark and Stormy Night*

<sup>18</sup> I found an analytical list with the reels and tapes of which *Clown Torture* consisted in the following blog: <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/brucenauman/the-1980s>

<sup>19</sup> Excerpts from viewers' reactions on YouTube to Bruce Nauman's video *Clown Torture*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YorcQscxV5Y&gl=BE> (accessed July 15, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Renown critic Arthur Danto writes about Nauman's retrospective at Museum of Modern Art: "It was *Clown Torture*, writ large" and "the show may have taught an inadvertent lesson not only about Nauman's art but about human nature: I hated it because it hated me" (Danto 1993, 56).

with *Laughter* (Nauman 2005, 338). Language plays an important and specific role in the context of *Clown Torture's* invitation. The short story "Pete and Repeat," told in *Clown Torture*, goes like this: *Pete and Repeat were sitting on a fence. Pete fell off; who was left? Repeat. Pete and Repeat were sitting on a fence.* The same strategy is used in the version *Clown Torture: Dark and Stormy Night with Laughter*. Four clowns each hold up one of their own legs while they tell the same story over and over until they fall: "It was a dark and stormy night. Three men were sitting around a campfire. One of the men said, 'Tell us a story, Jack.' And Jack said, 'It was a dark and stormy night. Three men were sitting around a campfire. One of the men said, 'Tell us a story, Jack.' And Jack said, 'It was a dark and stormy night...'" (Nauman 2005, 337). In both cases the story is repeated in a loop, ensuring there will be circularity. The words are used as performative utterances, adding an extra layer to the overall narrative. Nauman has repeatedly mentioned that for him "the point where language starts to break down as a useful tool for communication" is where it gets interesting, making someone aware of the tension between language's functionality and its sounds and the words' poetic parts (Nauman 2005, 354). In *Clown Torture* the stories function as a trap, seducing the spectator, triggering their curiosity to understand what the clowns say, keeping them in the loop, under the spell.

Speaking of his early works, Nauman has described a mathematician of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "whose approach was to step outside the problem rather than struggling inside the problem." "Standing outside and looking at how something gets done or doesn't get done is really fascinating and curious... If I can manage to get outside of a problem a little bit and watch myself having a hard time, then I can see what I am going to do" (quoted in Simon 2018, 42). Nauman plays with the edges of our perception of what is human and how we experience being human. But to do so he places distinct borders between the roles of spectator and artist. For Nauman the autonomous artist assumes moral responsibility. In doing so he controls and directs the spectator, who becomes an instructed performer or at least participant in an experience scripted by the artist. To be fair, I should acknowledge that prior to offering this experience to others Nauman did submit to it himself, testing the limits between him and the media he was using, producing alienation and suffering for himself first.

*Clown Torture* establishes a link between the artist and the viewer so that the former can communicate to and potentially transform the ethos of the latter. It is a parrhesiastic artwork because it initiates this process of transformation in the imagination of the beholder through a disturbing audiovisual attack on the senses, which forces the viewer to feel and consider what kind of reactions this "uncontainable fuel of utterances" (Nauman 2005, 35) provokes to him/her. Linguistic miscommunication and sensory overload are employed by the clowns, who, as Nauman points out "are abstract in some sense," and "it's hard to make any contact with an idea or an abstraction" (Simon 2018, 54–5) in order to articulate an inconvenient truth, namely the difficulty of sharing the frustration about the human condition.

### 3. Parrhesia is a Moral, Social, and Political Obligation: Grayson Perry (1960–), Between Appropriation and Spectacular Travesty

I am in the communication business and I want to communicate to as wide an audience as possible. (Perry 2017, Foreword)



From left to right: "Theater Scene" illustration after a vase in the museum of Verona in Champfleury's *Histoire de la Caricature Antique*; Grayson Perry's *Cuddly Toys caught in barbed wire* (2001) depicting among others Perry as Claire, his alter-ego; photo of Perry dressed as Claire looking at one of his vases.

Grayson Perry creates colorful, shiny, glazed objects upon whose surfaces intricate and dense narratives are held together by harsh comments that expose his own weaknesses, vices, and insecurities — all laid there, bare, naked, in common view. Perry makes the link between these objects and a depiction of an ancient Greek vase in Champfleury's book on ancient caricature, the comic tradition of such vases and the character appearing on that vase, under the title "Theater Scene."

Perry's images are rich and powerful, but a large part of his work can only provide access to meaning by addressing the viewer through language. In the early 1980s, he started to produce images and text on glazed plates that represented his experience in terms of "explicit scenes of sexual perversion — sadomasochism, bondage, transvestism" (Boot 2002, 69). According to art critic Andrew Wilson, Perry chose pottery because at that time "studio ceramics was in thrall to a formal idea of a subject matter being defined by a truth both to materials and process." Vases are hollow objects. The surface of a vase encircles a hollow space. *G.P.* invests in this hollowness, covering it with his undressed self. He uses the vases as his film strip, finding pottery an effective alternative to film because of "the ways artifice could be deployed to make the innocent or honest pot have a purpose and mean something" (Wilson 2002, 85). But his stories are not only personal internal monologues; they also address ethical questions about the position of the artist within the art market as well as gender and social class.

What is there in a vase that turns it into a parrhesiastic prop for *G.P.*? How does the vase work so well to communicate his ideas? I would suggest that the secret lies in the form, which invites the viewer to take turns around it in order to come to terms with its reality. It is about viewers taking time to explore the narrative, but also about *G.P.* taking our time in order to tell us the story, his story. The vase, then, can be understood as a trap, a weapon in disguise; on the one hand, it generously and affectionately offers time to the viewer to discover what Perry has to say (as much time is invested in the making of the object) and on the other hand, it seductively and cleverly steals the viewer's time to force them to listen to him. It is no coincidence that the title of his 2002 exhibition at London's Barbican was rather polemical: *Guerilla Tactics*.

Perry provokes and addresses moral, social, and as a consequence political issues, holding a mirror of political incorrectness to his audience. Rancière argues that "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the possibility to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (Rancière 2009b, 13). It is in this revolving act, through and around the hypnotizing, choreographic element-trap of the ceramic vases, that the experience of the objects lies and the transformation of imagination takes place, for Perry's viewers.

Perry also performs a complex choreography, both undressing himself in the filmic/vase strip and dressing up as Claire, his alter-ego. He has been a transvestite all his life, and

has said that Claire affords him a certain level of anonymity: “curiously, though, Claire has become my way of controlling my increasing celebrity” (Alexander 2014).

In an imaginary parrhesiastic theater parade, Perry encircles and flirts with the group of the *Fool* character. He moves strangely, connecting the groups, being a man with a need for women’s clothes, and someone who doesn’t mind revealing the contradictions and doubts that go hand in hand with an artist’s life and lifestyle. Speaking up about something can be seen as equivalent to coming to terms with it. In some ways, Perry reactivates the old tradition of the *Fool*, the jester, developing rituals in order to speak up. By undressing himself as man and redressing as Claire, in women’s clothes, he puts on a “mask” in order to take the courage to speak. Having dressed up, he then guides us through the vases. Perry lets go of control, almost as if caricaturizing himself to get attention and gain more control over his audience. He could fit into the group of those exposing themselves through the strategy of disguise. As he has said, “A lot of my work has always had a guerrilla tactic, a stealth tactic. I want to make something that lives with the eye as a beautiful piece of art, but on closer inspection, a polemic or an ideology will come out of it” (Tate, n.d. a). In his case his costume is a very conscious instrument and a strategy that passes through psychoanalytical tools and returns to art.

#### 4. Serving as a Critic is a Condition for Parrhesia: Pierre Huyghe (1962–) and the Strategies he uses in Puppet Play



Pierre Huyghe, *This is not a time for dreaming*, 2004. Live puppet play and super 16 mm film, 24 minutes. Film still. © Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris © Pierre Huyghe

Huyghe’s own experience provides the starting point for *This is not a time for dreaming* (2004). The film documents a puppet show that tells the parallel stories of the modernist architect Le Corbusier’s commission to design the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard University, and Huyghe’s own commission to create an artwork to celebrate the building’s 40th anniversary. Shifting back and forth in time, the narrative weaves together historical and contemporary events with fantastical elements, in an allegorical representation of the struggles and compromises inherent in the creative process. (Brinson, n.d.)

French artist Pierre Huyghe has often explored narrative models that critically address the production of spectacle and the role of the maker in it. In Nicolas Bourriaud’s words: “He organizes his work as a critique of the narrative models offered us by society.” Huyghe’s work often operates between fiction and reality, leading to “gaps in the spectacle” (Bourriaud 2002, 50–52).



The 3 minute, 11 second film *Blanche-Neige Lucie* (1997; accessible online at <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7nm6>) serves as an example of how critique takes place through Huyghe’s re-organization of the structural elements with which a spectacle is built. In the film, singer Lucie Dolène, the French voice of Disney’s Snow White, sings “Un jour mon Prince viendra” in front of a camera, while the background of a soundstage moves behind her. English-language subtitles throughout provide a first-person account of her encounters with Snow White: when she first saw the original film and sang the song as a child in 1938; when she met Walt Disney in the US; when she was chosen to dub Snow White for the 1962 version of the film; and when she sued Disney for reissuing the film and using her voice without asking permission or paying her. In *Blanche-Neige Lucie*, meaning is produced for the viewer through the juxtaposition of text (subtitles), Dolène’s presence, and her singing voice staged in a studio set. Huyghe selects and orchestrates the film’s audiovisual and textual elements in order to precisely situate his critique of spectacle within the vicious circle of the spectacle’s production and consumption. Dolène and other individuals in Huyghe’s work “reappropriate their story and their work, and reality takes revenge on fiction” (Bourriaud 2002, 51). Dolène’s reclaiming of her voice takes place at the interstices of this circulation of meaning, between the deconstruction and reconstruction of the story’s structural elements.

I decided to focus on Huyghe’s 2004 film *This is not a time for dreaming* because it marks the first time that he directly implicated himself (embodied as a puppet) in his work. In a publicly accessible video (<https://vimeo.com/5705760>), curator Linda Norden speaks about Huyghe and her involvement with the film. Invited to realize a project at Harvard University in 2000, Huyghe focused on Harvard’s Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts — the only building realized by French architect Le Corbusier in North America, finished after his death in 1964. Norden says Huyghe had an interest in the “idea of the practice of art” within an institutional context. Over a three-year period his thinking crystallized, and he decided to make a film using marionettes due to “the symbolism, the idea of the artist as puppet.” Huyghe’s puppet opera — using puppets in film, reality, and sculpture — re-enacts the story of the Carpenter Center building, showing Le Corbusier’s but also the artist’s own struggle to realize a project. Norden values the reenactment of a breakdown of a series of relationships, struck by the power of the resulting critique, “an allegorical fable” that “explores the fate of creative commissions within the institution of a university.”

In a dreamy landscape, among animated red birds and growing plants, the puppets of Le Corbusier and Huyghe appear along with sounds, music, and movement. A human narrator also shows up, and introduces a play “of sorts, a sequence of actions precisely constructed.” We then see a close-up of hands holding the wooden mechanisms with which puppets are manipulated, and hear the sentence: “An artist in relation to Harvard in relation to what might happen in that place.” The characters of the opera are introduced: Le Corbusier, Mr. Serf, Mr. Sekkler, Mr. Pierre (Huyghe), Ms. Linda (Norden), Mr. Scott, Mr. or Mrs. Bird, and Mr. Harvard. The characters then enter the scene; shots of them alternate with exterior shots of the building. In a relatively abstract manner, the narrator summarizes Huyghe’s position and his reasons for making this work, before announcing that the reflection on these issues will take place “using a model rooted in the past: a set of relations with no dialogue.” After that, there is no more speech; we enter the realm of imagination, symbolism, and allegory via moving image and music. Le Corbusier dances with the rhythm of the song. We see the puppeteer and his assistant moving the puppets with strings — an allegory of the power of the system to move the creative abilities of individuals. Mr. Harvard, a dark shape (visually reminiscent of an abstracted Darth Vader from *Star Wars*) manipulates Le Corbusier’s building through invisible forces. Huyghe’s puppet-face is shown in close-up, strings all around him, trapped in the scene. A puppeteer (not included in the frame) moves a big Huyghe puppet performing the role of puppeteer, manipulating in turn a miniature Le Corbusier and a miniature Huyghe puppet. Huyghe dares to directly implicate himself and reflect upon his role as the artist in



this game. This is done in a very intelligent way, addressing both the senses and the intellect. During the confrontation between the artist and the curator, for example, no words are exchanged, but the dramatic music intensifies to indicate the tension building up. The critique applies not only to the roles of the artist, the critic, and so on, but also to the general construction of the institution, in this case the university. *This is not a time for dreaming* is an amazing example of how institutional critique can be a truly parrhesiastic practice, whereby the artist uses dramatic power and feeling to affect the spectator. Huyghe assumes responsibility and speaks up about the power games and tensions between the artist and the institution during the process of the work's creation. Unlike an outside commentator, he implicates himself in this process by exposing his own personal experience and frustrations in relation to the project in question.

### 5. Speaking One's Mind is a Dangerous Game: Claude Cahun (1894–1954)



Heliogravure by Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, preceding Chapter IX of *Aveux non avendus*.

The naked idea (called truth) has not been able to dazzle for us. We must strip bare its organs, manipulate its skeleton — and admit to our disappointment. But give it back its make-up, and truth regains its power. Dreams and delicious suspicions remain for us — and all is permitted — of the inexhaustible combinations of lies. Glorify the imagination of the costume maker. Announce the perpetual Carnival. (Claude Cahun, “Bedroom Carnival” (1926), quoted in Shaw 2017, 286)

Although French writer, photographer, and performance artist Claude Cahun is historically situated within the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde, I decided to include her here for two reasons. First, in passionately “embodying her own revolt,” Cahun can be considered a living example of Foucault’s definition of parrhesia as a stance, manifested both in her art and life. Cahun put artistic strategies such as *detournement*, irony, and exaggeration to use in actively resisting the Nazi occupation of the island of Jersey, with real repercussions: she was arrested, stood trial for distributing propaganda to undermine the morale of the German forces, jailed, and sentenced to death (the sentence was never carried out). Second, Cahun was enthusiastically “rediscovered” in the late 1980s, when the issues of gender and sexuality raised in and through her artistic body of work and the strategies she used to address them became topical within contemporary artistic practices and debates about identity. For the purposes of this dissertation, I briefly examine how her strategies relate to courageous expression and risk within an art context.

In December 1933 the literary magazine *Commune*<sup>21</sup> invited several writers to respond to the question: “For whom do you write?” Claude Cahun responded by proposing that “for” be replaced with “against”: *against whom do you write?* She was examining the question critically, addressing the importance of an author standing in opposition to the reader but also, even more than that, in opposition to her own self:

It is against those who know how to read that one must write, because in my estimation progress is never obtained except by opposition. So that readers can draw benefit from what the writer has thought against their own histories, against their own selves. This is to say that I write, that I wish to write, above all, against myself. (quoted in Shaw 2017, 287)

Her suggestion provoked a very angry response from Louis Aragon, co-editor of the journal and former Surrealist. Aragon replied to Cahun using the plural “we,” suggesting that he saw himself as speaking in behalf of the Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers’ (male) community. This apparently hostile “we” deployed against one person’s opinion underscores Cahun’s very particular individual positioning in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in western Europe: woman-born, Jewish, lesbian, highly educated, and equipped with darkly humorous tactics like hyperbole and irony. Art history professor Jennifer L. Shaw describes Cahun as simultaneously occupying an inside and outside position: due to being seen as highly intellectual and a Surrealist artist in her own right, she was partly accepted within male circles. As she did not fit the Surrealists’ female role model (muse, mistress, wife), she was at the same time an outsider.<sup>22</sup>

Speaking one’s mind is a dangerous game. It requires the courage to differentiate oneself from others, to stand in opposition and often in confrontation with other opinions, and even, as in Cahun’s case, to accept living in a state of permanent ambivalence and contradiction: holding several opinions, arguments, and counter-arguments within oneself, maintaining a self that consists of several selves. Through her denial of logocentrism, the “orientation of philosophy toward an order of meaning — thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word — conceived as existing in itself, as foundation” (Culler 1982, 92) and her transgression of heteronormative discourse, Cahun persistently resisted categorization, constantly calling into question the roles of artist, author, and audience, and faced the consequences. Her art and life, her person and her politics, totally merged.

The notions of adventure and masquerade were central in Cahun, who worked with theater, writing, assemblage, and photography. Her attitude combined outsidership and insidership, a curiosity about what might be behind the mask(s), and the courage to face whatever is found there. Cahun’s interest in “strategies of disidentification” (Shaw 2017, 76) is expressed in her 1926 text “Bedroom Carnival”, where she says:

Masks are made of different kinds of materials: carboard, velvet, flesh, the Word. The carnal mask and the verbal mask are worn in all seasons. I soon learned to prefer these two non-commercial strategies above all others. (quoted in Shaw 2017, 286)

21 *Commune* was the journal of the Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (AEAR), the French section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, established in the Soviet Union in 1930. AEAR was founded in 1932. Cahun joined the association the same year.

22 Dilemmas regarding the place of the intellectual in the polemical climate of the 1930s due to the rise of fascism formed the background to Cahun’s reaction. Cahun did not agree with those in the AEAR who wanted to take a Stalinist position in art and politics. She opted for the “poetry of indirect action” instead, as the only emancipatory way for the reader to find their way through a text on their own. For an in-depth analysis, see Shaw 2017, 162–9 and 287–9 (for the English translations of Cahun’s letter and Aragon’s response).

Cahun's stance, work, and life now appear as precursory for ideas regarding social construction of identity explored in the 1990s by many artists and thinkers in the US, among them photographers Nan Goldin and Cindy Sherman and philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler. In her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble* (1989), Butler argues that gender is a construction, a product of culture: we socially learn to perform gender. In summarizing Cahun's strategies, the key phrase might be "stubborn ambivalence": she insisted on blurring the line between "revolting the self and performing a self" (Shaw 2017, 87), both invoking and refuting, being legible and illegible (against interpretation); embracing iconoclasm and undermining the notion of self through theatricalizing and dramatization, looking for the exception which "proves the rule — and disproves it too" (Cahun 2007, 152).

The same strategies appear in Cahun's 1930 publication *Aveux non avenues*. The title affirms and immediately negates: confessions cancelled. In the introduction to the book's English translation, Jennifer Mundy writes:

Cahun's many-levelled attack on notions of truth and authenticity, and on the veracity of appearances, mean that ultimately the text is not confessional; it is rather a collage of fragments that mirrored Cahun's parodic view of the self as a rather poorly assembled patchwork of thoughts. (Cahun 2007, XVII)

In *Aveux non avenues*, Cahun's ambivalent and complicated relationship with the authority of logos expands from literary montage to photomontage, complicating the production of meaning. Her heliogravures in *Aveux non avenues* are formed of photographic fragments showing herself in various costumes and theatrically staged postures. They precede the compilation of textual fragments and refuse to provide fixed meaning: each remains loosely and indirectly linked to the text of each chapter, allowing for a double distancing and contributing to a critical function. This open-ended, enigmatic (keeping poetry's secret), and disruptive approach reflects the relation Cahun sought to develop with her readers. As her biographer François Leperlier puts it in the afterword to *Aveux non avenues*:

This "self-centred" book, which trumpets its narcissism, its egoism, its extreme individualism, also longs to engage with others: but those others have to undertake a full part in the process, play the game of "for and against," of "punch-ball and boxer" as Cahun puts it, on their own account (Cahun 2007, 207).

## 6. A Theatrical Space as a Condition for Parrhesia: Christoph Schlingensief (1960–2010), *Ausländer Raus!*

In the summer of 2000, German provocateur Christoph Schlingensief set up a refugee camp in front of the Viennese Opera House. He interned twelve actual refugee applicants in a large shipping container and streamed their life over the web for the week. As in any "reality TV" show, the audience was allowed to vote their least favorite player out of the compound — and, in this case, out of the country. (Tactical Media Files, n.d.)

In 1989 a discussion on "theatricality" took place in Jeff Cornellis' Flemish philosophical TV talk show *CONTAINER*.<sup>23</sup> The panel consisted of Bart Verschaffel (moderator), Lieven de Cauter, Klaas Tindemans, and Paul Vandenbroeck. For Vandenbroeck, the broad meaning of theatricality was "the staging of daily life, a shaping of the interaction between people" that can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century European saying "life is a stage [schouwtoneel]," with Senecan influences. If life is a stage on which everyone plays a role and has a part, then, Vandenbroeck adds, this also means that "the way in which people interact in daily life is already a kind of screen. One builds a screen between oneself and the others" (Verschaffel et al 1989). Tindemans makes a distinction: experiencing an event in real life by being there is different from looking at it on television — once recorded, filmed, an event becomes dramatic, it becomes a spectacle.



"Bitte liebt Österreich", Wiener Festwochen, 2000  
© Paul Poet

Christoph Schlingensief's *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container* (2000) is simultaneously an art project, a reality show, a website, a documentary film, an action, and a chronicle. It pinpoints how the media influence a subject's capacity to relate to other subjects. Between the project's various aspects, formats, and transmissions, Schlingensief plays with the media of the time in which *Container* was produced, which he then reconsiders as a critical tool and redistributes. He creates a "Big Brother"-type reality show not via the television but in the city and on the internet. He opens up a space between formats, between the theatrical and the cinematic.

Starting from definitions of the theatrical as "the solemn, that which is worthy to be seen," in 1989 Verschaffel argues that the carrier of theatricality is not the theater piece, but the (theater) hall, which in the West is constructed in a certain way: "one spot has been decided as the ideal point from which to look, and immediately that which you look at is directed towards one static powerful, absolute, gaze (the gaze of the king)" (Verschaffel et al 1989). For Vandenbroeck, the narrow meaning of the theatrical in Europe stems from the European tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and has to do with power, which is essentially invisible. It cannot be seen, but it can be felt. This kind of theatricality, Verschaffel says, is disappearing now. "The theatrical can now be a synonym for exaggeration." He also remarks that theatricality has spread into other media which have bigger technical skills and resources, leading to the spectacularizing of the city.

Together with dramaturge Matthias Lilienthal, Schlingensief stages a situation in order to create an actual experience, an event in real public space. The event attracted hundreds of Austrians to the square, and 800,000 logged on to the website, designed by Paul Poet, cre-



ator and curator for Austrian-German internet TV site [www.webfreetv.com](http://www.webfreetv.com), to cast their ballots. Poet also documented “the action from its inception to its logical conclusion” (Tactical Media Files, n.d.), preserving it and opening it up to translation by future generations, and further disseminating it in the form of a 90-minute documentary film titled *Schlingensiefel's Container. Chronik einer Kunstaktion*.

The camera moves into the city. Cars pass, people walk by. Close up: the film uses image, sound, and data — statistics, TV news, posters from a campaign by far-right national populist party FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) — from 1986 onwards to arrive at facts about Austria's current political situation and the rise of the right wing. Video shots of police, people, security staff approaching a bus alternate with graphics: TRANSPORT IN THE CONTAINER. Schlingensiefel's choice of spaces emphasizes his subject matter: containers, divisions, inside and outside, borders. Internet information on the project alternates with shots of people (the participants of the show) entering the bus. The bus moves along. Schlingensiefel appears in front of the microphone. Webfreetv.com. He presents the project to the people gathered in the city square. *Big Brother*. Those (participants) you don't like will leave the country. The bus arrives. A band plays. The square is full of people. Their reactions are filmed. Security staff pass by. The participants, covering their faces with newspapers get out of the bus and walk to the container. The band stops playing. Applause. Schlingensiefel continues delivering his speech, about the project, transparency, and openness. Uncovering the title of the project, *Ausländer Raus!*, people applaud. Press conference; for him it is important that the placard (*Ausländer Raus!*) is standing there, “unremovable like an election banner” (see video at 9m 17sec, on Tactical Media Files, n.d.). He observes that once the words were there, sympathizers applauded.

In 1989's *CONTAINER*, Tindemans makes an important differentiation between “all those media who can show reality more precisely — it is debatable what that means — or give the impression that they can do so,” and theater as a show, which “isn't really about mimesis or imitation: the actual presence of a body... The fascination, the direct contact of eyes with a body.”

In his *Container* (2000), as a guest in a TV program, Schlingensiefel says that provocation is a medium to wake people up if they are deaf. Live, online, on TV, he provokes: anger, dislike against his aggressive way of presenting the Austrian people. A man says to him that *he* has to leave the country. People are shouting. He provokes fighting between people in the square, fighting in the TV studio. Austrian people start fighting between themselves. A woman tells him: Are you gaga? Go away. People get more and more hysterical. One guy is very angry because Schlingensiefel is insulting the Austrian people. He wants to kill Schlingensiefel. Tension rises. This resonates with Rancière's articulation of the stage being “simultaneously a locus of public activity and the exhibition-space for ‘fantasies’, [which] disturbs the clear partition of identities, activities and spaces” (Rancière 2009b, 13).

Over a period of six days, a series of actions related to public speaking are continually repeated by Schlingensiefel. In the philosophical *CONTAINER*, discussion goes on about the relationship of the dramatic with the real. If the dramatic literally means that which has to do with drama and drama means action, or a way of acting, then — Vandenbroeck says — we are facing a shift in the meaning of “dramatic,” which is now “split and also means the bad, the cruel, and the catastrophic,” constricting its original meaning. Verschaffel considers the place of this “new kind of dramatics” as “the dramatic model of the catastrophe” offering the excitement of shock. “Its place is not in the theater but in the news (the real).” Lieven De Cauter remarks that “the real dramatic seems to be stronger than dramatic theater” (Verschaffel et al 1989). Whereas Brecht's epic theater proposed critical distance, Schlingensiefel offers viewers the chance to choose their own measure of distance and their own dramatic engagement. Is it “dramatic” in the sense of acting or “dramatic” as in spectacle that they will select? A return to the absolute gaze of the old theatrical now translates to: access to all media.

## 7. Parrhesia's Transformative Power: Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010)



Louise Bourgeois with *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1947–49) in 1975.

The way I fail to relate to people is what I am and what I do. It is what motivates. (Louise Bourgeois in Meyer-Thoss 1992, 138)

Louise Bourgeois transformed her self-proclaimed inability to relate to people in “real life” to an ongoing reparatory dialectic process in her artworks: sculptures, drawings, prints, and performances. Bourgeois' parrhesiastic process could be described as follows: she acknowledged her inability and her trauma as her subject matter, and by confronting it she turned her real-life weaknesses around and transformed them into her artistic powers. Having understood early on that revealing one's weakness to public exposure is a sign of strength, Bourgeois worked with this reversal, while steadily drawing a clear line dividing art from life: “As an artist I am a powerful person. In real life, I feel like the mouse behind the radiator” (Bourgeois 1998, 227).

Bourgeois entered into a confrontational dialogue with her emotional demons. Her raw material in this process consisted of raw emotions: aggression, anger, anxiety, rage, fear, tenderness, stoic calm, suffering, and despair.<sup>24</sup> She used knives and scissors to cut and chip away, needles to stitch and repair. These were her weapons in transforming emotion into solid matter and clear form. The more resistant the material, the better for Bourgeois. German writer and lecturer Christiane Meyer-Thoss describes Bourgeois as someone “constantly revising her work.” Through “repetitions, stackings, different methods of lining things up ... old works are assimilated, eaten up, by new ones ... in a process of continual change and experimentation with a diversity of materials (Meyer-Thoss 1992, 66).

*He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947), *The Listening One* (1947), *Observer, One and Others* (1955), *The Blind Leading The Blind* (1947–49), *The Confrontation “A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts”* (1978), *Articulated Lair* (1986): Just a few of a parade of works produced over forty years. Her titles testify to her perseverance in building up bemas for helpless standing figures that fail to communicate. The paradoxes of relating extended to Bourgeois' relationship to language: “My knives are like a tongue. I love you, I hate you” (Bourgeois 1998, 222). She said she “had fun with the English language”, which she learned through her nanny and father's mistress, who simultaneously offered her access to a new window of communication and betrayed her trust (Wye and Smith 1994, 72). For

Bourgeois language was “perfect, but not enough” (Wye and Smith 1994, 14): things could be tolerated when written down, but words were “not completely satisfying” (Wye and Smith 1994, 72).

Bourgeois trusted in the eyes, saying “they never lie.” From her three diaries (the written, the spoken, and the drawn) the only one that counted for her was that which consisted of drawings (Bourgeois 1998, 303–305). And yet several works of her include language. In her early work *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, nine engravings appear in parallel to nine parables in the space of a book, opening up a new space of associations for the reader. She stated that this work was about failure of communication. Bourgeois was bitterly aware that it takes two to parrhesiazesthai, but she also said: “If you don’t like yourself you are not ready to communicate” (Meyer-Thoss 1992, 121). Communication may take place through language, but is not confined to it. Speaking one’s mind may also include non-verbal, physical and performative aspects. In her own words: “Color is stronger than language” (Bourgeois 1998, 222).

In her early eighties Bourgeois claimed that she accessed her unconscious through “an affective communication with people playing along” with her (Bourgeois 1998, 251). According to her assistant Jerry Gorovoy, however, “her work wasn’t really about the need to communicate; it was about the need to express what she was feeling” (Wroe 2013). It seems there was an element of magic, an alchemical process involved in this stone woman’s sculpting time, which spiraled around the question: “what’s the use of talking if you already know that others don’t feel what you feel?” (Bourgeois 1998, 308). This element of magic was a prerequisite to seducing, trapping the viewer and leading him/her to a transformative experience in turn:

If the artist is successful, at ease with his sources, magic operates in his process. The viewer feels the positive vibes of the work, illuminated by the artist in touch with his unconscious. There will be communication. If there is magic in the making, then there is magic in the discovery. Let’s hope. (Louise Bourgeois in Meyer-Thoss 1992, 121)

A magic transformative process: the artist cured from her actual life’s past through making work — Bourgeois defined “process” as elimination (Bourgeois 1998, 249), an exorcising of one’s fears — raw emotions transformed into form, failed relations transformed into meaning and communicating through the working of the material, the viewer transforming in turn upon receiving this experience. This happened to me personally, during a period of intensive reading and writing around her practice: While I was literally sleeping, she put her finger on my wound — spot on. In my dream, the tension building up through an unpleasant discussion with my deceased father escalated to a burst of tears upon handing him Bourgeois’ book *Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father* to read, and seeing him open the book and look through its pages. I woke up crying. Maastricht-based psychologist and psychotherapist Mieps Van Hest explained to me that a trauma can only be processed through the body, and this was exactly what was happening in my dream: I was processing my trauma under Louise Bourgeois’ influence.

Bourgeois contributed significantly to the development and acceptance of idiosyncratic process-based artistic practices that subscribe to a “personal logic.” Among other texts, this is analyzed in curator Helaine Posner’s essay “Louise Bourgeois: Intensity and Influence,” which focuses on the artist’s role as “artistic mother” of feminist artistic practices (Posner 2013, 51). Through her courageous persistence, her work and stance deeply affected a generation of younger artists seeking alternatives to modernism’s rigid formal solutions. In turn, it played an important role in expanding and therefore transforming our reception of art.

## Conclusion: Who is the parrhesiast-artist?

The above examples of artistic strategies can help us construct a portrait of the parrhesiast artist. Before arriving at some conclusions regarding parrhesia’s role in contemporary art, however, I would like to take a step back and reconnect with Foucault’s art-historical stopping points in *The Courage of Truth*: Cynical art, the literature studied by Mikhail Bakhtin, and the figure of the modern artist.

Foucault notes that comedy and satire “were often permeated by Cynical themes and even better, they were, up to a point, a privileged site for their expression.” He refers to the literature of medieval and Christian Europe, specifically to the fabliaux,<sup>25</sup> bawdy tales of medieval France, and the grotesque, carnivalesque Renaissance literature studied by Bakhtin, as evidence of a line of continuity from the Cynics to carnival and other festive forms (Foucault 2011, 186–9).

In exploring “cynicism as a moral category in Western culture” and wandering around “the problem of Cynicism as a ‘trans-historical’ category” (Foucault 2011, 177–9), Foucault keeps the reader on the trajectory of parrhesia as a way of life — as the courage to express truth through one’s life — while locating later descendants of Cynicism within Western culture. Foucault argues that this way of life emerged in forms of Christianity (such as beguines in the Middle Ages) and, later on, into political movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which he distinguishes as three types: secret societies, revolutionary movements, and parrhesia, as it manifests in the artist’s life (Foucault 2011, 182–6).

In walking this “trans-historical” line of the Cynic life, Foucault mainly places his interest in the emergence of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century modern artist. He argues that parrhesia is about living a life as an artist. Foucault concludes that it is within art that the “most intense forms of a truth-telling with the courage to take the risk of offending are concentrated” (Foucault 2011, 189), as opposed to those forms of “good” parrhesia (for example the Socratic) characterized by “a certain harmony, a certain homophony between what the speaker says and his way of life” (Foucault 2011, 169).

My explorations into contemporary artists and visual arts strategies demonstrate that we are now somewhere else: in our current highly complex and multilayered reality, in which we live with an abundance of mediated images, more refined, context-specific strategies are required to enable parrhesia. Constantly exposed to various media claiming various truths, we as spectators find it hard to trust our own experiences, and we become impatient and desensitized, easily bored. At the same time, confrontational laughter is under threat: in recent years sensitivities around political correctness have become fraught as the struggles of certain social groups to claim their right to be taken seriously, instead of assuming marginal positions in society, have intensified. To create artistic work that reaches out and touches people, the artist must conceive new strategies that take this into consideration. Still, I argue that a trait all parrhesiast-artists share with the Cynic is one detected by Foucault in Book III of the *Discourses* of Epictetus: the Cynic is a spy or *kataskopos* (Foucault 2011, 166–167). Parrhesiast-artists are spies. They constantly make use of their senses: they observe, listen, and smell social\* issues and situations and react to them in expressive, sensational ways. Through their work, parrhesiast-artists address these issues and situations, and have the power to confront, move, and affect\* other people because they have already been confronted with, embodied, or enacted these issues themselves. In communicating those embodiments and enactments, they mobilize their imaginations and their critical attitudes as well as those of their audience

in turn. Paradoxically, parrhesiast-artists are able to both keep a certain distance from an issue in order to observe it clearly, but also come very close, be affected by it, and transform it through their art. This includes revealing to the audience “their blindness due to inattention, complacency, weakness, and moral distraction,” but, as Foucault also notes, if it is a duty to show, it is up to the audience to take it or not (Foucault 2011, 16). For the artist-parrhesiast, this showing needs to be coupled with some kind of self-implication, engagement, and exposure.

The motivations, expressions, and strategies of parrhesiast-artists vary tremendously. Some follow the tradition of the mime, the clown, the Fool, and the caricaturist — mocking things, producing laughter with a goal, using satire, exaggeration, and creating new reconfigurations. Others follow a tradition of ethical obligation. Some combine elements from both strategies. In between these various unique paths, the possibility of crossing a border between good and bad, between ethical and immoral, is always present. The parrhesiastic in art is that which reveals uncomfortable truths against conventions by undoing dignity and seriousness. Theatricality is an ally: the parrhesiast-artist feels an urge to design a game which has consequences and affects others in turn. Whether the parrhesiastic game is confrontational, healing, disruptive, friendly, or aggressive, engaging and affecting the spectator is the unifying aim.

Earlier in this Chapter I briefly described the three historical Western European perspectives regarding the relation on art and truth: in Greek antiquity, the Platonic approach considered the good, the true, and the beautiful as inextricably linked — the beautiful being the face of good and of truth. A few centuries later, for Seneca (c. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) and the Stoics, art was meant to give good examples to people by serving temperance and wisdom. There is a limit, according to Seneca: “Truth is complicated and profoundly obscure” (Dobbin 2012, Seneca 115 Demetrius [5]). In modern philosophy, a third perspective had been established: art is beyond good and bad. Modern artists were responsible for finding ways to express the moral attitude and aesthetic values of modernity. My examination of Sherman’s strategies proves how holding a credible relationship to truth in the postmodern world further complicates the relations between art and truth. Sherman “appears” and reveals mechanisms involved in the construction of identity of a subject caught in the gaze through manipulated self-centered imaging acts. The uncomfortable truth she shares with the viewer is with respect to the problem of “true” identity.

However different the subjects, strategies and perspectives of the artists I examine in this Chapter, it is obvious that they all attempt to create set-ups, define “a time and a place, in other words a dramatic scene where truth can emerge, where subjects can be recognized in the act of truth” (McGushin 2007, 9). In these set-ups they invite the viewer to project, desire, and imagine. The set-ups function as reflective surfaces; they depend on the viewer’s imagination and ability to mirror themselves in them to receive meaning and become complete. The mechanisms and strategies contemporary parrhesiast-artists use to approach the viewer and grasp and hold their attention, keep them in the artwork, include dubiousness, trickery, seduction, deception, undermining. In the present complicated and loaded post-modern, post-truth landscape, one could observe that contemporary parrhesiast-artists decide to function underground, instead of employing straightforward approaches regarding art and truth relations, in order to have an affect on the viewer. I suggest that this attitude partly resonates with Duchamp’s enigmatic statement of 1961, about the “artist of tomorrow” going underground (Duchamp 1961).

Although truth is a very contested term, the artist-parrhesiast persists in seeking it out through the power of senses and affect, using artistic freedom of expression as a weapon. The artist-parrhesiast adopts a militant vocabulary and stance. Grayson Perry has named an exhibition *Guerilla Tactics*, Louise Bourgeois spoke of “defense.” During their resistance work, Claude Cahun and her partner Marcel Moore signed themselves as “The Soldier With-

out a Name.” I argue that although not all parrhesiast-artists make explicitly political work, political questions underpin their work. By political I mean the possibility for imaginative processes to be enabled and expressed, by making associations not previously imagined and by daring to disassociate from existing associations. Parrhesiast-artists care for the conditions needed so that they can persistently keep asking the question, “How can I, as an artist, practice my ability to create a kind of shared sense of what is true or meaningful?” and have the courage to challenge, disrespect, confront, and disrupt normality, rules, and the status quo.

**III. It's My Artistic Positioning! Where Am I in This:**  
**Parrhesia from My Own Position as an Artist.**  
**Notes on My Methodology**

“The war raged on and I sat there by the sea and looked deep into the heart of humanity. I became my mother, my grandmother, in fact I was all the characters who take part in my play. I learned to travel all their paths and became all of them.” (Salomon n.d.)



*The Narrator* (Eleni Kamma) strikes a selfie in Limburgs Museum wearing a mask made of celluloid.



### The Higher Powers Command:

#### Write from the Perspective of Connectiveness and Conviviality, not of Dichotomy.

*The Narrator* puts on a colorful transparent mask, makes grimaces, and strikes a selfie. She is in the Limburgs Museum archive in order to conduct research on Limburg's historical carnival costumes and masks. *The Narrator* starts improvising her written manifesto-monologue, reading out loud. In a lively, sentimental tone:

In 1969, German artist Sigmar Polke created a painting, the title of which was *The Higher Powers Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black!* The title also made it into the lower back part of the painting itself. This double status of the text as the title of the work *and* as part of the painting confronts the viewer with several possible readings: that this is a “bluntly satirical version of a painting by Ellsworth Kelly” (Tate n.d. b) as one of the texts accompanying Polke's 1995 solo exhibition *Join the Dots* in the Tate Modern Liverpool suggested; “an acknowledgment of the tacit, built-in mystery of painting: that we don't make art so much as art tells the artist what it wants to be,” according to art critic Jerry Saltz (Saltz 2010); or a tongue-in-cheek statement by the artist himself accepting his role “as medium, as way station for commands from higher beings,” as described by curator, artist, and art critic Harald Szeemann (Szeemann 2018, 150). In other words, Polke dared to mock and undermine himself as the sole author of the painting, as critic, professor, and editor of *Texte zur Kunst* Isabelle Graw argues (Howard 2015), while at the same time he justified this provocative act by using text in a double way, both as the title of the work *and* as part of the painting. Polke's ironic stance seems in line with Saltz's observation that since his relocation from East to West Germany at the age of twelve, Polke “thought and acted like an outsider, or really a visitor from another esthetic planet” (Saltz 2018).

*The Narrator* thinks of that painting, and the impression it made on her when she first saw it. She takes a deep breath before continuing:

At the age of nineteen I entered the School of Mathematics in the University of Patras, Greece. Two years later I gave up mathematics for painting for similar reasons I suspect celebrated artist Joseph Beuys gave up his studies in biology prior to turning to art.<sup>26</sup> I then entered the Athens School of Fine Art, majored in painting (a five-year course) and continued my studies in London, where I completed a master of arts at Chelsea College of Art & Design. Following an intense period of making and exhibiting work between 2003 and 2007, I ended up at the Fine Art Department of the Jan Van Eyck Academie, a “post-academic institute for research and production” in Maastricht, from January 2008 to December 2009. By using that time for reflection, I reshaped my artistic practice into that of a visual artist-researcher with a love/hate relationship to language. Although I thoroughly enjoyed looking at the world around me in silence — observing attitudes and situations — and expressing my thoughts through drawing and painting, a need to share my findings with others in ways that expanded from the visual realm into the social dimensions of art, including the notion of participation, intensified over time. Words, sentences, and other linguistic tools found their way into my practice. I became increasingly attracted and repelled at the

same time by the dangers, limitations, and traps that words most often offer in exercising authority, controlling what we call communication\*, turning sensorial experience into descriptions, translations, and other semantic systems. To give an example of how the use of words may limit instead of enable global-scale “universal” communication, in 2019 a scientific study of comparative linguistics published in the journal *Science*, the largest such study so far, concluded that terms for emotions (“anger,” “fear,” and so on) “vary in meaning across languages, even if they are often equated in translation dictionaries” (Jackson et al. 2019).

### Moving along a Moebius Strip

I, *The Narrator* who mainly speaks with the voice of the *Engaged Artist*, often ask myself: why do I have this urge to move back and forth between mediums?

Since 2016 I have committed myself to examining, through the use of artistic tools and methods from visual arts, performance, and film, the conditions that can allow for the opening up of a parrhesiastic space in the field of art. Throughout this examination, my viewpoint continually shifts between the positions of artist and researcher, my practice being situated between monologue and dialogue. I define my internal monologue as those parts of the practice which I conduct myself in the studio as well as those for which I work with others but take my own decisions and personally assume responsibility for the outcome. I consider as a dialogue all the other parts, ranging from research to artistic collaborations, in which I reach out to others and develop both the thinking and outcome through exchange and interaction with them. I have therefore been working along a Moebius-strip schema, which keeps shifting or circulating from me as individual artist (through drawings and objects), to dialogic collaborations (such as the journal *Paroikeo*, talking activities, performative events, and short films), and writing about the process. My research subject is investigated through a circulation process within which concepts such as communication, dialogue, and listening are continuously performed and put to the test.

In the past two years I have become increasingly interested in performative strategies. The reasons for this are twofold. First, I find performance\* to be the most appropriate medium for reflecting on current conditions of daily life (such as precarity, materiality versus virtual life, individualism versus the collective, and cultural specificities versus European politics/economics). Second, my research subject specifically asks for developing ways of working with others that test the limits of what it means to speak up today and, eventually, what this means for a community of people living together. I increasingly consider myself to be a practitioner in the sociocultural field: as someone who (through artistic media) situates and expresses herself in relation to (with\*, against\*, through\*) others. In my case, the discourse and practice are situated at the intersection between visual arts, performance and film. I advocate hybridity\*, not because of indecisiveness, but because of its promise of openness. Used as a testing ground, such intersections offer the possibility of a critical distance, allowing a rethinking of otherwise unshaken certainties within each field.

So, how do I move in and through this research? It seems I need several other bodies (and their voices) in order to move. These bodies and voices are, among others, those of the artists whose strategies of parrhesia I analyze in Chapter II, the performers I have collaborated with, and the academics, artists, and peers I have entered into a dialogue with throughout this research. During one of our meetings, my supervisor Janneke Wesseling observed that I am in the middle of things. This back-and-forth movement is my way of marking the territory I am investigating. I just started this investigation, and moving in one direction does not help me think, question, or doubt things; moving back and forth does. I like to think through the contrast between modern clichéd phrases regarding time and direction, such as: “the future

lies in front of you” and “facing the future,” and the terminology of Ancient Babylonians which indicated that they, on the contrary, considered the past as laying in front of them. I need to move back and forth, test again and again, until what I am looking for becomes experienced, embodied knowledge.

Here I will provide an example of how I am led through my methodology to the realization of artistic work, by describing my solo exhibition *Oh, for some more Amusement!* at the contemporary art center Netwerk in Aalst, Belgium, in April 2015. It attempted to bridge the conceptual and temporal gap between the forms and methods used by people speaking out in public space today and the historical *Karagöz*. Taking its format from the circle created by the audience surrounding the *Ortaoyunu actors*, the exhibition consisted of three video installations, two objects (reconstructions of the *Ortaoyunu* theatrical props), and the first issue of *IIAPOIKEΩ*, a printed journal. Written and edited by performer Michiel Reynaert, psychoanalyst Bibi Straatman, critic Pieter Van Bogaert, and myself, the journal was published on the occasion of the exhibition. *IIAPOIKEΩ* issue I compiled the following content: archival material on the political role of Karagöz shadow theater in the Ottoman Empire, photos I had taken during the Gezi Park protests, written transcriptions of Turkish protesters testifying to their experiences of the events in 2013 from my video interviews, and email correspondence between the four editors, who are based in Belgium and the Netherlands.

In my video installation *Play it, Emin: Walking along the Russian Monument at Ayastefanos* (2014), which was part of the above-mentioned exhibition, a historical event is used to provoke thoughts about political conditions today. In the two-channel video, *Karagöz* master Emin Senyer appears on the right-hand screen, reenacting through his puppets the demolition of the Russian Monument at Ayastefanos, a memorial erected in 1898 to celebrate Russia’s victory during the Crimean War of 1877–78. Its demolition by Istanbul’s *Union and Progress Party* in November 1914 was an event of staged propaganda, orchestrated shortly after the Ottoman Empire’s entry to the First World War. In addition, the demolition is thought to have been filmed by the first Turkish filmmaker, Fuat (Uzkinay) Bey, and although no traces of the film have survived, it is officially considered to mark the beginning of Turkish national cinema (Mutlu 2007, 75–6). On the left-hand screen a tracking shot moves along the path up to the Ayastefanos monument in the Istanbul suburb of Florya, filmed in 2013 at a walking pace, with intertitles superimposed on top of the footage. The intertitles provide official historical information (newspaper sources) about the event, and about its filmic registration by Fuat (Uzkinay) Bey. On the screen to the right, we see *Karagöz* master Emin Senyer reenacting the subject of the unpreserved film — based on three photo-documents of the monument taken before, during, and after the explosion, and a description of the event found in the personal memoirs of the lieutenant who did the exploding — with a humorous trick; on the left-hand screen we simultaneously read intertitles describing an upcoming agreement between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to unilaterally reconstruct destroyed Russian monuments and tombstones in Turkey (including the monument in question) and Turkish monuments and tombstones in Russia, as announced in Turkish newspapers in 2012. While the narrative unfolds, what is actually being explored in *Play it, Emin* is the relation of an event to testimony and its representation. In *Play it, Emin*, meaning is produced in the gaps in time concerning the specific location of the monument.

### Research into Old Forms. Connecting Past to Present Practices, the Cynic — the Fool

Following her Istanbul experience, *The Narrator* started looking for historical contexts, museums, and archives related to old popular practices of entertainment in the geographic areas of Belgium, Dutch Limburg, and Athens. Festivities such as carnivals, celebrations, and parades have traditionally been identified as settings for the production of communal laughter. German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that “all festive experiences ... allow no separation between one person and another” (Gadamer 1986, 39). When individuals participate in such events, they essentially look at the world from a personal, affective point of view, embodying the political in society through their participation.

Thanks to Limburgs Museum conservator Frank Holthuisen, *The Narrator* was encouraged to systematically explore that museum’s archives. She had the opportunity to visit both its video archives and costumes collection on several occasions. Riet Sax, a Limburgs Museum volunteer, opened up boxes of the costumes for her and showed her several costumes and masks from various historical periods.

The costumes of a particular costume designer, Thérèse Gorissen from Maastricht — a city of 120,000 inhabitants in the southeast Netherlands known for its cultural activities and large number of national heritage buildings (second after Amsterdam) — were particularly fascinating, firstly because of their complex construction design and sculptural qualities, and secondly because of the identity (and representation) issues they raise about Gorissen’s own role as a maker and as a Carnival participant wearing these exaggerated, slightly distorted, and extravagant stereotypes of femininity.







Research into costumes and masks at Limburg Museum, hosting the Costumes collection of the former Museum of Echt (now closed), Venlo, The Netherlands. 2017–2019

*The Narrator* felt touched by the effort and time that Thérèse Gorissen invested in her designs. Gorissen's costumes seemed autobiographical and of a critical, humorous disposition. Was she daily performing a mocking self-portrait throughout the making of the costume, during her year-long preparations for Carnival? Was she, like a Louise Bourgeois doppelganger, repairing and transforming her everyday life by cutting and assembling the tissues, ties, and bits and pieces for the reversed world of Carnival?



The figure of the medieval Nar is still present in Dutch Carnival today. The English translation for “Nar” is jester or fool. In the Netherlands, the Prince of Carnival is the Prince of Fools. The jester would wear a hat with the long ears of an ass (donkey), a remnant from Rome's Saturnalia and the medieval donkey feast (Champfleury 1867, 191–2), and had bells sewn on his costume. To some extent, analogies could be drawn between the figures of the traditional jester and the Cynic philosopher.

Firstly, both the jester and the Cynic practice unlimited freedom of speech and exercise parrhesia by addressing local political and/or social misconduct through laughter\*. The jester speaks and acts bluntly through the marrote, a “scepter” which consists of an emblematic replica of the jester's head on a wooden stick, and costume. The spectators seemingly laugh along with the situation they are presented with, but they are actually also laughing at themselves being reflected in the jester's overly theatricalized activities and gestures. This resonates in a distant way with Cynic philosophers, using the street as stage, often narrating stories, comic jokes, and ironic anecdotes to provoke laughter\* from their audience; they aimed at passing on “schemas of conduct” through these methods rather than through doctrines, and creating a new traditionality (Foucault 2011, 208–9). The spirit of the medieval Nar/jester is central to experiencing Carnival. Reflected in each other's overly theatrical activities and gestures, Carnival participants laugh at the situation they are presented with (the others), but also at themselves.

Secondly, the jester and the Cynic philosopher both occupy a peculiar position in the margins of the social structure. As Michel Foucault notes, “Cynicism is always both inside and outside philosophy (the familiarity and strangeness of Cynicism in relation to the philosophy which serves as its context, milieu, vis-à-vis, opponent and enemy)” (Foucault 2011, 237). Both jester and Cynic philosopher are free to speak their minds because of the specific quality of the space allocated to them: a space for one who is weird, poor, ridiculous, and on the fringes of society.

A not-so-marginal contemporary version of the jester can be encountered in the still-alive local tradition of the buuteredners in Limburg. It is a South Limburg version of the traditional *fool* or *court jester*. Jan Heffels, a contemporary buuteredner from Sittard, argues that buuteredners “try to ‘pour in words’”. This can be done by telling a joke, or a pun, or at least an unexpected twist in relation to the mindset of the people and putting them on the wrong track, hoping that it will catch on.”<sup>27</sup> With Heffels and Dutch artist, writer, and curator Joep Vossebeld, I entered into a discussion that led to a collaboration; I was first invited by Joep to take part in the group exhibition *Sittard, wat verbeeld jij-je?*, which he curated at Sittard Museum, De Domijnen, and in turn I invited Jan to perform in the context of the exhibition.

Revitalizing or appropriating\* an old popular entertainment practice within a specific locality can trigger social awareness and enable the expression of political consciousness. This triggering happens because exercising old popular participatory entertainment practices can evoke feelings of familiarity to a local audience, reminding them of their primary experiences of freedom of expression within such entertainment. In their pleasingly or strikingly old-fashioned qualities, these practices serve the collective public memory and invite viewers to critically activate themselves. The way in which old local practices and narrating traditions prompt audiences fits, perhaps surprisingly, with descriptions of political consciousness by Latin American members of JASS, a non-profit organization “dedicated to strengthening the voice, visibility, and collective organizing power of women” as “an interactive process that involves four overlapping levels of consciousness. These range from passive (accepting roles of subordination as natural) to questioning (asking why) to analytical (naming and analyzing



oppressive situations) and finally to active-critical consciousness (developing a critical analysis of inequitable systems and structures and taking action with others to transform them)” (Miller 2002). Accessing the dormant powers of formerly popular local entertainment practices can only happen through exchange and co-creation with people connected to the local practices and narrating traditions that I, as an artist and researcher, am investigating.

My installation *Cursus voor Buuteredners* (Lessons for Buuteredners) (2019) serves as an example of how a popular traditional practice of entertainment can be used to generate thoughts about contemporary life, events, and situations. *Cursus voor Buuteredners* was part of the group exhibition *Sittard, wat verbeeld jij-je?* at Sittard Museum. On the occasion of Sittard’s celebration to mark its having had city rights for 775 years, artist and curator Joep Vossebeld invited eleven artists to “reflect on the city’s past, its identity and possible visions about the future” (Vossebeld n.d.). I borrowed the title of my installation from a video that I discovered in the archives of the Limburg Museum; the video was part of an episode of the weekly documentary television series *Van Gewest tot Gewest*, which reports on regional topics, presented by Jantine de Jonge and broadcast on 9 November 1993 by NOS.<sup>28</sup> It showed how established buuteredners try to keep their tradition alive by welcoming and training a younger generation in their art. My installation consisted of several drawn studies of my parrhesiastic Characters (see pages 65–74 of this Chapter and pages 135–163 of Appendix 1); a maquette depicting the central Sittard Markt inhabited by several drawn paper models of recent local protests in Limburg, based on documentation I found on the internet and in newspapers (Sittarders demonstrating for better salaries; others in Heerlen speaking out publicly against the controversial tradition of Zwarte Piet, a black-face character that has become part of the annual feast of St Nicholas on December 5; demonstrators against the demolition of their public garden); and a video film. The video film shows local buuteredner Jan Heffels in action on January 5, 2019, performing two of his jokes several times in the middle of Sittard Market Place, attracting a local audience. For the occasion of the video film, Jan was also briefly interviewed by Joep Vossebeld. I had sent Joep my questions beforehand, hoping that he could find a way to tackle the following issues: would Jan have a peculiar story to share, regarding truths told and surprising or confrontational reactions from the audience? What makes a buuteredner funny? What are the talents or qualities a buuteredner needs to develop in order to tell a joke and win over the audience? How does Jan understand “speaking freely” (*vranke [spreken], vrije meningsuiting*)? What is at play in the process of conceiving of and telling a joke? Is *where* Jan tells the joke important? By playing with the things that people in their own lives take very seriously, does a buuteredner deliberately test the limits of politics? Is he working on the conditions in which politics become possible? We recorded his answers and his performances.





To questions such as “Is it a buuteredner’s task to reveal uncomfortable truths? If yes, how do these affect his audience?” and “what is the role of the buuterdner in public space today, if public space is a space where one is confronted with what other people think and how they live their lives?” Heffels answered as follows:

originally, the buuteredner was there to sting a bit and to stand on a platform and expose all abuses in a place. Now that lessened a bit, becoming more general and the buut has become, yes, on that point, shallower. And we are not comedians either in the sense that we speak real, harsh humor. It is all a bit milder... More “Limburg,” you could say. The cosiness is more highly regarded than bullying people. “It may smell, but it should not stink,” they say here. The main goal is to make them relax and laugh and not to put a finger on every sore spot.<sup>29</sup>

Not putting a finger on a sore spot is not always feasible, especially when it comes to questions of otherness and how a “we” is to be understood in contemporary heterogeneous urban communities. Two of the images I used for the maquette were photographs of protesters holding placards with “Zwarte Piet Is Racisme” slogans. It was Quinsy Gario (1984–), a Dutch performance artist born in Curacao, who created this slogan and started that project in June 2011. I interviewed Quinsy online on April 20, 2020 about his practice, and asked him about his involvement, to which he responded by confirming both his awareness of the specific protest *and* his lack of personal involvement. In his own words:

I created the slogan and then after it fulfilled my intention of boosting those who wanted to speak out publicly, I bowed out in 2012. The *Zwarte Piet Is Racisme* project intentionally blurred the line between artist, participant, and spectator. I’ve switched places now from artist to spectator and a lot of people have gone from spectator to participant to artist. For me it’s important to note that I am the artist behind the piece, so as not to get lost in the annals of history because of bad citational practices around the artistic work of racialized people, but also that the work was intentionally conceived for people to take ownership of it and run with it as they saw fit.<sup>30</sup>

In her essay “The Politics of Public Things,” Bonnie Honig, a political, feminist, and legal theorist who specializes in democratic theory, explores how British psychoanalyst D. H. Winnicott’s objects relation theory might be relevant and correspond to the importance of public things for a healthy democracy’s “holding environment.”<sup>31</sup> Honig draws analogies between the objects’ necessary role in human development from infancy to maturity, as transitional objects (a term Winnicott coined) between mother-dependency and independence, and citizens’ attachments to public things, which are, she argues, constitutive elements of democracy (Honig 2013, 62). By examining specific cases of public things being under pressure

29 Jan Heffels interviewed by Joep Vosseveld in the video *Cursus voor Buuteredners*, which made part of my homonymous installation in group exhibition *Sittard. Wat verbeeld jij je?*, 2019.

30 Email exchange, May 20, 2020, following our online discussion on May 7, 2020. For Quinsy Gario’s statement following his end of the *Zwarte Piet Is Racisme* piece, see: <https://zwartepietisracisme-blog.tumblr.com/post/35566690735/mijn-kunstproject-is-geslaagd-omdat-het-zichzelf>.

31 The essay *The Politics of Public Things: Neoliberalism and the Routine of Privatization* by Dr Bonnie Honig is an excerpt from a longer lecture given as part of three lectures in the “Thinking Out Loud” series (2013) in Sydney, Australia, hosted by the University of Western Sydney, forthcoming in *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair* with Fordham University Press. It was part of ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ issue 2, which was published on the occasion of the international group exhibition *πλάνητες* (planites) held between 28 January 2017 – 17 March 2017 and organized in the context of the inaugural events programme of the Cultural Capital of Europe, Pafos2017. Edited by Eleni Kamma and Elena Parpa.

in the US,<sup>32</sup> Honig argues that in the context of democratic theory (as opposed to neoliberal contexts) things serve other purposes than efficiency, because “in health, democracy is rooted in common love for shared objects, or even in contestation of them” (Honig 2013, 60). As with Winnicott’s mother-figure and healthy object relations, in democracy public things are there when needed. But then — and here Honig departs from Winnicott — this is a reciprocal relationship: as citizens we are responsible for tending for such objects in a democracy. She distinguishes between neoliberal economies always looking at the end result and democratic theory focusing on “the generative power of things, and their magical properties to enchant, alter, interpellate, join, equalize, or mobilize us” (Honig 2013, 69). If, following Winnicott, it is the object that “enables the child to exit continuity with the mother to experience contiguity in and with the world in a healthy way,” what about object-deprived citizens? Honig suggests that they need to take the initiative by looking out for or initiating ways to set up a “healthy” democratic holding environment (Honig 2013, 70). In the third and final part of her essay, Honig arrives at the importance of imagination and play as resources, especially for those humans deprived from a holding environment. By embracing one’s status of deprivation, one may “adopt common tactics in response to the majority that marginalizes them: laughter, irony, and the pariah’s mocking infiltration of, or resistance to, the dominant culture that excludes him” (Honig 2013, 72). Honig concludes by leaving the reader to contemplate “the sort of thing — hybrid, public, magical, and nutritional — that might have the power to enchant future citizenships” (Honig 2013, 73–74).

Here I wish to offer a short story about a personal experience of the thingness of public things: for its second issue, *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ*, the journal I initiated in 2015, moved to Paphos, where it participated in *Planites*, the opening exhibition of Pafos2017 European Capital of Culture. *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* II aspired to negotiate the politics of public things and public space within Paphos’ historical and social contexts. The public library of Paphos opened in 1946 thanks to Christodoulos Galatopoulos (1902–53), its visionary mayor. A revolutionary once imprisoned by the English, Galatopoulos was passionate about poetry and books and he published a local newspaper. During my research trip in the summer of 2016, no local journals or old publications were on display — they had been locked away since the library’s renovation, rotting in the basement, not accessible to researchers or the public. I was lucky to discover a few copies of Galatopoulos’ newspaper in Paphos’ high school. In one, dated February 1945, I found a passionate open letter from Galatopoulos, in which he addressed the repeated destruction of public *things* by unidentified individuals. The second issue of *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* consists of a reworked version of Honig’s essay, my Paphos photo essay about the reshaping of public space due to the “Capital of Culture” funding, and the mayor’s republished letter. The essays in *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* are considered both as texts and as “public things” to be shared.

In *Cursus voor Buuteredners*, meaning is produced around the controversies of “tradition” through the compiling of heterogeneous audiovisual and textual material regarding the disappearance of a single marginal public figure with the power to unite people through laughter. How to deal with funny public “traditional” figures that some want to preserve, but that are actually offensive and racist and in need of erasure when seen in a different light or from another’s perspective? The installation invites the visitor to rethink the present politics of public things and public space while moving in retrograde through Limburg’s historical and social context.

32 Honig discusses the TV program *Sesame Street* and specifically the character Big Bird in relation to funding cuts to US public television networks and the use of public telephones during Hurricane Sandy in 2012.



### Enacting Parrhesia (Me in the Middle)

In parallel to my research into old popular practices of entertainment in Belgium, Dutch Limburg, and Athens, I started investigating how I, as an artist, can enact parrhesia. By imagining answers to the question of how can I dare to take up a position, how I can speak my mind, I made a number of drawings with myself at the center. The drawings were created by selecting, cutting, placing, copying via carbon paper, and painting various heterogeneous fragment-depictions of bodies, clothes, and props into a mise en scène: a Cypro-Archaic vase, a hand cut out from a Belgian socialist poster, a badge used in contemporary Dutch lessons, the Mestreechter Geis sculpture and its plinth, a mantle decorated with Greek shadow-theater types in the colors of the Greek flag and worn around the body, and so on and so forth. In every case, the model for each character is me. I draw myself again and again for each drawing, in an attempt to embody these characters and incorporate traces of myself and my body among selected fragments. Each fragment retains information about its origin; they are traces of regional comic traditions and vary in terms of origin, cultural background, and historical time.



In these drawings the image is constructed through a compositional logic of putting together and juxtaposing pre-existing heterogeneous images and meanings. Although I “glue” together representations, cultural references, and layers of meaning that are not necessarily meant to belong together, the fact that I work mainly with pencils and aquarelle gives the compositions a material homogeneity. My drawings express a longing for a return to an image before the historical knowledge of its visual fragmentation. They incorporate a desire for some kind of reterritorialization. Mine is a meticulous activity that gathers, glues, associates, and connects independent elements on a spatial plane or in time, on a drawing, a ground plan of a building, or a moving image. It works on paper, on film, as a projection, or on a screen as a controlled two-dimensional representation of reality.

I began imagining and thinking through these drawings. Upon my giving them names, they transformed into studies for several parrhesiastic character-types. I invented a game — an imaginary parrhesiastic parade — of which the parrhesiastic character-types would be the future participants (for example, *The Drunk*, *The Fool*, *The Angry*, and so on). It would be a parade of attempts, events, and manifestations that, inspired by artistic methods of entertainment, laughter\*, and excess\* from the past, would question how parrhesia\* can be tried out, rehearsed, performed, and put to the test.

### Why a Parade?

The parade is first of all a device or model to help me explore the possibilities of visualization, actualization and practice of aspects of parrhesiastic theater\*. The model develops around sequences of scenes of a parrhesiastic theater\* parade as an “event”. This event\* will be filmed. The parade is founded on old, traditional characters, popular practices of entertainment and events. These will be transformed with the help of drawings and objects into a contemporary typology of characters, roles, and their possible interactions with new ones, mainly caricatured post-internet characters and situations. These interactions will happen through the appropriation\*, reenactment, and rehearsal\* of certain acts. As part of the research process, some of these characters, both individuals and groups, will be realized, with actual costumes and using props to enable them to interact with real people in contemporary time and space, through a series of actions. These actions\* include speech, jokes, gestures that invite the audience to judge, reflect, react in relation to the notion of parrhesia\*. The characters embody traces of the comic traditions of their regions and move alongside the city’s urban tissue. The parade will take shape through an ongoing investigation process into the simultaneous, interdependent relations between the description of the parade and aspects of its actualization. The actualizations I consider as case studies.

The parade develops halfway between a cultural allegory of contemporary Europe and an invocation of a community of old parrhesiastic laughers. In exploring *other* ways of speaking — as the etymology of the term suggests (*allos* means “other” in Greek) — and producing arbitrary relations between image and language, allegory has often been used as a weapon against unjust situations. In his essay “Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art,” critic and writer Jan Verwoert reads post-modernist critic Craig Owens’ understanding of allegory in *The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism* (1980) “as a composite sign made up of a cluster of dead symbols which are collaged together to create a shabby composition, a signifier in ruins that exposes the ruin of signification.” (Verwoert 2007, 4). His reading of Owens is part of a larger frame within which Verwoert examines recurring themes around the subject of appropriation in American critical art discourse of the 1970s and 1980s — including Douglas Crimp and Fredric Jameson, as well as Owens. In looking at appropriation’s perceptual shifts from the late 1970s to the beginning of the millennium, between its momentum in the 1980s and today, Verwoert al-

locates the difference to “a decisive shift in the relation to the object of appropriation — from the re-use of a dead commodity fetish to the invocation of something that lives through time.” (Verwoert 2007, 3). The parade’s Characters are certainly not dead. They are carriers of historical knowledge and invoke collective memory. They are revitalizers of dormant powers within specific localities.

The reasons I selected the parade as the form for my research were the following:

1. Whether military, carnivalistic, or as a mode of protest, parades form and address a social body. During carnival, people lose their everyday individuality and experience a heightened sense of social unity through the use of masks and costumes. The aim of a parade is to demonstrate, to expose, to make visible — whether this be the power of the conqueror or the grandeur of a celebration. Parrhesiastic practices also aim at making visible and exposing, but they are concerned with issues such as an injustice done to the city or a corrupt sovereign.
2. A parade engages with public space in two ways. It is a moveable temporary public space in itself, and at the same time, in theatricalizing existing public space, it traverses, permeates, and disrupts. A parade challenges the given order of things and therefore has the potential to activate and transform the spaces of the city it moves through.
3. Parallels could be drawn between the movements involved in comedy as process<sup>33</sup> and those involved in a *Triumph of Parrhesia Parade*, based on laughter\* and excess\*.

As a device, the parade would enable me to:

1. define the main concepts and a network of concepts related to parrhesiastic theater\*
2. understand and analyze historical examples of parrhesiastic theater\*
3. detect where we (contemporary viewers, participants and makers) are now in comparison to these examples
4. appropriate, reenact, and partially revive these examples to enable this detection
5. disseminate and diffuse the material resulting from the above

The parade develops and will be described in four stages. The parade develops in a synthetic process, from each character and the costumes and props that she will use, to the interactions between the characters and to strategies of visualization. This includes the specific locations and environments in which such scenes of interaction happen. The parade’s description is an investigation into the production of parrhesiastic laughter\*, including the exercises, interstices, doubts, and spaces between the will to share one’s opinions through comic situations with the public and the actualization of these situations.

1. The starting point of this description is the development of various characters who exercise the courage to speak their minds in common view, through acts\* of laughter\* and excess\*. These character-types are rooted in European art, cinema, and theater, and they point towards the creation of an agonistic space.
2. The next stage is the analysis of how parrhesiastic practices take place through these characters and their interactions. Like me as artist/researcher, the characters move

<sup>33</sup> See Alenka Zupancic, *The Odd One In, On Comedy*. In her book, through a philosophical and psychoanalytic approach, Zupancic examines the practices at work in the practice of comedy. According to Zupancic, comedy as process involves various techniques and procedures, while being in constant motion.

- along a Mobius strip that continually shifts from an individual practicing a monologue to dialogical collaborative attempts and failures among these individuals.
3. Stage 3 is about strategies of visualization. Visually, the parade builds up around cinematic and theatrical methods and strategies that enable the investigation of related terms and concepts, such as close-up, affection-image, action-image, and repetition. This part of the description includes the spaces where such scenes of interaction happen and the cinematic elaboration of these parts, as well as some kind of script. *In between Stages 3 and 4 is where the rehearsal-parade-theater-play would be.*
  4. Stage 4 could be considered the outcome, the montage, where the three other stages come together.

A glossary develops through the writing process, enriching the description. The words of the glossary are indicated with a star.

### The characters of the parrhesiastic parade

The parade consists of twenty-five characters, appearing both as individuals and as groups. Although my Characters are fictional, they are informed by characters from popular culture, art, theater, and cinema who purposefully risk speaking their minds through scenes of laughter\* and excess\*. Embodying traces of the comic traditions of their regions, they move alongside the city’s urban tissue. Creating urban scenographies in motion, they reflect upon the history of parrhesiastic theater\* and look at the future of an agonistic\* space. Demonstrating various strategies of language, image, and gesture as employed for parrhesiastic purposes, they are often confronted by caricatured post-internet characters and situations. The pool of Characters with their full descriptions can be visited in Appendix 1, on pages 135–148. Here I provide a few indicative examples.

#### Character 1: *The Collector of Proverbs*



This character collects proverbs, and then demonstrates them as a parade of human folly. The *Collector of Proverbs* shares the penchant for brief popular epigrams with Erasmus, Brueghel, and other 16<sup>th</sup>-century European intellectuals. Erasmus first published his *Adages*, a collection of 800 proverbs and quotations, in 1500. By constantly revising and expanding this collection until his death in 1536, Erasmus made the *Adages* “an unbelievably rich reference work that was consulted by virtually every orator and writer of the day” (Branden 1995,



34). In *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), Walter S. Gibson, a well-known scholar of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlandish art, cites several images and textual sources which show that the “literal depiction of proverbs constituted an important source of wit in this period, both in the written and spoken word and in art” (Gibson 2006, 40–1).

Bruegel’s 1559 painting *Netherlandish Proverbs* is a striking demonstration of visual wit in its depiction of “between 85 and 126 proverbs ... acted out in a setting of village and countryside” (Gibson 2006, 43) in one comprehensive spatial setting: a “proverb country.” A woman in a red dress in the middle of the picture, for example, puts a blue cloak on her husband, which suggests that she is cheating on him (“Zij hangt haar man de blauwe huik om”).<sup>34</sup> According to Gibson, *Netherlandish Proverbs* was “painted mainly to provoke laughter at the absurdities involved in taking proverbs literally” (Gibson 2006, 148). François Rabelais’ representation of proverbs through accumulative actions in his *Pantagruel* novel series (c. 1532–c. 1564), is considered the most famous literary parallel to Bruegel’s painting.

Scene:

Three *Collectors of Proverbs* (one Belgian, one Dutch, and one Greek) use various ethnicity-related proverbs to jokingly fight over the seven concepts of *Democracy*, *Prosperity*, *Solidarity*, *Language*, *Migration*, *Pluralism*, and *Europe*.

### Character 2: *The Animal*



Stills from tests during *Artistic Research in Caricature*. Jessica van Rüschén and Sahra Huby exploring movements and interactions for *The Animal*.

In the ancient Roman and Greek traditions, animals were used in satire to parody human behavior (Champfleury 1867, 106). Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, sculptures of human-animal hybrids (human bodies with animal heads) appeared in European churches, in an attempt to amuse the eyes of the religious (Champfleury 1870, 38).

*The Animal* character delivers a “speech” that demonstrates that we humans are also animals, and provokes laughter by reminding us of our “primitive” substance. The Animal touches upon issues related to civil society, good manners, disciplinary measures, and the suppression of laughter. It does so through its physical presence, gestures, and the body language it assumes in surrounding spaces.

*The Animal growls ... Grrrrrrrrr wwwooooof cccccccivil society ha ha ha ah.*

*The Animal touches the screen.*

*The Animal licks the ceiling. Woof, miauwww.*

*The Animal crawls, smells, scratches, and scans the space with their eyes.*

*The Animal knows no shame.*

### Character 3: *The Fool*

And let me tell you, fools have another gift which is not to be despised. They’re the only ones who speak frankly and tell the truth, and what is more praiseworthy than truth? (Erasmus 1511, 56)



The jester is a recurring figure throughout history, in the form of Greek and Roman “ridicule” mimes, the medieval court jester, the clown, the fool, and roguish figures. Typical of the jester is wit and a special privilege to express personal opinion or the voice of the people to those in power — provided it is humorous or ridiculous. The jester’s role is closely related to freedom of expression.

The Medieval *Fool* is traditionally represented by a costume that includes a hat and a bauble, which is the *Fool*’s “scepter” and consists of an emblematic replica of the *Fool*’s head on a wooden stick. The sound that accompanies the *Fool* is that of bells sewn into his or her hat and/or costume.

Actions:

The bauble is semi-autonomous with respect to *The Fool*; for example the bauble might start satirizing a person or situation, while *The Fool* defends the same thing, leading to an argument between the bauble and *The Fool*.

An interesting chapter in William Willeford’s *The Fool and His Scepter* (1969) is “The Fool, the Boundary, and the Center,” in which among other elements he analyzes how the fool’s relation to the social border is brilliantly explored in two of Charlie Chaplin’s films: at the beginning of *A Dog’s Life* (1918) and at the close of *The Pilgrim* (1922).

### Character 4 (Post-Internet): *The Selfie-Junkie*



Scene: The Fool and The Selfie-Junkie antagonize and confront each other through mirroring.

*The Selfie-Junkie* is a character derived from contemporary social-media culture and represents an evolution of *The Fool*. The character is self-focused and places their own self in a picture frame, often against the background of a recognizable location. *The Selfie-Junkie* is simultaneously inside and outside this site: physically present, but more concerned with the distribution of their own image through the space of social media. *The Selfie-Junkie* makes self-portraits in the form of photos or videos with the surroundings in the background: the parade, the bystanders, passersby, the city. Although *The Selfie-Junkie* behaves in a ridiculous way, she has the knowledge and power to make use of social media's potential as an increasingly important site for protest, inclusiveness, and parrhesiastic practices in the post-internet era.

#### Prop(s):

The phone, the selfie stick, GoPro, other equipment.

Actions (to be performed individually, but possibly by several participants):

Between two and three dimensions. *The Selfie-Junkie* as a character in the Agora. Turning around his or herself, using different tempos (slow and quick). Live-streaming. *The Selfie-Junkie* acts as broadcaster or master of ceremonies. Underlining the constant tension of experiencing life between two dimensions (the digital realm) and three dimensions (the realm of the physical body) today. As a character, *The Selfie-Junkie* offers us the opportunity to think about the various senses and how, when combined, they can expose truths or deceive.

### Character 8: *The One Who Has Nothing to Lose (After Charlotte Salomon)*



“Looking at death in the eye,”<sup>35</sup> this character is well aware that her time is up. “Driven by the question: whether to take her own life or undertake something wildly unusual” (Salomon n.d.), she chooses to start a passionate project that includes drawing, talking, performing, and writing. She performs an excessive, feverish speech activity, and has tremendous energy.

She is compelled to undertake this activity because of an urgent need to testify to her own experience of the catastrophic time-space she occupies.<sup>36</sup> In this peculiar time-space of excessive creativity in anticipation of a forthcoming disaster, Charlotte finds numerous ways to put together language and image in an almost filmic way, by constantly alternating her own position between subject and object, while operating within a very limited economy of mediums: layers of gouaches and paper.

Charlotte's relationship to parrhesia is pretty straightforward, almost dogmatic: she is convinced of the importance of speaking out one's truth for the common good. This is obvious in the text accompanying image 715 of *Life? Or Theater* (1941–43), where she encourages her grandmother, who has just attempted to commit suicide to “... make use of the same powers to describe your life? I am sure there must be some interesting material that weighs on you, and by writing it down you will liberate yourself and perhaps perform a service to the world. There aren't that many good books representing universal truths, and your book would be among those. I'm absolutely sure of that. You can start right now. Here are paper and pencil” (Salomon n.d.).

### Character 9: *The Angry*



<sup>35</sup> Paula and Albert Salomon interviewed by Georg Stefan Troller for *Pariser Journal* (WDR), 1963. YouTube video, 6:15. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlytlkjojGo> (uploaded on March 25, 2015, accessed April 18, 2017). See Mieke Bal 2006.

<sup>36</sup>



*The Angry* feels that her voice is not heard. This Character's mouth (see figure at top right of my drawing of *The Angry*) is white or effaced, making direct reference to *l'électeur aphone* (the voiceless voter) in the lithograph *Le Vote Plural* (1902) by Czech painter and graphic artist František Kupka. The lithograph was a caricature of the practice of plural voting, valid in Belgium and the UK at the time. It appeared in issue No 57 of *L'Assiette au Beurre*, an illustrated satirical French weekly, published in May 1902.

On March 31, 2018 in Leuven, Belgium, during her opening lecture of this year's Philosophy Festival,<sup>37</sup> Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe reminded the audience that the issue of voiceless voters is still topical. In her lecture, titled *The Affects of Democracy*, Mouffe referred to the Indignados' motto in Spain — “We have a vote, but we don't have a voice” — as a concrete confirmation of her argument that “not providing the possibility for an agonistic confrontation between different political projects deprives the citizen of real voice in the elections.” For Mouffe, there is no democracy without an agonistic confrontation, and this is why — she argues today we live in a post-democracy.

In my drawing, *The Angry* is accompanied — or confronted — by two post-internet characters, one blinded by a selfie stick, the other obsessed with being plugged-in and connected.

#### Actions:

Gathering around public signs. Performing a dance to the ancient Egyptian god of dance and war, Bes. Raising one leg after the other. Releasing anger through laughter.



*Close Ups:* Here the focus is on how faces, mouths, eyes, and other body parts render visible or demonstrate the traits of each Character. For example, *The Angry*'s hand betrays the amount of nervousness and tension building up in the enclosed space between her palm and fingers prior to her vocal outburst. Stills from tests with Jessica van Rüschen and Sahra Huby exploring movements and interactions for *The Angry*.

#### Character 13: *The Disguised (Elk-Gilles-Domino-Collective consciousness)*



Several *Gilles* marching at the Carnival of Binche, 2017

This character draws inspiration from folklore and festivities, during which people lose their everyday individuality through the use of masks and costumes. In cases such as the *Gilles* at the Carnival of Binche, Belgium, and the *Dominoes* at Patras Carnival, Greece, masks and covering up are used in order for individuals to become anonymous and merge in a common activity, a state of collective consciousness which has the potential to empower participants to find their own voices and claim their freedom. In the case of the (female-only) *Dominoes* in Patras, this masking and covering encouraged sexual freedom, whereas the *Gilles* in the Carnival of Binche aim at an impressive simultaneous appearance, a statement and act of collective power.

#### Film reference:

*Des hommes, des masques, une ville*, Alexandre Keresztessy, Belgium, 1978 (57 min). Sound and rhythm invite everyone to plunge into a collective moment. Many drums play together. Many people wear the same mask. It's all about synchronicity. Close-ups: Feet move together, wearing the same shoes.

#### *Megera (Collective Female Consciousness)*



Megera/Shila is a hybrid Character combining two roles: She is a Museum Selfie-Junkie and, as *MEGERA (Collective consciousness of silenced female voices)*, she is the Leader of *The Disguised*.

## The Meta-Characters

The four *Meta-Characters* belong to a category separate from that of the other characters in the parade. This is articulated in the ways in which they enter into the text and/or parade. What differentiates the four *Meta-Characters* from the other characters is that they do not simply act — they also consider the effects of their own actions.

### Character 22: *The Ghost*



A *deus ex machina*, *The Ghost* appears in order to expose an unjust situation that needs to be addressed through a basic gesture: uncovering. Making reference to the fact that columns in ancient Rome were signifiers of public streets (Champfleury 1867, 90), the *Ghost* stands naked on a pillar, balancing on one foot behind contemporary Brussels public signage, the other foot in the air, haunting our collective consciousness of citizenship rights and public and private space. *The Ghost* embodies knowledge of parrhesiastic characters of the past, referring to and elaborating on examples of parades in art history, such as Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, depicting Christ entering contemporary Brussels in a Mardi Gras parade (1889), etchings and paintings by Otto Dix, Picasso's costumes for the ballet *Parade* and its painted theater curtain (1917), Fernand Léger's *La grande parade sur fond rouge* (1953), and Georges Rouault's *Parade* (1907–10).

*I cannot be seen and I can barely be heard, because I am a Ghost. But I can be felt, when I pass through you. I speak to you through the space, through movement and touch. I whisper in your ears, I make you shiver. I am there to remind you that something wrong happened on the very ground you are stepping on, be it the Villa Empain or the Palace of Justice in Brussels, or the Agora in Athens.... I am the parrhesiastic conscience in everybody's brain. I was behind Diogenes when he walked around the city making cynical jokes to wake up his fellow citizens....*

*The Ghost* is hosted by locations, events, and spaces related to key moments in the history of the European Union, focusing mainly on Brussels, and additionally on Athens and Maastricht. *The Ghost* traverses the text and does not stay confined within the space allocated to each Character's description.

## Character 23: *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words*

*Wikken en wegen* (BE) = Weigh your words



*The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* is a parade within the parade. It develops through the writing process, enriching the description. It moves through the parade of Characters and demonstrates terms that are relevant to both parrhesiastic practices of the past and critical artistic practices of the present.

As a theatrical figure, *The Glossary* moves along the urban tissue of the city, demonstrating the heaviness of words she carries with her, metal words hanging from leather strips around her body. She carries a balance to weigh the words against internet information; she might demonstrate, for example, that in Donald Trump's America "truth" has no weight and ethics are negotiable. The Greek phrase "weightless speech" can be interpreted as meaning speech without value or validity — meaningless, unimportant, unreliable. *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* is made of words that take up courageous parrhesiastic meanings. The words are made of hammered metal, in reference to value systems and old Greek vows.

As a character and as part of my method, *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* clarifies certain terms and/or personal definitions, while operating in the space between imagining and actualizing parrhesia, a space in constant movement and flux. "The Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words" in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) is my source of inspiration for this *Glossary*. Kundera's dictionary — the third chapter of the book's third part, "Words Misunderstood" — demonstrates how words act as a distancing tool for the two lovers, Sabina and Frantz, due to their radically different cultural upbringings, having been raised in Czechoslovakia and France respectively.

### Character 24: *The Academic/Philosopher*

Speaking with a rational-sounding voice, *The Academic/Philosopher* invites passersby, the other Characters, his peers, to a game: *Truth or Dare*. You have to either tell the truth or be dared to do something. This is the difference between Socrates and Diogenes: there is some daring in finding and saying the truth, but there also is some truth in doing things. What is the medium of real truth-finding — saying or doing? *Truth or Dare* connects to this philosophical problem as well as to play. It resonates with the kind of parrhesiastic practices I refer to in my research and seek to re-actualize. The game in itself is a kind of parrhesiastic act — challenging people, forcing us to come out, to show ourselves.



Character 25: *The Engaged Artist*



This category includes a group of Characters such as *Great Appropriators*, *Impersonators*, *Image Disruptors*, and *The Ones Who Exercise Spectacular Travesty* — an indicative rather than exhaustive list. They are all artist-parrhesiasts, and I elaborate on seven of them in Chapter II. All these characters simultaneously operate as the parade’s masters of ceremonies, and as a result come into conflict with each other. *The Engaged Artist* speaks in a sentimental, expressive voice. For a detailed description of the artist-parrhesiast, see the conclusion of Chapter Two (pages 47–49).

The Narrator’s Role

*Out on the edges is where the assemblage artist works, fooling up, mixing up, raising problems.* (Lawrence Alloway quoted in Shattuck 1992, 140)

How do I, Eleni, speak in this parade? What is my role? I think of Diegesis and imagination. As *Narrator*, I am always there, clear about my methods and goals. I embody the four Meta-Characters (*The Ghost*, *The Glossary*, *The Academic*, and *The Engaged Artist*). I-we speak in four distinct voices and carry props for all four Meta-Characters.

- *The Ghost* reflects on historical situations and mediums and parrhesia. *The Ghost* is the imagination and the historical dimension of this text. Whispering voice.
- *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* reflects on the meaning of words in parrhesia. Mechanical voice.
- *The Academic/Philosopher* reflects on the philosophical dimensions of parrhesia. Rational, thoughtful voice.
- *The Engaged Artist* reflects on the spectator’s role in parrhesia. Sentimental, expressive voice.

*The Narrator/Engaged Artist* wants to relate to and communicate with others on multiple levels. Her art practice, which engages performative strategies, serves as a starting point and framework for the project. She chose the parade and she chose to think about parrhesia via several characters, instead of developing one (her own) individual way of enacting parrhesia. Through them she re-assembles herself, she lets herself be played out by others. *The Narrator* alternates between the “I” and the “third person,” between immersing herself in the project and retaining a critical distance, seeing herself acting. In doing so, she follows the traces of Charlotte Salomon, and becomes “a strangely twin-natured creature that watches itself acting” (Meyer 2016, 26), but for very different purposes: *The Narrator* attempts to “bear being the impossible-possible witness” (Meyer 2016, 31) of a PhD in and through art experience.

How to Create a Common Process that Enables Parrhesia to Take Place?

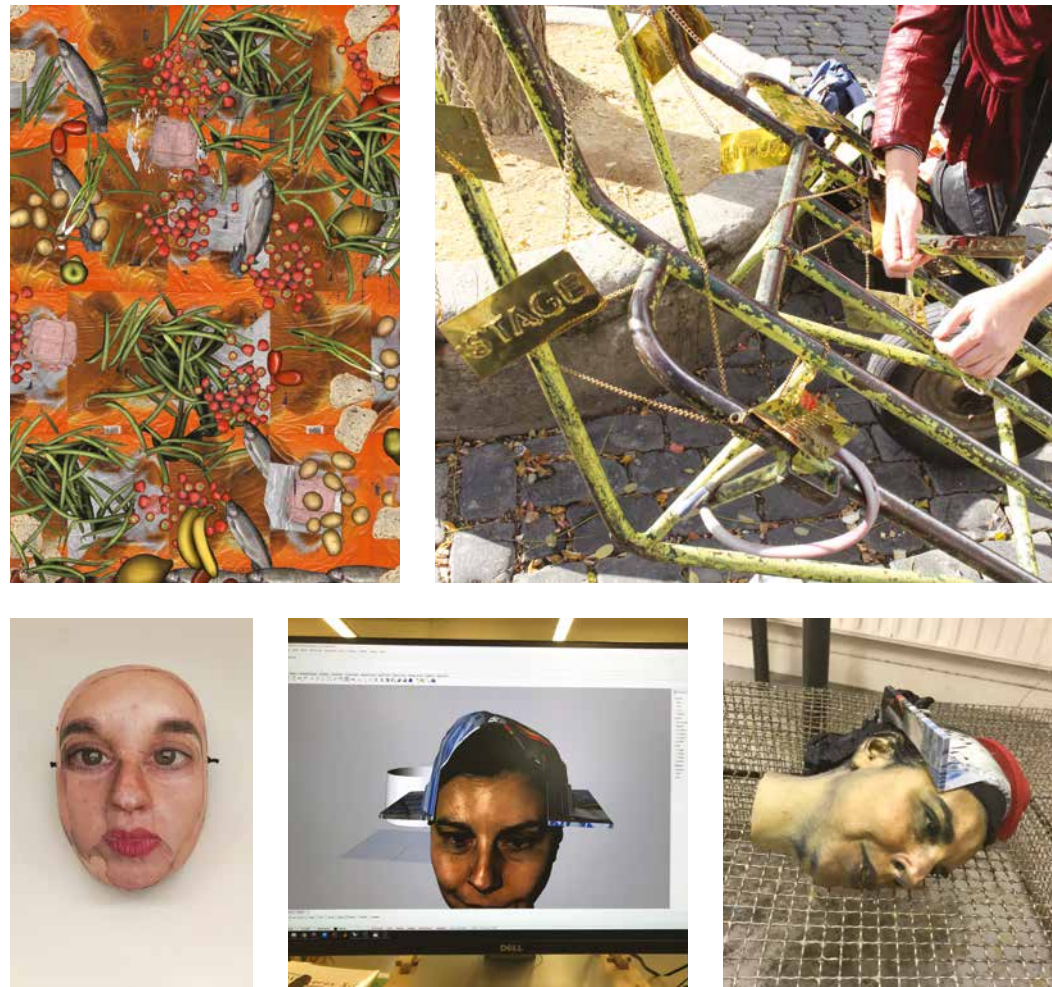


Appropriating Theatrical Tools

*The Narrator* introduces theatrical tools in her visual artistic practice: characters, voices, props, and so on. In addition to in the discussion about the notion of theatricality between Bart Verschaffel Klaas Tindemans, Lieven de Cauter, and Paul Vandebroek in 1989 TV program *Container*, she is inspired by the curatorial approach and related texts of German curator and director of CCA Singapore, Ute Meta Bauer. Bauer argues in favor of theatricality’s potential for critical artistic practices, as it “instigates reflection on how we experience reality in art and how fiction unfolds in reality,” but also “provides us with a tool to interfere in what determines reality rather than accept as a given that things cannot be changed” (Bauer 2016, 20). In bringing theatricality into her practice as a critical strategy, *The Narrator* also considers artist, filmmaker, and author Constanze Ruhm’s understanding of theatricality as a “migratory form” that moves out of the institution (theater) and onwards into other possible spaces, genres, media, and methodologies (Bauer 2016, 140).







### Engaging performative strategies

How can one rehearse, try out, put parrhesia to the test through an artistic, performative framework? I decided to actively explore it through a collaborative development approach. Instead of a hierarchical approach in commissioning other people, I wanted to test methods and limits of co-operation and co-authorship. This would happen in three stages:

**Stage 1.** Meetings with practitioners (artists, performers, theorists and anthropologists) who share a common language, but not the same cultures to discuss, share opinions and methodologies regarding dialectical confrontations. How do they explore and deal with such issues in their own practices?

**Stage 2.** Experimentation with practitioners (certain artists and performers from stage 1). Collaboratively build “characters” with them using drawings, objects, and designs from my broader research, and work with texts, sketches and jokes commissioned from Pieter de Buysser (BE), Margo van de Linde (NL), Joep Vossebeld (NL), and Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR) on community-related concepts that lead to heated discussions, more specifically the seven concepts of *Democracy, Prosperity, Solidarity, Language, Migration, Pluralism, and Europe*.<sup>38</sup> The tools discovered in stage 1, together

with the characters and commissioned texts, would be used to express opinions more freely and playfully. How can we work with the limits of language to speak with, against, and through the other?

**Stage 3.** The tryouts of stage 2 would be recorded and then serve as a basic grid of working methods and tools for future performative events.

### How do parrhesiastic practices take place through the characters and their interactions?

#### Action-Image



In 2017 I collaborated with dancer Sahra Huby in an exploration of how people react to exaggerated movements and expressions from certain users of public space. For example, we became inspired by tourists taking selfies in Grand Place, Brussels, who were so absorbed by the task of placing themselves in the middle of their picture frames that they appeared to totally ignore the space and passersby around them. People responded to Sahra's try-outs in various ways, ranging from friendly, joking, flirty, indifferent, and mostly wanting to become part of her selfie shot. Six months later I invited more people to participate in this game: myself and Sahra Huby, dancer Jessica van Rüschén, and DOP Boris van Hoof experimented with the Characters' movements in urban public spaces in Brussels and observed people's reactions. Champfleury's books on the history of caricature and books on caricature in Belgium were used as references. In working towards an expanded version of parrhesia that goes beyond verbalization, bodily movements and gestures such as breathing, moving, standing still — activities proposed by Judith Butler as potential forms of “political performativity” (Butler 2015, 18) — were taken into consideration: the Characters move, communicate, and interact through their voices, bodies, and exaggerated gestures. The selection of spaces was dictated by the Characters and their actions; Gallery Bortier, an arcade of antique bookshops, would be a suitable space in which *The Collectors of Proverbs* could rehearse, for example, and the Marolles (see image on page 138) where the film *La Bataille des Marolles* (see Character 10 in Appendix 1) was shot, would be relevant for collective actions.



In public space, the Characters interact among themselves, but also with an external, accidental audience. To give a few examples:



Joep, as *The One that Brings the World Upside Down*, Margo, as *The Animal-Horse*, and Shila, as *Megera*, are sitting next to each other on a bench on one of the platforms of Maastricht train station. The trains come and go while they tell each other populist jokes about Europe:

#### MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Europa is net een seksclub: niemand die lid is durft er thuis over te vertellen.

#### JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Europa is net de Melkweg: licht van allang gedoofde sterren.

#### SHILA-MEGERA

Europa is als een Hollands verjaardagsfeestje: veel gezeur en weinig sfeer.

#### JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Europa is als theater: het drama begint in Griekenland.

Europa is als een oude lerares: alleen de Franse president raakt er opgewonden van.

Europa is als Britney Spears: populair in de jaren 90, nu vooral treurig.



Three *Collectors of Proverbs* parade along the public Library of Centre Ceramique in Maastricht late on a Sunday afternoon, holding seven placards on which are written seven community-related concepts likely to create disagreement.<sup>39</sup> *The Collectors of Proverbs* exit Centre Ceramique. They march along Plein 1992, while a voiceover in Greek by Dimitris Dimopoulos and Lina Kalpazidou demonstrates proverbs in various European languages. *The Collectors of Proverbs* approach passersby and ask for proverbs in any language on the seven topics, which they then write down in a reporter's notebook.



Some of the Characters enter the Carnival parade of Maastricht. Joining the parade, Megera is now out in the streets. *The Animal-Horse* also joins, surrounded by other parade horses.





Eleni/*The Narrator* holds a 3D-printed half-head self-portrait. She stands beside the parade, watching masked participants and chariots passing by.

### Between Directed and Delegated Performance\*



*The Healers* rehearse a healing dance for the public space at Place du Jeu de Balle or Vossenplein, a square located in the heart of the Marolles/Marollen, Brussels.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to collaborate with three performers (Shila Anaraki, Tarek Halaby, and Gaetan Bulourde) on filmic tests in public space. We developed a game-playing method that is non-hierarchical and inclusive. For this we worked together by democratically sharing the filming time and each proposing our own visions on specific commissioned texts/jokes. We made one filmic proposition each and divided the shooting time into four equal slices, four being the number of main participants: three performers and myself. Humor, masquerade (playing a character, acting out another background or opinion), and dialogue are the tools that we used in the experiment.

I often appropriate\* notions and insights from other fields of knowledge that help me develop my methods in my own research. In developing my appropriation strategies, I take into consideration social anthropologist Arnd Schneider's suggestion of re-evaluating appropriation as a hermeneutic practice, "an act of dialogical understanding" (Schneider 2006, 36).

By inviting Shila, Tarek, and Gaetan to enter into my research process and use elements of my research material (characters, histories, locations, and commissioned texts) as tools, I encouraged them to appropriate and transform my findings. By inviting people to suggest ways of working, take up the space, and contradict me and each other, I put myself in a vulnerable position, dependent on their input. Between directed and delegated performance, a space opens up that cannot be controlled and that keeps transforming — a parrhesiastic space. If you are a true parrhesiast then you work with delegated performance. An example: four approaches on Dimitri Dimopoulos's joke: Languages (see Appendix 2, pages 204–205).



From left to right, top to bottom: Shila, Gaetan, Tarek, and Margo as *The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains* invite passersby to connect with them in a full and then empty Place du Jeu De Balle, Brussels (first and second photo), Grand Place, Brussels (third photo), and Het Vrijthof, Maastricht (fourth photo).

### Ongoing Rehearsal\*

Throughout my PhD research, my practice has been situated within "processes of rehearsal and staging in contemporary arts discourse," in line with artists, curators, and theoreticians who consider rehearsal as a "counter-model" of practice, one that allows for reflecting on and re-interpreting existing rules and formats (Buchman, Lafer & Ruhm 2016, 12).

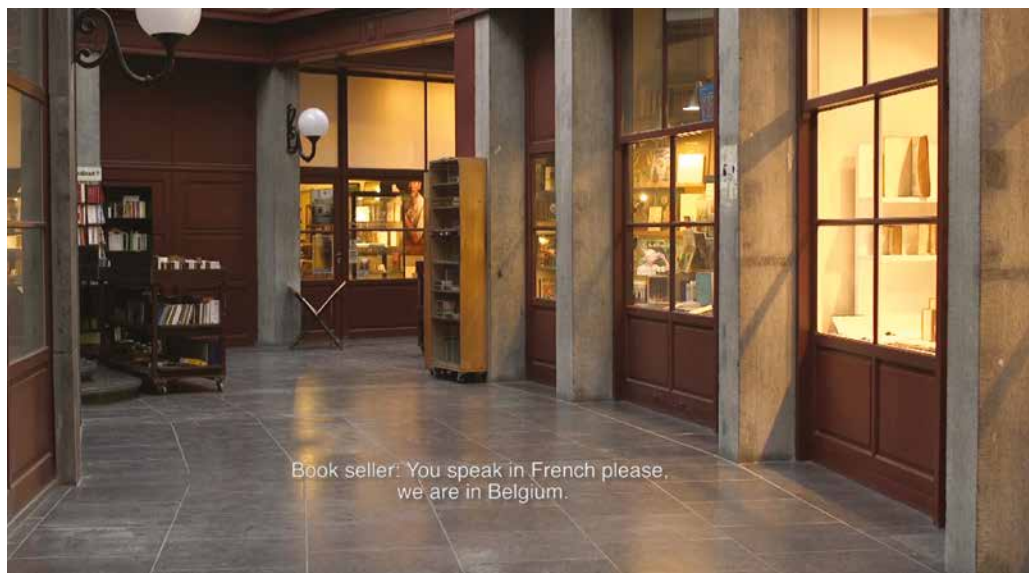






The concept of an ongoing rehearsal\* is central to my research and practice. Throughout this PhD research process my rehearsals of parrhesiastic theater alternate between *meletan* and *gymnazein*. Foucault traces the differences between these ancient Greek terms as follows: “*gymnazein* generally designates more a sort of test ‘in real life’, a way of confronting the thing, as you confront an adversary, in order to find out if you can resist him or be the stronger, whereas the *meletan* is a sort of mental exercise, rather, an exercise ‘in thought’, but which again is quite different from what we understand by meditation” and “*meletan*, the exercise of thought often supported by a text which one reads; then *graphein*, writing” (Foucault 2005, 18). I have been alternating between *meletan* (through learning, reading, collecting information, and writing *on* parrhesia) and *gymnazein* (training to articulate *my own* parrhesia, taking the risk of being exposed in and through my artistic practice).

Repetition and rehearsal for film or theater are of vital importance for this project. I consider them to be structuring elements. Throughout the parade, the circulatory processes of communication, dialogue, and listening are constantly rehearsed, executed, and put to the test. Taking as a point of departure the various commissioned jokes, the performers rehearse using improvisation, a performative strategy that permits play to come in.



In one of our rehearsals, *Casting Call #18, The Collectors of Proverbs* — shot in Gallery Bortier, a public space in Brussels hosting antique bookstores — the camera captures two female performers warming up, trying out the *Collector's* walk, while repeating in English, French, and German the words *Democracy*, *Prosperity*, *Solidarity*, *Language*, *Pluralism*, and *Europe*. During the third video rehearsal, an unexpectedly aggressive linguistic response from a bookseller takes place. In her effort to protect her property — her books — the bookseller's language quickly descended to nationalistic clichés regarding territory, language, and identity. The sound of performers rehearsing and uttering the words *Europe*, *Language*, and *Solidarity* in English and German, heard across the narrow public passage of the gallery in front of her bookshop, likely triggered her verbal outburst.

Tensions between an inside and an outside are inherent to both the notion of parrhesia and the processes of comedy, jokes, and laughter\*. The notion of the limit is inextricably linked to my research subject; parrhesia is examined through a variety of characters who have the tendency to play on the borders of what is “correct.” In exercising parrhesia, the *Drunk*, the *Animal*, the *Fool*, and the others often surpass the limits of politically correct behavior. They offend, they provoke, they challenge the limits of normality. Where is the limit of a joke? In considering rehearsal as the actual “work,” I combine the freedom to experiment with several formats and test the parameters employed in the project through the rehearsal's potential as a tool for retrospection, enabling critical reflection and reevaluation of one's experiments.

### A Common Act of Witnessing in Rehearsing for a Parrhesiastic Theater Parade

The role of audience participation is vital for a parade that advocates inclusivity and within which everyone is welcome to speak up. How can I do the hosting in a way that allows people to find their place in this series of attempts, events, and manifestations? In considering examples of socially oriented reception within contemporary artistic production, I was often disappointed by art that functioned impeccably within the aesthetic realm — smart, safe comments that made perfect sense in the art world, but that did not take the risk to critically interrogate how such comments impacted their site of production.

The practices of the artists associated with “relational aesthetics,” a term introduced by French art historian, curator, and critic Nicolas Bourriaud in 1996, were informed by movements known for their avant-garde and participatory aspects, such as Fluxus, Dada, and Situationism. Relational art considers social interaction as the actual work. The production of a social space is specifically positioned in relation to the notion of “conviviality”: eating a soup together in an opening, parading, celebrating, and so on. Although Bourriaud contributed interesting insights regarding conditions of artistic production in the 1990s, it has been pointed out that under relational aesthetics conviviality served as a reconfirmation of the system (here, the art market) and the status quo within which it operated. US artist and educator Joe Scanlan thus read it as “peer pressure,” which, he said “would suggest that one of the best ways to control human behavior is to practice relational aesthetics” (Scanlan 2005). In her essay “Relational Art and Antagonism,” art historian and critic Claire Bishop brings in Hal Foster's text from 1996, pointing out that “the institution may shadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital and the director-curator becomes the star” (Foster 1996, 198), to stress the issue of the conflict of interests in situations such as Bourriaud's, being at the same time the co-director of Palais de Tokyo and the theorist of the movement (Bishop 2004, 53). Furthermore, Bishop expresses

skepticism about several aspects of relational aesthetics: she considers the gatherings produced in its context too homogeneous and consensual to be democratic, and deconstructs many of Bourriaud's claims by asking questions to positions she finds unclear: "If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom and why?" (Bishop 2004, 65).

What is needed to create a shared experience within an art context? In his book *Reassembling the Social*, French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist Bruno Latour argues that the elusiveness of the term "social ties" is due to the fact that:

the adjective "social" designates two entirely different phenomena: it's at once a substance, a kind of stuff, and also a movement between non-social elements. In both cases, the social vanishes. When it is taken as a solid, it loses its ability to associate; when it's taken as a fluid, the social again disappears because it flashes only briefly, just at the fleeting moment when new associations are sticking the collective together. It's traceable only when it's being modified. Physiologists have shown that for a perception to take place, continuous movements and adjustments are necessary: no movement, no feeling. This is true for the senses of sight and hearing as well as for taste, smell, and touch. ...With the absence of movements has come a blurring of the senses. The same is true of the "sense of the social": no new association, no way to feel the grasp. (Latour 2007, 159).

In recent years I have often experienced feelings of emptiness and fatigue while participating in "activist" political, artistic, and/or curatorial statements. I found myself often wondering about the limits between artistic practices and activism, between art and ethics. I suggest there is something worth considering in loosely following a line of thought from Peter Bürger's historical typology sketch of individual versus collective reception in sacred, courtly, and bourgeois art (Bishop 2006, 46–47), to US philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey's emphasis on the role of the process for the development of an "experience." Dewey was critical of distancing art from society, placing it on a pedestal, apart from the experiences of everyday life, as a result of a capitalist way of thinking (Dewey 1934, Chap. 1). Inspired by Dewey's writings, US artist Allan Kaprow responded by proposing new forms, namely *Assemblages*, *Environments* & *Happenings*, as his 1966 book is titled. All three forms suggest a blurring between art and life — life, art, form — in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1960s brought in a participatory impulse, with artistic practices "appropriating social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life" (Bishop 2006, 10).

Fifty years later, Bishop identified certain theoretical reference points for participatory and collaborative art in her 2012 book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. She discussed certain changes in theory in the 1990s that influenced "the discourse around participatory art," relating how British philosopher Peter Dews claimed that the comeback or revitalization of "questions of conscience and obligation, of recognition and respect, of justice and law" was an "ethical turn" — an idea that thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Rancière have opposed, as they remain "skeptical of the jargon of human rights and identitarian politics" (Bishop 2012, 25).

When asking "how to engage the audience, how to engage the beholder, how to make him part of the scene" — as Austrian art historian and art critic Sabeth Buchmann beautifully put it in a January 2018 presentation in Amsterdam — a space open for imagination is a precondition (Buchmann 2018). Buchmann describes the kind of space that opens up in the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century paintings that Edgar Degas made of ballet rehearsals:

it is a kind of a scene without a beginning and without an end. It is an empty middle space and it is exactly the space where you as a beholder or as the audience step in. It is a space of imagination, it is not filled. It is open, and I think that is constitutive for processes of rehearsal and Degas made hundreds of them [...] You always have this kind of circular moment, this circular causal method (Buchmann 2018).

From a new media and film studies perspective, US film theorist Robert Stam includes and reflects on "witnessing publics," a term coined by filmmaker and anthropologist Meg McLagan. Witnessing publics are "that loose collection of individuals, constituted by and through the media, acting as observers of injustices that might otherwise go unreported or unanswered" (Stam 2015, 281). However different the mediums may be, the converging point seems to be a link between acting as a witness and feeling involved in a common process. Buchmann concludes by describing her experience of the painting of a rehearsal by Degas as follows:

to the degree you can see that the Maître de ballet is looking at the scene, which is in the making, it is not finished, to the degree you can imagine also the beholder of the painting as someone who is not only contemplating about the scene, but who is judging, who is evaluating. There is something more about the concept of perception and the concept of the receiver and the beholder. There is something that tries to tell you, you are part of common process of judgment and evaluation (Buchmann 2018).

For the purposes of the parade, I opened up the rehearsals to various possibilities of participation, from paid professionals to an invited audience, amateurs, an accidental audience, and volunteers, in an attempt to undermine the boundaries between spectator, participant, and performer. In this body of tests, experiments, and try-outs, the different agents and agencies blend together. The approach is strongly inspired by German writer, poet, psychoanalyst, and Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck: "Let it run until it happens: this is in my opinion the slogan, or should be the slogan, of the assemblers" (Shattuck 1992, 135). In the rehearsals for the parade, performers, professionals, amateurs, volunteers, and an accidental audience partake in a witnessing act from different angles, and are encouraged to respond by enacting parrhesia. In this series of attempts, events, and manifestations, each rehearsal "runs" or activates people until we become a community of laughers, both witnesses and participants, through the common experience of laughing at others and ourselves through performance and film.

### Case Study: RE-M-OMMEGANG (RE-M-WALK AROUND)

*RE-M-OMMEGANG* is a 30-minute performance produced by Playground Festival, which premiered on November 16, 2018, at Museum-M, Leuven and was also presented on November 17 and 18. Between the physical and the online, Shila Anaraki performs in the medieval section of the Museum-M collection in Leuven. There are spectators all around her. She attempts a curated walk, more specifically a re-m-ommegang, a "re-Museum M-walk-around," speculating on the perspective of an item in the museum's medieval collection. Shila is a *Museum Selfie-Junkie* and carries a reproduction of the head of female giant *Megeera*, a medieval character of the city of Leuven and the only remaining part of Leuven's fifteenth-century Ommegang.<sup>40</sup> Shila puts on and takes off the reproduction of the giant *Megeera* head while trying to film herself with her phone. Shila's *Megeera* stands for the internal female voice that

40

Leuven's ommegang was a religious procession held annually in honor of the city's patron, the Blessed Virgin Mary, between the 14<sup>th</sup> century and 1681. See: <https://www.erfgoedcelleuven.be/nl/reuzenhoofd-megera>.



is not audible to others. Inviting the audience to join her in the parade, the performer activates the collection's items and the space around her by talking, holding the phone on a selfie-stick, and moving along with it in a game of postures and gestures. She leads the group of *The Disguised* (*Collective Consciousness of Silenced Female Voices*).

**SHILA** is a *Selfie-Junkie* and the *Broadcaster/Master of Ceremonies*. She possesses the ability to speak in three voices: *factual* (dry knowledge, the canon, the figures the museum and art history give us), *casual/personal* (the relationship Shila creates with the audience, the relational), and *fictional* (real knowledge, reality not represented, other ways of speaking, poetic exercises).

Following my personal research into items within the Museum-M collection and into specifically *Mege*ra's giant head and her history, Shila and I entered into an ongoing ping-pong of ideas. Over several months, we persistently tested whether each new building block we added to the performance was strong enough to "hold" the audience, focusing on "holding" as a concept. Building the script and developing the performance together was a risky, challenging, wonderful process of building together trust, while carrying around the frozen frame of *Mege*ra.



SHILA/MEGERA

Christ! I have always been silent! My actual name was Megara. Mege

She tries to coordinate her senses. She takes off the mask and interrupts:

SHILA/MEGERA

The system was as follows; both Mege



The audience walks backwards in the museum assuming a form of parade.

At the end of the performance, the communal body of the audience collectively carried paper fragments and leftovers of printed images of *Mege*ra back to the beginning of the walk-around. Walking backwards, they handed over their sense of control to Shila, the broadcaster, having come to trust in her through her storytelling. I ask myself, did this work really have to do with parrhesia? Yes and no. It did in the sense that we invented a story in order to revisit the collection and give *Mege*ra a voice. Fiction and facts came together to create an attractive environment and seduce the audience into engaging with the museum's history. This ostensible guided tour made it possible for us to comment upon the museum's role in the history of voiceless women and to explore the space in which we, contemporary beholders and audience members, operate between actual presence and the online and what we trust as real. *RE-M-OMMEGANG* communicated better among younger audiences, who took the iPad along as a contemporary relic to watch the performance.

Each of my rehearsals engages with a specific place, time, and a character's possible actions in that setting. Mege

### Case study: Affection-Image.

#### Deep Listening for Character 18: The (Wounded) Healer

Having been selected through an open call, *The Narrator* was as an artist-in-residence in Varberg, a small town of 20,000 inhabitants, from April 29 to June 8, 2019. The town is a famous spa resort in southwestern Sweden. The residency's theme was *Self-Care Then and Now in Varberg*.

What brought her to Varberg were questions about the conditions under which self-care can take place. Her goal was to realize a short artist's film documenting a discussion between several participants, to be filmed in the spaces of care. She would organize and make a film, a flowing conversation in the water, reflecting upon the activity of self-care in the floating environment within which it takes place. How does time count in self-care? How does it affect us both on an individual basis and in forming a community? Throughout the Art Inside Out residency she would develop Character 18, *The Healer/Caretaker*.



This Character is inspired by activists such as Louise Dunlap, author of the book *Undoing the Silence: Six Tools for Social Change Writing* (2007), but also other practitioners, such as author, political journalist, world peace advocate, and inner healer Norman Cousins and his book *Anatomy of an Illness: As Perceived by the Patient* (1979). How would the *Healer* — as an individual — take care of herself in Varberg’s Kallbadhuset, or cold bathhouse, a building-witness of collective self-care?

The first two weeks of the residency were dedicated to research: an intense program of discussions with several individuals, organizations, and local guides offered input and a diversity of perspectives on the notion of self-care in Sweden.<sup>41</sup> These conversations were recorded. *The Narrator* found the paradoxes and twists embedded in the history of the Swedish healthcare system fascinating. On the one hand, the system demonstrates commitment to innovative ways of working with various social groups, an impressive desire for inclusivity, and an urge to fulfil democratic ideals through healthcare. On the other hand, she was puzzled to find that several interviewees and participants in the discussions described the healthcare system as a rigid, inflexible structure, within which one either fits or does not. She decided to address these issues by developing a mini-dramaturgy for the *Healer/Caretaker*.

In order to develop this Character during the residency, *The Narrator* practiced intensive listening: she dedicated her time to transcribing the interviews and discussions with local participants as well as selected archival material. What she did was listen, record, and transcribe. A mechanical process. In such a repetitive activity, one forgets one’s ego, which may leave space for being useful to others and allow for healing processes to enter the frame. In his essay “The Aesthetics of Affect,” Simon O’Sullivan refers to Jean-François Lyotard’s call “for a practice of patience, of listening — a kind of meditative state that allows for, produces an opening for, an experience of the event, precisely, as the affect” (O’Sullivan 2001, 128).

By transcribing and listening again and again to several of the discussions, she created the film’s script. The film takes place in the Kallbadhuset. The camera follows Tarek, a dancer practicing self-care in the spaces of the cold bathhouse: the cabins, the sauna, the showers, the sea. The dancer explores the notion of self-care through his body. In between the sounds of the sea and the wind, female voices from the archives re-inhabit the women’s sauna. They alternate with the female archivist’s voiceover and local voices offering historical facts on Kallbadhuset and *the Healer’s* voiceover. *The Healer* (Tarek) addresses the local participants by assembling their own spoken phrases, sentences, and words on healthcare:

If I would enter into insanity somehow, I would need to go to the public health care system. But the problem is in Sweden that you still need to be coping with the system. You still need to be sane enough to know how to cope with the system.

And it could be hard for me to talk. Because I had been through so many treatments, where I should talk about everything and the words, it was so hard to find meaningful words, but I could have expressed it in other ways, through dancing and singing. It was really a way of self-care for me. And it was...

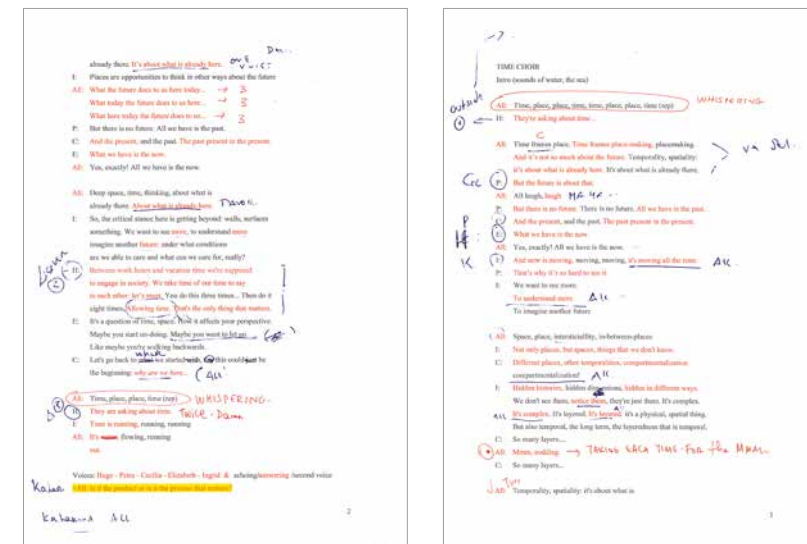
41 These included, among (many) others: dance developers Hugo Tham and Anna Leppäjoki, who respectively specialize in dance for patients of Parkinson’s disease and girls suffering anxiety during puberty; mime Ika Nord, who currently works with amateurs; lecturer Ingrid Holmberg and architect Henric Benesch; psychologist Elizabeth Puzzi from research group Curating the City; the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies; UGOT Gothenburg University; and the members of the Art Inside Out team — editor Petra Johansson, producer Davor Abazovic, process leader Cecilia Gelin, and artist and local guide Krystallia Sakelariou.



In this way, the bathhouse’s moving images are activated through the acoustic mirror that *the Healer* holds back toward the audience. Together they invite the spectator to reflect and position herself within this environment in turn.

In his chapter “Supplement II: Keywords for Affect,” Canadian philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi includes the word “belonging,” which he relates to affect as follows: “In affect, we are never alone. That’s because affects in Spinoza’s definition are basically ways of connecting, to others and to other situations, of affecting and being affected. They are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life — a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places” (Massumi 2014, 110).

By transcribing and listening again and again to several of the discussions, *The Narrator* noticed how much emphasis and concern is placed on the notion of time, on how we think of the past in relation to the future. This time she collected only those phrases, sentences, and words spoken by members of the Art Inside Out team — Petra, Davor, Cecilia, and Krystallia — and by Hugo, Elizabeth Ingrid, Henrik, and herself, which were relevant to the question of time. How does time count in self-care? How does it affect us both on an individual basis and in forming a community? Together with Dutch writer and poet Tina Van Baren she reshuffled, edited, rearranged, and reconfigured those phrases, sentences, and words, by thinking of how much breathing space is needed between them, in order for the text to flow like water.





She decided to treat the reworked text as the starting point for a new game: *Time-Choir*. The rules are simple. Participants are invited to experiment with a collaborative reading of the text. There are as many reading variations as participants, multiplied by the ability of each to articulate and combine their articulations in a collective reading group.



Every attempt to form a choir involves this tension between the vocal expression of individual bodies and the articulation of a collective body that includes those bodies in unison, at the same time. Traditionally, the goal is the production of a harmonic whole. Through the *Time-Choir* game *The Narrator* tried to develop a working method to exercise parrhesia through a democratic process, in which the participants may come in and affect what is being practiced.

The *Time-Choir* group that quite spontaneously and arbitrarily came together on June 3 consisted of seven participants: four members of the Art Inside Out team (Petra, Davor, Cecilia, and Krystallia) who had already been part of the discussions; a politician and member of the Art Inside Out board, Katarina Sundberg; a volunteer, former teacher, and self-taught painter, Margareta Hjortsberg; and audio engineer Helena Persson, who also conducted and recorded the event.

In contrast to the other members of the group, Margareta was initially hesitant to participate. She told *The Narrator*: “I just want to be here and look, like a little mouse.” For this game *The Narrator* officially took up the role of a director, but in essence she was there to serve the process, to safeguard the availability of a welcoming space for experimentation through participation. The co-workers found the process extremely amusing. They were surprised to discover different aspects of their fellow co-workers. After the first try-out, Margareta joined the choir and actively took part as one of the voices throughout the whole afternoon of reading and audio registrations.



In their transformative processes, parrhesiastic practices entail caring and healing, therapeutic qualities. Foucault draws attention to this very close relation between curing and caring in Socrates' parrhesiastic approach. This is evident in Socrates' wealthy friend Crito, who “was cured when in discussion with Socrates, he had been freed from the common opinion, from the opinion of corrupting souls, in order, on the contrary, to choose, resolve and make up his mind through opinion founded on the relation of self to the truth” (Foucault 2011, 105–6). These qualities are also evident in Demonax as described by Lucian: the Cynic as a figure “for whom the practice of truth is a mild, curative, therapeutic practice, a practice of peace and not of insults and assaults” (Foucault 2011, 199).

In “Keywords for Affect,” Massumi defines the time of the “event” as this in-between time or transversal time, during which “there is a reactivation of the past in passage toward a changed future, cutting across dimensions of time, between past and future, and between pasts of different orders” (Massumi 2014, 104). The *Time-Choir* involves a certain use of bodies: the participants may laugh together, nod, take time from their time to come together, literally enact in time what the text says. They are free to negotiate and eventually co-develop the text's rhythm, time, rules, their very own collective understanding of how the piece should be read in time.

Although *Time-Choir* was just a game, participants did risk appearing ridiculous to the eyes of their co-workers or co-participants whom they had only just met. They allowed themselves to experience a certain vulnerability while exposing their own voices during this collective exercise between listening and speaking. In September 2019, the *Time-Choir* audio piece was presented to the public in the Kalldbahuset. A light rain choreographed the positions of the audience. They chose the cabins as the protective coverings under which they could stand and experience the work. This setting intensified the experience: individuals looked at each other while listening as a group to the piece, which asks a community to consider their time together responsibly, but also playfully. The *Time-Choir* group threw a pebble into Varberg's waters of self-care, producing circles of affect.



**A few concluding remarks:  
A recap of the considerations for the composition of the Parade**

My Parade draws examples and inspiration from old celebratory Parades filled with laughter and excess. It appropriates strategies and tools for bringing people together, enabling them to “appear” in common view. It does not reenact an old parade, however. My Parade is a mental structure and a device, a parade in the sense of the addition of elements, starting from my drawings and a monological approach, and reaching out to others, who include professionals such as writers, costume makers, puppeteers, and performers but also amateurs, volunteers, and invited and accidental audience members. The Parade builds up and evolves through the augmentation of a heterogeneous collection of texts, characters, props, voices, and people joining, becoming part of it. This happens in a successive manner that investigates and supports both the research and the practice.

The specific characteristics of my Parade have evolved through my focus on old popular European artists and practices. Following my investigation into European appearances of parrhesia through popular entertainment, via museum visits, books, interviews, and collections, I put together an indicative list of parrhesiastic Characters. The Characters in my Parade invoke the voices and figures of Old Parrhesiastic Laughers to activate the contemporary viewer. They are revitalizers of dormant powers within specific localities.

Parades form and address a social body. My Parade is approached as an ongoing rehearsal, practiced in the space between observation and imagination, within which the parrhesiast artist as Cynic operates. In this preparation towards the Parade’s event, the Characters are carriers of historical knowledge and invoke collective memory. Massumi reflects on this temporality of transversal time, the time of the event, arguing that “it enables, and requires, you to rethink all of these terms — bodily capacitation, felt transition, quality of lived experience, memory, repetition, seriation, tendency — in dynamic relation to each other” (Massumi 2014, 104). In this transitional social space of the parade, the parrhesiast artist as Cynic keeps asking the question “How can I, as an artist, practice my ability to create a kind of shared sense of what is true or meaningful?” The artist seeks to do this by inviting others to join, bringing together bodies affecting and being affected, making them part of the question.

## IV. Casting Call



Character: The Disguised

“It is the *documenting* that counts, the project of finding a form that would encompass the material at hand and not just the ‘document’ that may come out of it.” (Lotringer 2016, 101)

It’s late evening in December 2020, in Maastricht. COVID-19 goes on. Lockdown has just been reimposed in the Netherlands. *The Narrator* reads material on the **subject, influences, method, structure, and filmic treatment** of the film *Casting Call* aloud:

In the film project *Casting Call* I bring together four years of investigation into the notion of parrhesia, *the courage to speak one’s mind*, which I approach from a comedic and excessive perspective. It is situated against the backdrop of three cities strongly linked to the European Union: Athens, Brussels and Maastricht. These three cities take center stage in the European political theater of today: the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, Brussels is the de facto European capital, and Athens has been the epicenter of the Greek financial crisis played out since 2010.

The film is intended as a cultural allegory of contemporary Europe, using the notion of parrhesia as *the courage to engage in subversive dialogue*. Its title references the preparation of a film or theater production, but can also be considered an invitation to inclusivity — the act and process of, and a call for, participation.

*Casting Call* employs characters-types, populist jokes, costumes, props, dark allegories and excess to playfully ask serious questions about living well together and the role of public space and time<sup>42</sup> in contemporary Europe. The way in which parrhesia may or may not conquer public space in times of social media and post-truth is the film’s subject.

Listening is of vital importance in *Casting Call* due to its subject matter. A desire to interact in a dialectical game is required for parrhesia to successfully take place: the one who speaks the truth, the parrhesiast, aims at transforming the ethos of the one who listens, who must want to listen. Drawing inspiration from French film theorist and experimental music composer Michel Chion’s celebrated book *The Voice in Cinema* (1999), *Casting Call* focuses attention on both silence and verbal utterance, pauses and addressivity\*.

In *Casting Call* I explore what the courage to speak up might mean in Europe today. The film investigates how confrontation between various characters can arise in the inverted world of a festive European parade. The experience of collectively leading our lives on and off social media has a direct influence on how we speak our minds and therefore on parrhesia’s contemporary role. What about our ability to listen together, and maybe eventually laugh together, in contemporary European public space?

## Inspiration-Influences

My main references and sources of inspiration for this film are: Marguerite Duras' use of repetition and the sound of the voice in space; Gilles Deleuze's notion of the refrain and of repetition as fundamentally different from the logic of representation (repetition against representation); and Danish dramaturg Ulla Ryum's spiral-dramaturgical model, which she developed in the 1960s and 1970s. I am specifically interested in how Ryum's model "seeks associative relationships between images instead of continuity and development. Unlike a linear temporality where a position excludes and displaces the other, Ryum's model instead opens for conflict and thereby invites to a common ethical room with space to accommodate difference and disagreement" (<https://khio.no/events/817>).

I would also like to cite Franco "Bifo" Berardi, according to whom the dominant mode of social interaction is currently shifting from conjunctive to connective — or, in his own words, "from the alphabetical to the digital environment of the Infosphere" (Berardi 2014, 10–11). In examining how aesthetic and emotional sensibilities are affected in the communication process between living and conscious organisms, Berardi remarks that change may take place through conjunction — "singularities can change when they conjoin" — but not in the connective mode, where "each element remains distinct and interacts only functionally" (Berardi 2014, 18).

Film is a time-based medium. In thinking about parrhesia as a concept that is related to acts of not forgetting, I find it important to mention the artist Michelle Dizon, for whom activating memory is "an act of resistance." I encountered her work in Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2019. As GIBCA's website explains:

In the installation *The Archive's Fold*, Dizon uses images of the US colonial and postcolonial period in the Philippines, sourced from archives in the Philippines, the USA, her family albums, and the internet — to deal with the intergenerational legacies of colonial violence. The official archival photographs are contrasted with Dizon's personal portrayal of an intimate realm where physical and spiritual remains are shared by the dead, the living, and the unborn. The piece takes the form of a conversation between Dizon's great-great-grandmother in the year 1905 and her grandchild's great-granddaughter in 2123. (GIBCA n.d.)

In his 1991 book *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis argues that "hand-in-hand with the creation of a public space goes the creation of a *public time*." He explains that by public time he means "the emergence of a dimension where the collectivity<sup>43</sup> can inspect its own past as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as a domain for its activities" (Castoriadis 1991, Chap. 5). By public time, Castoriadis means historiography. His notion of public time resonates with Sara Sharma's conclusion in her book *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, where in defense of a radical politics of time and space, a "politics for the meantime" as she calls it, she places emphasis on an understanding of "all social space as being in transit" and on the importance of "politicizing how we inhabit time," as "this leads to reimagining time as a collective struggle" (Sharma 2014, 142).

## Method — Matter/It's a Matter of Method

*Casting Call* takes the form of an essay-film in which the interior monologue voiceover of *The Narrator* becomes a central character, leading the viewer along a subjective and reflective path of shot footage. The film's production has an innovative and experimental character, resulting from a singular working method that corresponds closely to its investigated subject matter.

The method was process-oriented and aimed at challenging existing hierarchies and stereotypes about borders between individual and collective thinking. The filming process provided a temporary platform, a niche that offered both invited and casual or unexpected participants the opportunity to come together and express their ideas. To give an example: as I described in Chapter III (pages 80–81), in 2018 three performers and I developed a game-playing method that is non-hierarchical and inclusive. We made one filmic proposition each, based on the same joke, Language by Dimitris Dimopoulos, and divided the shooting time into four equal slices (there being three performers and myself). Each of us conceived of an idiosyncratic version of the joke and its mise en scène and performed it in public space (Scenes 16–17–18). The democratic structure of the filming process led to a platform where parrhesiastic exchange could be practiced. Creating this possibility goes far beyond just representing parrhesia as a subject.

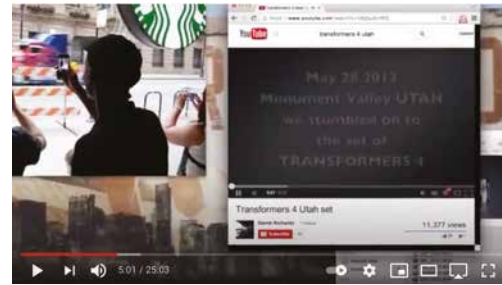
I see *Casting Call* as a genre crossover: it combines documentary methods with testimonies and allegorical performances in public space using jokes and mini-dramaturgies written by screenwriters in their native languages. I used performative strategies to approach the notion and subject matter of parrhesia by opening the filmmaking process to writers, performers, artists, and voluntary and accidental audience members, and engaging them in it.

The need to organize the footage created led me to reconsider the film as both a document of the various authors' texts and proposed scenes of the script *and* as the process of documenting the performative utterances generated between the "I" and the "we" on location.

## Filmic Approach

The film begins with a monologue from a performer (*The Narrator*) in an interior space improvising her part in *Casting Call*'s script. The camera captures her introducing and grouping the building blocks of *Casting Call* (drawings of characters, photos of Bellevue Museum, jokes and their performative tryouts in public space) on her desktop computer. Occasionally the camera captures only what happens on the computer's screen, following the logic of a desktop film or documentary, a sub-genre of desktop film that "uses screen capture technology to treat the computer screen as both a camera lens and a canvas."<sup>44</sup> Here I provide a few examples of desktop films as inspiration:





Kevin B. Lee Transformers: The Premake



Patricia Esquivias '111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana' (2012)

Desktop as storyboard: Lena Berg, False Belief (2019)

In the film, the making process, playful moments (jokes in public spaces,<sup>45</sup> surreal elements) and reflective moments (discourse)<sup>46</sup> are interweaved through the narrator who connects the scenes and brings these elements together. She does this through improvising or rehearsing in four very different tones of voice.

*The Narrator's* tone of voice alternates according to the four narrating roles she assumes (*The Ghost*/whispering voice, *The Glossary*/mechanical voice, *The Philosopher*/rational and thoughtful voice, and *The Engaged Artist*/sentimental and expressive voice). This particular mode of narration is used because these four perspectives are indispensable for understanding parrhesia, which is equally a historical notion, a verbal activity, a philosophical term, and a socially engaged practice.

The spectator is often led from one shooting location to another through *The Narrator's* voices, movements, and the sounds of props that accompany each voice. These vary from an invisible, whispering voiceover (*The Ghost*) to specific movements and the sounds of one of the props belonging to one of the voices (metal words for *The Glossary*, a suitcase with celluloid film for *The Engaged Artist* and *The Philosopher*).

Gradually the film develops into a surrealistic, dystopian world of twisted and transformed characters. In this simultaneously funny and cruel, visually attractive and weird landscape, puppets and humans co-exist, speaking their minds through masks and cruel jokes. This development happens in an unorthodox parade of sequences of parrhesiastic attempts and manifestations.

<sup>45</sup> These are treated as short autonomous mises-en-scenes in public space, based on the commissioned jokes. Interactions between performers-characters and passersby (an accidental audience) take place. The resulting encounters range from funny to awkward to unpredictable.

<sup>46</sup> The film records the performers' preparations and rehearsals for parrhesia before they go into public space to speak up. These parts of the film reveal what is happening "behind the scenes": how to speak up, how to communicate the jokes, and potential disagreements over working methods.

## My (The Narrator's) Role in the Film is...

### Multiple

Drawing from *The Female Fool*, I play and improvise with the limits of performing language, shifting from the rational to the mechanical to the emotional voice to whispering... jokes... and laughter. In between I doubt, rehearse, repeat, and reflect on the existing material.

### Mono

My interior monologue allows for a navigation through the existing material: the interior desktop-computer shots (where I arrange and organize the existing material) keep pointing to the dialogical with the external shots, including interactions in public space. Viewers are encouraged to reflect upon their own social interactions, as they live both physically and online through several screens.

### Connective vs Conjunctive

Following an improvisational reading of the script's scenes, I become fed up with this reshuffling of material on the desktop's screen and shift to the conjunctive mode, becoming completely absorbed by the filmed material and embodied in it. From that part of the film onwards, colors become intensely bright. I am not visible anymore, but I am present through my voice.

## Screenplay

To articulate this film project, writing a script seemed the most suitable option. The result was the scenario for the rehearsals, tests, and experiments that I conducted with the performers and artistic team. Throughout the script two colors (black and blue) are employed to indicate its distinct voices. In total there are seven voices: those of the four authors I commissioned to write texts, jokes, or sketches (Dimitris Dimopoulos, Pieter De Buysser, Joep Vosseveld, and Margo van de Linde), that of puppeteer Denise Castermans, that of set and costume designer Esther van de Pas, and that of myself. My own voice in the script, both as scriptwriter and as caretaker of the parts decided collectively through discussion among several participants, is indicated by Times New Roman and in black. This is the typeface and color I use in all other chapters of my dissertation as well. The texts in blue Times New Roman indicate all the other voices. In alternating between these two colors, the script not only acts as a scenario, but also testifies to the process through which it came into being, tracing how different voices have found their way into it. Furthermore, the reader can read the complete authors' jokes, texts, and sketches on pages 197–223. Denise Castermans specifically contributed to the rendering of Pieter De Buysser's texts into filmic scenes 14, 21, 33, and 34. Esther van de Pas contributed to the costume and prop descriptions in scenes 9, 20, and 27. The list of performers, the full script, and the authors' jokes, texts, and sketches in complete form can be found in Appendix 2 of this dissertation (pages 165–226).

## Torn between Research Process and End Product

To recapitulate, the idea behind the film *Casting Call* was that it could be considered the outcome, the montage, in which the three other stages of the parade would come together. My intention was to treat it as a carrier of parrhesia that goes beyond representation, demonstrating various opinions and voices, by unfolding as a multilayered parade from one joke, location, and character to another, with actions succeeding images succeeding language, one after the other. Throughout the film, the re-appearing pattern of a polyrhythmic parade is suggested. Through the input of the audible,<sup>47</sup> I proceed into the making of moving image, audiovisual, and performative works. *Casting Call* recycles the sounds of parades and demonstrations that took place in Brussels and Maastricht to develop its style and narrative structure. The audio is the main associating and unifying element within its overall construction. Through this approach, it is suggested to the spectator that the parade, *Casting Call*, is an ongoing process throughout the film. Varied shooting styles permit an exploration of the topic of parrhesia through different lenses (discursive, documentary, fictional, and so on).

Out of the script's thirty-six scenes, twenty scenes (1–5, 17–27, 29, 31–32, 36) were shot in 2018 and 2019, resulting in short videos and filmic notes. This is because although the project received development support from VAF (Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds), it was not supported further in the next stage (production). Instead, it received funding from several other sources (mainly visual arts funds, art institutions, performance festivals, and foundations with a focus on social engagement and cultural exchange), which allowed for production and post-production of a limited number of scenes. This peculiar way of producing a film in parts and the lengthy periods between the production of a limited number of scenes intensified a conflict of interests between my roles as a film director and as a visual artist.

The ongoing conflictual and antagonistic relation between *The Narrator/Engaged Artist/Filmmaker* and *The Narrator/Engaged/Visual Artist* does not seem to reach a resolution. In thinking of the parade as a format of presentation, a structuring tool, and an end product, parade as process and parade as outcome, the conflict goes over the following question: Is the end-product of this research *Casting Call* the film or *Casting Call* the manifestations, attempts, and events stemming from this process? In the first case, the filmmaker/director assumes total responsibility and control: she will make the final choices, editing and manipulating the material, and thereby expose her very personal account of parrhesia. In the second case, the end product consists of several staged and improvised actions documented within the frame of an ongoing open-ended process — an invitation to participation.

*The Narrator/Engaged/Filmmaker* rehearses speaking out on Hybridity\* and Solo — Collaboration:

From a filmmaker's perspective, the term "hybridity" relates to topics directly implicated in the medium of film, such as film's transformation from an analogue medium to a digital one and how new digital filmmaking methods influence the production of image and its form, as well as "the memory of both the image and the filmmaker," therefore potentially expanding the role of the filmmaker to that of "metahistorian," as Jihoon Kim suggests in his book *Between Film, Video, and The Digital: Hybrid Moving Images in the Post-Media Age* (Kim 2016, Chap. 3). Hybridization in film also concerns

<sup>47</sup> My definition of the "audible" centers around the human voice as carrier and producer of meaning (mainly through language), but it also includes utterances, unidentifiable sounds, silence, pauses, waiting modes, and moments just before the articulation of speech.

crossovers between genres, for example between fiction and documentary. This dates back to the beginning of the twenty-first century, to what critic Robert Koehler calls the "early years of the golden age of cinematic in-betweenness," with several films deliberately crossing the borders/divisions of classical film categories fiction and documentary or non-fiction (Stam 2015, 206).

Reflection on hybridity takes place in and through the film *Casting Call*, as it alternates from desktop documentary to fiction to classic documentary shots and a mix of professional and phone cameras. *Casting Call* is an essay-film that considers activating memory to be an act of resistance and the medium of film as a weapon. When film images conjunct, associations are produced. Film has also the power to create disassociation, thus reinforcing the viewer's political imagination through montage.

As a film director, I used performative strategies and opened the filmmaking process to writers, performers, artists, and voluntary and accidental audience members, and engaged them in it. Working democratically with the material was a conscious decision because this method best served the purpose of exploring the theme of parrhesia through filmmaking. As I have already conducted several experiments and shot adequate exterior footage with my characters during the above-described phases, once I shoot the remaining scenes I will have all of the playing cards, the cinematic material, in my hands. I will re-compose these shoots in order to narrate a tale on speaking out, boldly, about Europe today. I will bring the film project to its conclusion in close collaboration with the editor and sound designer. I deeply care for the input offered by the various participants and contributors. Although I have no intention of misusing their democratically gained input, I find it important to respect the medium I set out to serve. In taking the editing decisions on my own, I assume responsibility for the film's outcome and speak up my mind as director. To not betray the spirit of this working method, which was intended to be non-representational, I avoid assuming a representative's take and chose to focus on *The Narrator* instead. Through my multiple perspective as *The Narrator*, I offer my personal account of how I experienced the process and become accountable for it. What is left of the democratic procedure are its traces in specific scenes.

*The Narrator/Engaged/Visual Artist* rehearses speaking out on Hybridity\* and Solo event vs Collaborative events:

Through *Casting Call* I deal with the aspect of hybridity in two ways. Firstly, I assume a multiplicity of roles. As the director-caretaker-assembler-juggler of this project, I am actively involved in the entire process of making it, and I am held responsible both for holding it all together and for the end result. It is a fragile balancing act. I decide on several key elements, determine the structure and components, and set some parameters. These include the questions asked and the methods used to explore them: jokes, locations, costumes, and human participation (invited and voluntary as well as unexpected, external, and accidental). I purposefully keep a space open in order to welcome the other. Each writer, performer, and contributor in this project carries geographically embedded references and gestures that reflect personal associations to comic traditions and European diversity. They communicate through a *common language*, but do not share the same culture (language, religion, and values). This condition marks a shifting territory of inclusion and exclusion, embodying disagreements and misunderstandings, issues that this project wishes to address. Gathering the courage to speak one's mind with, against, or through others is a process of trial and error, never a final situation.

Secondly, I treat *Casting Call* as a hybrid stage-set between visual arts, performance, and film. (I bring theatrical tools into visual arts and use performative strategies.)



Michel Chion describes the differences between theater and cinema as follows: “The cinema does not employ a *stage*, even if from time to time it might simulate one, but rather a *frame*, with variable points of view” (Chion 1999, 22). There is a long tradition in the exploration of stage-frame relations in the visual arts (see for example Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman in Chapter II). I suggest that the synthesis of different mediums (performance and digital film and social media) will provide insights about the contemporary role of parrhesia.

In her essay “Between Theater and Film,” Susan Sontag explores differences and converging points of cinema (which she identifies as an object or product) and theater (which she identifies as performance). However different they are in their existence, she writes, “the object aspect of film, the performance aspect of theater are merely means — means to the experience, which is not only ‘of’ but ‘through’ the film and the theatre event” (Sontag 2005, 143). In my stage/set the performers picture their acts live in public space. At the same time, I employ the medium of digital film to record these acts. In my stage/set, by interchangeably moving from the stage to the frame and back, one can experience attempts to speak up through a cross-examination of media. I record the attempts in order to draw conclusions for my research. These recordings are not simply treated as documentation. I embrace the communicative\* power of the cinematic. The interference of language and the senses is embodied in parrhesia, but also in film. Using the detour of the imaginary and the artificial to be able to speak directly is a valid strategy for relating film as a construction to parrhesia. It emphasizes the importance of fiction and the magic of cinema, showing how imagination offers other ways of speaking out.

My method aims to challenge existing hierarchies and stereotypes about borders between individual and collective thinking. I see the filming process as a temporary, communal platform, a niche that offers both invited and unexpected casual participants the opportunity to express their ideas. Everyone who contributes to this process helps steer the direction of the project. This involves tensions, conflicts, and disagreements. Working this way provides space for several minds to come together and surprise ourselves, instead of executing a vision predetermined by an “individual artist.”

In *Casting Call*, I use the filmic tests and the construction of a film to create a temporary cultural-social space that enhances future social imaginaries. I offer live experiences and record these attempts in order to address virtual and future audiences. To a large extent the result is shaped by the choices of multiple actors and participants, yet I also inscribe myself in it. In doing so, I alternate between assuming authority (being the director) and letting go (depending on the participants’ input). I develop a structure with gaps to be filled by others. Through this participatory and performative process, I keep redefining my position and my responsibilities as an artist.

Although I consider the project ongoing, an outcome certainly exists. The outcome consists of an accumulating body of works and texts remaining from the research process — leftovers to be cared for — that document several parts of the process, from imagining to actualizing parts of the parade.

*Casting Call* takes shape and produces its outcome precisely through the numerous opportunities it provides for exchange with all of the project’s participants and contributors, and for investigating through and with them how one’s words and actions affect others in the process of speaking up, sharing a joke, addressing listeners, and provoking dialogue. At the same time, *Casting Call* is not a collective work. It is an artistic project initiated and led by me, through which I have conducted my research since 2016. It is my project because I am the one with the urgent need to answer the research questions that I set out to explore, and who chose to invite people to help me explore them. I am the one responsible for developing, financing, and holding the project together.

## Paying Attention to the Script: Between Documenting and Event\*

*The Narrator*’s distracted preoccupation with the conflicting perspectives and ways of operating described above continued for several months. The liberating answer came to her only after she had fully imagined, described, and finalized her exact role in the film and how the film would be realized. It then became clear to her that in *Casting Call* it is the circulation from the process to the product and back, through its documentation, that matters. To clarify, by product I mean the body of leftovers stemming from the rehearsals and try-outs of this on-going process, which accumulate and which must be cared for, as they permit the collectivity of the participants to go back and inspect what has happened. These include *Casting Call*’s script as well as an exhibited installation unfolding as a parade, demonstrating the steps taken throughout my research, providing evidence of what I have been creating and writing about — exhibits as testifiers — and inviting the visitor to partake in a sensorial experience. The exhibits include printed journals, filmic notes (shot between 2017 and 2020), drawings of costumes and characters, performance documentation, and objects (such as props, costumes, and displays). These have served as aids, testers, and witnesses through the project’s circulation from solitary individual practice to participatory dialectic attempts to address an audience.

The role of the script is central in this circulation. *Casting Call*’s script is both an outcome, a montage in which the three other stages come together, a work in itself, and a part of this “opera aperta” process. The state of the script can be considered, interchangeably, as a documenting process, a document, and “material.”<sup>48</sup> Its scenes may always be (re)activated. The script contains specified dialogues, but the actions are only sketched out in the script; as rehearsals proceed and the action is worked out with the participants, new parameters and conditions for parrhesia to take place emerge. The script remains open to the potentiality of an event.

In a short introduction to Alain Badiou’s philosophy, philosopher Fabien Tarby compares the moment of the occurrence of an event to a “surprising resurfacing of elements that were, until then, not presented in this situation” (Badiou and Tarby 2013, 142). I would like to bring in two examples of how I have encountered such occurrences during the shooting of *Casting Call* scenes. Having personally witnessed these episodes, I argue that they perfectly embodied in microscale the notion of the “event” in Badiou’s sense of something happening, capable of partially disrupting or exceeding the present structure, or rather the *situation* (ibid., 142).

The first example concerns a test for Scene 32 in Gallery Bortier, Brussels in December 2017, where Sahra and Jessica improvised the movement and gestures of the *Collectors of Proverbs* while uttering the words “Solidarity,” “Europe,” “Democracy,” “Language,” “Pluralism,” “Migration,” and “Prosperity” (the seven concepts) in various European languages. Having borrowed some books from a bookseller within the shopping arcade, they improvised walking and balancing the books as collectors’ hats upon their heads. At some point Sahra accidentally dropped a book on the floor. This sudden development led to a verbal outburst from the bookseller, who, disturbed by the possible damage of her merchandise, shouted at them to put the books back and leave, or she would call the police. The book-accident interruption allowed for a caricature of anti-European sentiments in favor of the bookseller’s

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I owe my understanding of the script as “material” to Sylvère Lotringer. His reflection on the role of tape recorders in his work interviews strongly resonates with the role I attribute to *Casting Call*’s script. See Lotringer 2016.

national identity to surface (“Speak in French, please. We are in Belgium. French or Flemish”) from below the polished surface of a well-educated Western European antiquarian bookseller.



The second example concerns Scene 27 of the script (see Appendix 2, pages 189-190), in which the camera follows *The Narrator* slowly walking along the bridge leading to Maastricht's Provinciehuis. *The Animal Group* (Shila, Sahra, Simone, and Joep), wearing business suits and animal masks of a fox, a dog, a rabbit, and a goat respectively, move faster than *The Narrator*. They arrive before the Provinciehuis. *The Animal Group* refers to the animals wearing costumes in Honoré Daumier's lithograph *The Conference of London*, depicting a painful historical moment from the redistribution of Europe in the 1830s. Daumier assigned animal traits to the great European powers involved in redrawing the borders between Belgium, Luxemburg, and Holland. The dog represents the Netherlands (Holland), the fox Britain, the hare France, and so on. These animal-headed figures are shown discussing a document while stepping obliviously on the corpse of a woman — Poland; Holland and Belgium are chained and crucified on the left and right sides of the image respectively. *The Animal Group* try three variations of coming together and taking turns to rhythmically embody parts of Pieter De Buysse's parable-joke on Democracy in a press-conference manner. *The Narrator's* voiceover recites the joke, while camera and performers enter a choreographic dialogue, ranging from standing still to dynamic movement (dancing, laughing, clapping hands).

On November 8 2019, at the exact date and time we planned to shoot the “Democracy” scene in front of the Provinciehuis, Maastricht, four performers (*The Animal Group*), the crew, and myself encountered a local protest against plans to build a new airport in the region. This accidental meeting strangely resonated with our plan and the commissioned “Democratie” text by Pieter De Buysse, in which a dispute between a cosmopolitan and a nationalist takes place as their plane crashes. While the crash is avoided at the last minute, the text develops into an allegory of animals offering the best form of democracy ever imagined. The sounds of the protesters intermingled with the improvised joke. People thought the performers were members of De Partij voor de Dieren,<sup>49</sup> a Dutch political group that champions animal rights, which came in support of the protest. As local journalists took photos of the performers marching in unison, the reality of the performed text and that of the protest merged into one. The protesters felt empowered by the presence of the animal group, who contributed their playful and humorous presence to the dynamics of the protest. For a fleeting moment, the increased theatricality of their costumes and postures parading among the protesting crowd resonated with Ute Meta Bauer's remarks on theatricality's potential: it “provides us with a tool to interfere in what determines reality rather than accept as a given that things cannot be changed” (Bauer 2016, 20).

In his essay *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Rancière rejects the binary opposition of passivity versus action in spectacle. He proposes that the relations between viewing and acting be rethought by considering any spectator active in their ability to interpret and turn what they see into their own stories. Rancière defines “emancipation” as “the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look, between individual and members of a collective body” (Rancière 2009a, 19). Between the one who knows and the one who doesn't, between the one who acts and the one who looks, he argues that “distance is not an evil to be abolished but the normal condition of any communication” (ibid., 10).

Back in the times of *Karagöz* and *Ortaoyunu*, cultural distances between spectators of various ethnicities were openly addressed. A circle of community was formed around *Karagöz*, with spectators celebrating misunderstandings between each other — the unit of measurement for what separated them from each other was laughter\*. Differences and distances among an ethnically diverse community were used affirmatively. In attempting to relate to local communities, *Casting Call's* research came across many distances and the practice was in finding methodologies for measuring them. In this way we, as participants, tried to understand what happened when we come together, to interrogate but also accept the distances that occurred, and to embrace, when necessary, the impossibility of communicating.

Inclusive of all types of distances, and succeeding and failing to cross them, the area I have been trying to trace and understand resonates with Bifo's interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic methodology. Bifo identifies the production and sharing of meaning as a singular event: when my intention of meaning enters “into vibrational syntony (or sympathy)” with other singularities, the event may be shared and proliferate (Berardi 2014, 17).

In the microevents I describe above, our shooting sessions and other people's realities and vibrations merged into one. However, not everyone who witnessed the scene recognized it as an “event” in the sense of Žižek's definition as “a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it” (Žižek 2014, 12) and in Badiou's sense of the event as something happening that is capable of partially disrupting or exceeding the present structure, or rather the *situation* (ibid., 142). For Alain Badiou, fidelity and testimony are crucial terms in relation to truth and the event, as “being faithful to an event is the means through which we become a subject of truth” (Badiou and Tarby 2013, 154) and for this “it

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The Party for the Animals is a political party in the Netherlands. Among its main goals are animal rights and animal welfare, though it claims not to be a single-issue party.

is necessary to name the event, to recognize its trace and to become ‘incorporated’ within it” (ibid., 143). The central figure in *Casting Call*’s search for the event is *The Narrator*, who is constantly present in the script and its activations and in the dissertation. She relates to both the documentation and the event. In walking along its traces, she becomes fully incorporated in the process.

To get back to the tests, every filmic scene opened up new questions which we had to deal with. In scenes 23–26 of the script, two jokes on Migration take place simultaneously. A crowd plays an adaptation of Dimopoulos’ joke, a Greek game called “Who should stay in the furnace and burn?”: A transparent globe ball is passed around among the members of the crowd. On taking the ball, each player states the name of the European country he or she is playing. All put their right foot in. If it’s a hit, the country hit is out, and if it is a miss, the one that threw the ball is out and goes to hug a pole. There is no winner, only a succession of leaders, turning this game into a triumph of European passivity and inefficiency into passing the globe and its problems from the one to the other. In its Greek version the participants would be actual immigrants trying to win a residence permit. During the discussions in Maastricht’s theater (Scene 2), Simone, Shila, and Sahra adapted the game to a more politically correct, inoffensive version that fitted the roundabout’s particularities (limited space to move around, many columns, risk that the globe-ball is thrown amid the cars). Hetty Van de Velden, production leader of the project in Maastricht, confronted me with a critical question that needed answering. This question concerned Joep Vosseveld’s Dutch joke “Fort Europa,” which would be filmed with him telling it in the foreground of the Stars of Europe sculpture, whereas in the background the extras would play the above-mentioned ballgame. What if the extras (volunteers, Maastricht-based friends, and family that Hetty invited into the project) disagreed with or felt offended by Joep’s mockingly pro-colonial joke? What if I later showed them the finished film and they opposed having their faces associated with such a text? Megera’s paper masks were a solution to that. The masks became a protective tool enabling anonymous participation. Megera’s followers became “the People,” each assuming a playful face by hiding their own.

Zoom out: Panoramic shot of Maastricht’s Europe Stars sculpture from the higher bridge level, above and far away, captures **Shila-Megera** talking to her tablet, addressing her online audience, **Joep-The One that Brings the World Upside Down** performing his pro-colonial monologue about migration on the other side of the stars sculpture, and a crowd of **Anonymous Megera Disciples** wearing **Megera masks** playing a ballgame in between the steel stars and columns of the Stars Sculpture in the background. Like me as artist/researcher, the project’s participants and contributors also move along a Mobius strip that continually shifts from an individual practicing a monologue to dialogical collaborative attempts and failures among these individuals. *Casting Call* has been affecting us and we keep practicing parrhesia and challenging our minds throughout this process. The correspondence between Sahra Huby and myself that follows Appendix 2 (pages 229–235) testifies to this.

To conclude, in my efforts to investigate, as an artist, what happens in this process of attempting to speak up, share a joke, grasp listeners’ attention, and provoke dialogue, I started on my own by placing myself in the middle of the research, working as a solitary artist. Subsequently I reached out to others and investigated this process with, against, and through them. I explored the model of parrhesiastic theater by creating situations within which the limits of the roles in relation to the authority of the artist-maker-participant-performer were claimed, negotiated, and examined through our hybrid stage sets between visual arts, performance, and film. In these situations, the performers continually fell in and out of role of the characters they assumed. During the co-working periods, I refrained from acting as aesthetic judge of others’ proposals and contributions (of what is good or bad, funny or insulting) and attempted to function as a caretaker and an “assembler,” letting the other voices in instead. Between several roles

and limitations, *Casting Call* developed into a site of negotiation for all the tensions and disagreements that arose as we, as participants, were confronted by the limits between “I” and “we.”

Although *Casting Call* is an ongoing project, there is an outcome: a body of leftovers ranging from printed journals, film notes (shot between 2017 and 2020), drawings of costumes and characters, performance documentation, and objects (such as props, costumes, and displays), stemming from the rehearsals and try-outs of this ongoing process, which accumulate and which must be cared for, as they permit the collectivity of the participants to go back and inspect what has happened. These leftovers will be exhibited to provide access to viewers and future participants in the process.

In my search for parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, these tensions, struggles, and compromises regarding my various roles and tasks within this film project led me to answers regarding my research sub-questions. To the question “Can we think of the parrhesiastic theater artist as a hybrid\*, assuming a role between archive, amplifying instrument for other voices, and caretaker?”, I would respond that there is a tendency among parrhesiastic theater artists to value hybridity and work in hybrid ways. They combine various mediums and/or roles in their practices, for example. The active combination of hats they wear (that of archivist, of amplifying instrument for other voices, of provocateur, of caretaker and so on) may be detected within a long list of contemporary artists, from Christoph Schlingensief (theater director, performance artist, filmmaker, provocateur) to Jeanne van Heeswijk (artist, facilitator, community-to-community projects, Trainings for the Not Yet) to Kader Attia (artist, curator, and founder of La Colonie), to name just a few examples. The various roles that parrhesiastic theater artists assume help them develop strategies of dissent and confrontation, to provoke engagement and produce affect, and to enhance the possibility for their own and other voices/ bodies to “appear.” I therefore positively identify the parrhesiastic theater artist as someone assuming a number of roles, but not as a hybrid.

In looking at parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, it is not only possible but necessary to think of it as both the process toward an event and as the event itself. In *Casting Call* it is the circulation from the process to the product and back again through its documentation that matters. Remaining faithful to the path opened up for her by the Gezi Park protests event in 2013, *The Narrator* keeps walking along its traces. In doing so she thinks of *Casting Call*, the process. Between the frames of the scenes that have been shot and those not yet realized in *Casting Call*’s script, she looks for the opportunity for the next micro-parrhesiastic event to take place in the successive line of micro-events that shape this ongoing parade.

## Conclusion

My personal experience of courageous and comic expressions of protest throughout the Gezi Park events in 2013, when I was conducting an artistic investigation into forms of entertainment belonging to the Ottoman popular theater tradition, led me to wonder if such old practices might be of interest for critical artistic practices today. I invented the term parrhesiastic theater\* and asked myself if and how it could be considered as a model for artistic practice. From a theoretical perspective, I began my exploration into parrhesia by looking into the forms, conditions, and characteristics of parrhesiastic theater in Greek antiquity, both through Michel Foucault's genealogical analysis of the concept as a mode of discourse and by visiting the Greek sources. By looking into contexts within which parrhesia was practiced in Greek antiquity, I decided to include the Epicurean approach as a counter-balance to Foucault's three forms of truth-telling (the Cynic, the Socratic, and the political), all three of which position the parrhesiast in opposition, against the other(s), be it one or many. The Epicurian approach is an antique form that considers the notion of parrhesia from a perspective of inclusivity, within a heterogeneous community. Furthermore, I examined how a number of thinkers, writers, and activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries relate to this notion and the ways in which they may find it relevant for contemporary society and how art can contribute to this discussion. Despite their different approaches and concerns, Castoriadis, Havel, and Brin seem to converge on the political dimension of parrhesia, placing emphasis on citizen responsibility. For Castoriadis, Havel, and Brin, it is evident that "genuine politics" cannot be separated from its moral and social dimensions. In the cases of Brin and Byung-Chul Han, moral and ethical aspects of parrhesia are examined through contemporary societal lenses. Their writing reflects on the challenges and dilemmas presented to contemporary Western societies regarding what speaking one's mind might mean today. These include the use of new media, the internet, and virtual reality (Brin), a "general positivization of society" leading to burnout achievement-subjects, and the phenomenon of "deconflictualization" (Byung-Chul Han). As Pajmans illustrates, art contributes to this discussion, by proposing other positions not through discourse but through the enhancement of imagination.

I then examined how these conditions and characteristics of parrhesiastic theater in Greek antiquity manifest in seven contemporary visual artists' practices and works, and the strategies they have used to bring parrhesia into being. My aim was to construct a portrait of the parrhesiast-artist through these examples of artistic strategies. To do this, I also considered Foucault's art-historical stopping points in *The Courage of Truth*: Cynical art, the literature studied by Mikhail Bakhtin, and the figure of the modern artist. In addition to Foucault, I considered Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* to examine how he relates the historical avant-garde movement of Dada to cynicism. I also briefly looked into the Dadaist undercurrent that runs through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In parallel to my theoretical explorations, I worked at various locations: I physically experienced local forms such as the Carnival of Binche, Maastricht Carnival, Limburgs Museum, the buuteredners, and caricature — in short old popular practices of entertainment in Belgium and Netherlands — as well as reading about them.

In looking into antique parrhesiastic positions, parrhesia in contemporary visual artists and in old popular practices of entertainment, the aim of my research was to investigate how parrhesia has been practiced in the past and whether such methods may be reused and put to the test in contemporary Western European public and semi-public urban spaces. Instead of re-enacting them through a distanced critical perspective, I placed myself in the middle of the research: I started realizing drawings of myself in various parrhesiastic positions and postures. The drawings visualized imaginary attempts to answer the question of how could I speak my mind. In these drawings, old popular forms, comic representations such as *The Joker* and *The Fool* merged with contemporary imagery such as *The Selfie-Junkie*.



I started thinking of my drawings as parrhesiastic characters and the format of a parade as a method through which they could come into life and interact in contemporary Netherlands and Belgium. The Characters would be built on the basis of old, stereotypical characters from several European historical periods (antiquity, the Middle Ages, and so on).

As a device, the parade would enable me to:

1. define the main concepts and a network of related concepts for parrhesiastic theater\*
2. understand and analyze historical examples of parrhesiastic theater\*
3. detect where we (contemporary viewers, participants, and makers) are now in comparison to these examples
4. appropriate, reenact, and partially revive these examples to enable this detection
5. disseminate and diffuse the material resulting from the above

I developed a working method that corresponds to the subject matter of parrhesia. Being aware that the investigation of parrhesia always implies the existence of an Other, I decided to conduct the research through the concept of the Möbius strip, as a format that flips between individual and dialogical attempts.

My Parade draws examples and inspiration from old celebratory parades filled with laughter and excess. It focuses on popular European artists and practices of entertainment from the past. Its Characters invoke the voices and figures of Old Parrhesiastic Laughters to activate the contemporary viewer. They are revitalizers of dormant powers within specific localities.

The parade appropriates strategies and tools for bringing people together, enabling them to “appear” in common view. It does not reenact an old parade, however. It starts from my drawings and a monological approach before reaching out to others, including professionals such as dancers, writers, costume makers, puppeteers, and performers, as well as amateurs, volunteers, and invited and accidental audience members. The parade builds up and evolves in a successive manner, through the augmentation of a heterogeneous collection of texts, characters, props, voices, and people joining, becoming part of it. To the series of attempts, events, and manifestations stemming from this parade I gave the name *Casting Call*.

*Casting Call* is a continual, still ongoing attempt to generate parrhesia and question its role in contemporary art through negotiating the tensions inherent in acts of dialogical understanding. In this attempt, a mix of professionals, extras, respondents, and accidental audience members (bystanders) were invited to speak their minds by using the Parade’s collection of commissioned texts, characters, props, and voices in playful ways. They joined improvised public mises en scène that functioned halfway between stages and filmsets.

A parade engages with public space in two ways. It is a moveable temporary public space in itself, and at the same time, in theatricalizing existing public space, it traverses, permeates, and disrupts. In public space, one is confronted with what other people think and how they live their lives. My choice to create a public playground to play with concepts people take very seriously in their own lives follows a historical tradition of play as indispensable for training toward an attitude of speaking out. I align myself with political theorist Bonnie Honig, who emphasizes the importance of imagination and play as resources, especially for those humans deprived from a healthy democratic holding environment (Honig 2013, 70–72), and Ute Meta Bauer, who suggests that through play and theatricality one can overturn the rules of the chess game of life, creating change (Bauer 2016, 20).

In the period between 2017 and 2020, several public mises en scène took place in various locations in the framework of *Casting Call*, in which people could “appear” in common view by making use of the above-mentioned collection of texts, characters, props, and costumes. It was important to keep the possibility open for an event to occur, while also recording the process to ensure that the event would not be forgotten. It became crucial that I keep track of what is at stake when several individuals come together, and how creative processes

may unfold among them. During our actions and negotiations as participants, we were continually exposed to ourselves as well as to the camera’s eye. By documenting aspects of the rehearsals, we were able to look back and inspect our own actions recording public time.

In *Casting Call*, I use the film shoots as a pretext to bring together and create a temporary social space that enhances future social imaginaries. I document these attempts in order to address virtual and future audiences, while also offering a live experience. The result is largely shaped by the choices of multiple actors and participants.

To recapitulate my research sub-question: “How can I, as an artist, investigate what happens in this process of attempting to speak up, share a joke, address listeners, grasp their attention, and provoke dialogue through a hybrid post-media artistic practice, ranging from drawing and writing to time-based media and performance?” In my efforts to answer this question, I started on my own by placing myself in the middle of the research, working as a solitary artist. I then reached out to others and investigated this process with, against, and through them. I explored the model of parrhesiastic theater by creating situations within which the limits of the roles in relation to the authority of artist, maker, participant, and performer were claimed, negotiated, and examined through hybrid stage sets positioned between visual arts, performance, and film. In these situations, the performers continually fell in and out of role of the characters they assumed. Between several roles and limitations, *Casting Call* developed into a site of negotiation for all tensions and disagreements, where we as participants were confronted with the limits between “I” and “we.” In this transitional social space of the parade, which was approached as an ongoing rehearsal and practiced in the space between observation and imagination, I keep asking the question “How can I, as an artist, practice my ability to create a kind of shared sense of what is true or meaningful?” I do this by inviting others to join, bringing together bodies affecting and being affected, making them part of the question.

In attempting to answer my sub-question “In looking at parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, would it be possible to think of it as both the process toward an event and as the event in itself?”, the methods I developed on my own and in working with, against, through others for the purposes of this parade provided me with the answer: it is not only possible but necessary to think of such theater as both the process toward an event and as the event itself. Once more, I wish to draw attention to Massumi’s definition of the time of the event as a transversal time, which “enables, and requires, you to rethink all of these terms — bodily capacitation, felt transition, quality of lived experience, memory, repetition, seriation, tendency — in dynamic relation to each other” (Massumi 2014, 104). Collaborative formats and dialogical attempts are not limited to the time of the work’s production, but extend in time before and after its making. In this research project, it is the circulation from the process to the product and back again through its documentation that matters.

My research project consists of an artistic body of work (*Casting Call*) and a written component (dissertation), within which *Casting Call*’s script is contained. These two complement each other. Although *Casting Call* is ongoing, there is an outcome: a body of work ranging from drawings through which I enacted the Characters of the parade on paper; costumes and props used by the performers I collaborated with in their attempts to enact the Characters in public space; video notes highlighting how the process of *Casting Call* materialized in different stages; and accompanying textual material. This body of work stems from the rehearsals and try-outs of this ongoing process. It accumulates and is worth caring for because it permits the collectivity of the participants to go back and inspect what has happened.

The research is disseminated to several types of audience — in artistic, academic, and broader contexts — through both its artistic and discursive bodies taking on various formats: performative events, discursive events, interventions, and exhibitions. As an exhibition, it takes the form of an installation unfolding as a parade, demonstrating the steps taken, providing evidence of what I have been writing about — exhibits as testifiers — and inviting the



visitor to partake in a sensorial experience. It is an installation of works as remnants of the research process — leftovers to be cared for — that document several parts of the process, from imagining to actualizing parts of the parade. They include printed journals, film notes (shot between 2017 and 2020), drawings of costumes and characters, performance documentation, and objects (such as props, costumes, and displays). These have served as aids, testers, and witnesses through the project's circulation from solitary individual practice to participatory dialectic attempts to address an audience.

In my search for parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, the tensions, struggles, and compromises regarding my various roles and tasks within this film project led me to the answer regarding the following research sub-question: “Would it be possible to think of the parrhesiastic theater artist as a hybrid\*, assuming a role between archive, amplifying instrument for other voices, and caretaker? A caretaker functioning both as an individual enacting parrhesia him/herself *and* as an “assembler” — in the sense of Charles R. Hulbeck’s “Let it run until it happens: this is in my opinion the slogan, or *should* be the slogan, of the assemblers” (Shattuck 1992, 135) and keeping in mind Louise Bourgeois’ remarks on assemblage as a work of love, emphasizing its restorative and reparational powers (Bourgeois 1998, 142–3)? A caretaker inviting and enabling several voices to run until a polyphonic testimony emerges through a curatorial (caring, healing) artistic practice?”. To this I would respond that parrhesiastic theater artists often work in hybrid ways; they combine various mediums and assume multiple roles in their practices. A long list of contemporary artists, from Christoph Schlingensief (actor, artist, theater maker, provocateur) to Jeanne van Heeswijk (artist, curator, collective projects- training for the not-yet) to Kader Attia (artist, curator, and founder of La Colonie), to name just a few examples, testifies to that. However, I argue that these roles primarily serve the artists’ attempts to develop strategies of dissent, confrontation, provoke engagement and produce affect, enhancing the possibility for their own and other voices/bodies to “appear.” I therefore positively identify the parrhesiastic theater artist as someone assuming a number of roles, but not as a hybrid.

My explorations into contemporary artists and visual arts strategies demonstrate that in our current highly complex and multilayered reality, in which we live with an abundance of mediated images, more refined, context-specific strategies are required to enable parrhesia. At the same time, confrontational laughter is arguably under threat: in recent years sensitivities around political correctness have become fraught as the struggles of certain social groups to claim their right to be taken seriously, instead of assuming marginal positions in society, have intensified.

In attempting to apply local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater\* in Western European urban spaces, settings, and situations (Brussels and Maastricht) in our “post-truth” era, I have largely been confronted with failure, apathy, indifference, complicated situations, and/or the audience’s desire to be entertained. With the exception of local buuteredner Jan Heffels, who in performing his jokes several times on the spot (at the center of Sittard Markt) attracted a local Dutch-speaking audience tuning in to his intended meaning, it was difficult for a character to function as the local character-representative of the people in the culturally diverse and multilingual urban European settings of *Casting Call*.

There are several reasons for this: a limited understanding of the social role of art as a spectacle to consume or amuse rather than an experience to engage with; caricature functioning when it mocks others (safe irony) but not appealing to spectators to see themselves in it; the impotence of caricatural figures to collectively represent in a diverse multicultural universe of individuals; concern about the possibility of causing offense; and broken lines of tradition reinvented and redistributed as spectacle, whether in the form of a commercial en-

terprise (Maastricht Carnival)<sup>50</sup> or cultural heritage (Carnival of Binche). My investigations with performers on location in public spaces of Belgium and Netherlands in comparison to my readings on old practices prove to me that caricature’s contemporary place and role is limited. Recent developments in politics such as the US Capitol events show that fiction has become reality. We are currently experiencing a twisted and reversed order of things, as a consequence of the joker having become the king.

In response to my initial research question: “Would it be possible for local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater — by which I mean events, actions, and performances staged by characters who courageously speak their minds through scenes of excess and laughter, that take place in public view and incite the spectator’s agency to speak their own minds — to relate to and/or provide new insights into critical artistic practices today? If so, how? What is the place and role of caricature today?”, I conclude that because all of the above experiences indicate phenomena which limit the role and place of comedic popular traditional practices of parrhesiastic theater today — apathy, distraction, the need to be entertained, sensory overload — it is worth asking this particular question over and over again: how is it possible for imaginative processes to be enabled and encouraged, in order to lead to a parrhesiastic stance through humor, laughter, and excess? I suggest that the above question should be understood from a perspective of an expanded version of parrhesia, including possibilities for those who do not know, the not-yet-trained, to claim their right to “appear” by finding other ways together, for example through our bodies, as Judith Butler suggests.

My investigation into local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater provided me with an understanding of the urgency for critical artistic practices to reflect and act upon the social role of the artist in the current Western European setting. Back in 2012, philosopher, dramaturg, and performance theoretician Bojana Kunst warned about how populist and neoliberal rhetoric has been undermining and attempting to dismantle any frames that cultivate the commons, art being one of them, for several years (Kunst 2012).

In her 2020 article “What should we expect from art in the next few years/decades? And what is art, anyway?” curator and cultural producer Carmen Salas proposes a revival of the relationship between art and ethics in order for art “to take a larger social dimension. Art is about risk taking, resistance, empowerment and transformation” (Salas 2020). Artist Domenico Dom Barra argues in turn that by “shifting the focus from the art piece to the art practice and from the artist to the community, art can influence society with its practices... It’s about acting and not about making” (Salas 2020). In the same period, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has argued for a Green New Deal, insisting on the necessity of connecting the artist with the social environment through governmental support and through art institutions embracing their “collective role to support artists and culture at this time” while strengthening the relationship between the public and the arts. His references are art historian George J. Mavigliano, philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey, and director of the WPA federal art programs (1935–43) Edgar Holger Cahill, who all placed emphasis on the role of art in daily life, connecting art to society (Obrist 2020).

The last five years have often brought me to question the role of institutions and the role of audiences, but even more so the artist’s role in the circle of production and dissemination. Speaking one’s mind is a transformative practice that constantly deconstructs and redrafts the limits between one’s self and the other(s). Art is also a transformative practice that may enable and nourish the individual, as well as feed social imaginaries. Participatory nourishing systems between artist, the audience or public, and the institutions involved are urgently

needed, for creating conditions for both individual and shared reception. Strengthening the relation between the “I” and the “we” cannot happen in a capitalist logic of speedy efficiency. Cultivating the right conditions requires engagement and shared responsibility from all participants (the artist, the audience or public, and the institutions involved), allowing for public time to be spent together in conviviality with a sense of joint liability.

Back and forth in time, I kept questioning my own position in the middle of it all. From the Cynics to the modern artist to our times, a trace of the artist as a social spy with militant extensions remains. As spies, parrhesiast-artists constantly make use of their senses: they observe, listen, and smell social\* issues and situations and react to them in expressive, sensational ways. They are able to both keep a certain distance from an issue in order to observe it clearly, but also come very close, be affected by it, and transform it through their art. Parrhesiast-artists address these issues and situations through their practice: they confront, move, and affect other people because they have already been confronted with, embodied, or enacted these issues themselves. In communicating such embodiments and enactments, they mobilize their imaginations and critical attitudes as well as those of their audience in turn.

Although “truth” is a very contested term, parrhesiast-artists persist in seeking it out through the power of senses and affect, using artistic freedom of expression as a weapon. Humor, irony, play, fiction, satire, irrationality are employed to facilitate a parrhesiastic attitude. Through their artwork parrhesiasts-artists attempt to define “a time and a place, in other words a dramatic scene where truth can emerge, where subjects can be recognized in the act of truth” (McGushin 2007, 9). They create set-ups that function as reflective surfaces; it is up to the viewers’ imagination and ability to mirror themselves and discover their own truth in these set-ups. In the present complicated and loaded post-modern, post-truth landscape, contemporary parrhesiast-artists often decide to function underground (by seducing, deceiving, tricking, undermining), instead of employing straightforward approaches regarding art and truth relations, in order to grasp and hold the viewers’ attention.

Whereas not all parrhesiast-artists make explicitly political work, political questions do underpin their work. By political I mean the possibility for imaginative processes to be enabled and expressed, by making associations not previously imagined and by daring to disassociate from existing associations. Parrhesiast-artists care for the conditions needed so that they can persistently ask the question, “How can I, as an artist, practice my ability to create a kind of shared sense of what is true or meaningful?” and maintain the courage to challenge, disrespect, confront, and disrupt normality, rules, and the status quo. Paradoxically, although truth-telling is enabled by the use of play, irrationality, fiction and so on, the freedom deriving from them is often accompanied by a sense of powerlessness, traditionally the price to pay for assuming marginal positions and occupying cultural-social spheres of exception, where play and irrationality would be possible. Several historical examples in the trajectory from the Cynics to the modern artist and movements like Dada and Punk testify to that. However, the increase in numbers in recent years both of artists-activists such as Tania Bruguera, Guerrilla Girls, Ai Weiwei, Quinsy Gario, but also of artists, thinkers, writers, curators such as the ones I already mentioned in this document, seem to suggest that a paradigm shift is currently taking place. These practitioners are not so much guided by a need for destruction and/or a reaction against tradition, a Dadaist ‘undercurrent’. But rather these practitioners are guided by a sense of engagement in social change, re-evaluating boundaries between the “I” and the “we”, blending and challenging traditionally assumed functions and characteristics. To give an example, the artist and the curator: Boris Groys makes a distinction between “the sovereign, unconditional, publicly irresponsible freedom of art-making” from the “institutional, conditional, publicly responsible freedom of curatorship” (Groys 2009b). In the case of artists-researchers, the boundaries between responsible and irresponsible freedom are becoming blurred. The artist-as-researcher oscillates between the sovereign prerogative of the artist and the need for justification that makes systematic research public.

Parrhesia and art meet in this act of appearing, of making visible. For Boris Groys “art’s function is rather to show, to make visible the realities that are generally overlooked” (Groys 2009b). For Foucault, it is due to lack of visibility that “the parrhesiast performs his role”, in unveiling the “interplay between human beings and their blindness due to inattention, complacency, weakness, and moral distraction” (Foucault 2011, 16). Foucault and Groys add that the task for both the artist and the parrhesiast is to show, not to solve the problem: the parrhesiast “leaves the person he addresses with the tough task of having the courage to accept this truth, to recognize it, and to make it a principle of conduct” (Foucault 2011, 16) and “The goal of art, after all, is not to change things — things are changing by themselves all the time anyway” (Groys 2009b). To pessimistic views on art’s powerlessness, I counter that art does have the power to change society: as an artist-parrhesiast, one may help others see; by pointing, appearing, making visible, he/she may help others face realities overlooked and uncomfortable truths, and lead them to a change of conscience in turn.

















**A Selective Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words**

*The Glossary* consists of concepts and terms that have been crucial for *The Narrator’s* dissertation-writing process. The information provided on these terms is by no means exhaustive. *The Glossary’s* purpose is to offer insight into *The Narrator/Engaged Artist’s* understanding of them through a subjectively selective, idiosyncratic reading of their history that involves indicating affinities with specific thinkers. In not attempting to locate etymological origins, *The Glossary* acknowledges that contemporary linguistics operates on two levels of language analysis: synchrony and diachrony. A native speaker learns language in a non-temporal scission (in synchrony), while words, their meanings and their shapes, change through the passing of time (diachrony).

*The Glossary’s* terms are indicated by a star throughout the dissertation’s introduction and four main chapters.

**ACT/ACTION**

The term is here explored in relation to their potential to affect the onlooker, spectator, future participant. Hanna Arendt’s Chapter on “Action” in *The Human Condition*, Chantal Mouffe’s call for an expanded understanding of the artist’s role, intervening in several fields (art world, public space, education etc.) and thus opening up a variety of agonistic public spaces, as well as Claude Cahun’s opting for a “poetry of indirect action” — in her own words “setting it going and letting it break down” — as the only emancipatory way for the reader to find their way through a text on their own<sup>51</sup>, are taken into consideration in approaching this term.

**ADDRESSIVITY**

A term coined by Russian literary theorist and philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin. He defines addressivity as “the quality of turning to someone.” For Bakhtin, addressivity

51      See the analysis on Cahun, pages 40-42 of the dissertation.

and utterance (which is distinct from a sentence, as it is an act of speech whose meaning is produced by taking place on a specific occasion, and therefore it is a singular event that cannot be repeated) are interdependent: addressivity is a “constitutive feature of an utterance”; without addressivity, “the utterance does not and cannot exist” (Bakhtin 1986, 99). As Gary Saul Morson, professor of the arts and humanities at Northwestern University, puts it: “sentences provide resources for an utterance, but the utterance requires more than the sentence”; it is addressivity that “denotes all those aspects of the utterance that make it dialogic in the deepest sense” (Morson 2006, 55).

### AFFECT

In *The Engaged Artist's* film, *Notes on Parrhesia* (2015), interviews with Gezi Park protesters looking directly at the camera exposed a personal-affective point of view, revealing a moment where the personal becomes the political — the political being embodied by individuals in society. Artists work with the senses to produce affects. In this dissertation the term is understood in accordance with a description from Simon O’Sullivan, professor of art theory and practice at Goldsmiths, of affect as extra-discursive and extra-textual, immanent to matter and experience (O’Sullivan 2001, 126), and it also takes into consideration the writings of Brian Massumi and Chantal Mouffe.

### AGAINST

This refers to all cases where parrhesia takes place through confrontational relations between language, images, gestures, and postures: language that respects nothing, language that confronts (caricature, the Cynics), language against disciplining, and so on.

### AGONISTIC

A term coined by Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe that clearly opposes Jurgen Habermas’ understanding of public space as the locus for the creation of consensus. Mouffe counter-proposes an agonistic approach; she understands public space as the terrain “where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation” (Mouffe 2013, 92). Mouffe considers an agonistic space as the locus for democracy. In this research, the focus is on how laughter and/or excess may contribute to the production of an agonistic space.

### APPROPRIATION

The employment of pre-existing strategies, techniques, or tools for a new purpose. François Rabelais appropriated the form of the novel in order to satirize the humorless official ideology of the Church, and Mikhail Bakhtin in turn appropriated Rabelais to criticize the novel’s misuse by his Soviet contemporaries — as a genre now obliged to serve the state — and to propose instead his vision of it as a “celebration of linguistic and stylistic variety.”<sup>52</sup> In

Western art, appropriation’s popularity and use as a strategy rose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the collages of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the proposition of ready-made objects as artworks by Marcel Duchamp, but also in Surrealism and Pop Art, to name a few examples; it reached its peak in the 1980s, with a group of US artists, including Sherrie Levine, who pushed it to its limits by reproducing the work of other artists and claiming it as their own.

While in the 1980s appropriation in art was related to irony and post-modernism, in recent years the term has been revisited and is now seen in a different light, either as dedication (Isabelle Graw) or invocation (Jan Verwoert). Cultural appropriation means the borrowing of an element of cultural expression of one group by another. In this research, appropriation means revitalizing semi-forgotten practices that encourage inclusivity through entertainment — an empowering tool for parrhesiastic practices. Appropriating here means re-imagining.

“Appropriation” in art is here understood with reference to Isabelle Graw’s essay “Dedication Replacing Appropriation: Fascination, Subversion, and Dispossession in Appropriation Art” (2004) and Jan Verwoert’s “Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art” (2007). They both discuss a shift in historical momentum from the 1980s to the 2000s, and how this affected ways in which the relation between the appropriating artist and the appropriated material is perceived.

### ARTISTS’ WRITING

The act, process, and/or practice of writing as exercised by visual and performing artists. Artists’ writing occurs in a wide range of forms: artists’ books, artists’ statements, art theory, autobiography, correspondence, diaries, essays, interviews, memoir, fiction, and poetry — to name but a few.

- texts written in parallel to one’s artistic practice (paratexts), texts written *about* art
- texts written *as* art
- texts and other linguistic forms written to serve an artistic purpose; texts incorporated into artistic practice as tools and/or part of an artwork (i.e. a script to be performed).
- hybrid\* formats consisting of words, images, and performative gestures (i.e. artists’ books, memoirs, etc.).

### COMMUNICATION

Throughout this dissertation, communication is understood not as regulation but as affect. “To be means to communicate” (Bakhtin quoted in Morson & Emerson 1990, 50).

### ENGAGED ARTIST

An artist concerned with the social dimensions and communicative aspects of art. An artist who cares for the social impact of artistic practices and opens up spaces for conflict, bonding, and possibilities to imagine and/or act with, against, and through others.



**ETHICS**

Concerning questions that examine what a good “way of being” or “way of living” is — what a wise course of action can be, and how to live well together with others. I explore ethical aspects of parrhesia in Chapter I.

**EXCESS**

Excess is understood as overstatement and exaggeration, including wrong or inappropriate use of language such as hyperbole (the speaker overemphasizing their emotions) and catachresis (use of the wrong word for the context). In her book *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*, Anca Parvulescu traces interesting links between laughter and excess in philosophical avant-gardes, placing emphasis on Georges Bataille, who perceived laughter as a passion, as therefore excessive by definition and exceeding negativity, and Derrida’s claim that “laughter exceeds dialectics and the dialectician” (Parvulescu 2010, 83).

**EVENT**

In this dissertation the notion of the event is examined mainly through Alain Badiou, Brian Massumi, and Slavoj Žižek.

**HYBRID**

Here I take into consideration media studies professor Jürgen E. Müller’s reading of the term as “a mixed form of two concepts from two language systems, the Latin *hibrida* (bastard, mixed blood) and the Greek *hubris* — excess (cf. Samoyault 2001, 175). The term ‘hybrid’ is thus founded on the process it designates. It denotes and connotes moral (later: artistic) and (more or less) excessive transformations of beings and objects” (Müller 2010). I specifically discuss my understanding and approach of the terms “hybrid” and “hybridity” in and through my research project and artistic practice, within the context of contemporary art and film, on pages 53, and 100–101 of this dissertation.

**LAUGHTER**

A form of communication and a social behavior, rather than a reaction to jokes (Scott 2014). A resilience tool. For Bataille, laughter “destabilizes our self-sufficiency”: when we laugh at someone’s misadventures we are laughing at ourselves. This leads to the founding of a community based in a common experience of “failure” (Parvulescu 2010, 91). “Laughter is a specific aesthetic relationship to reality, but not one that can be translated into a logical language; that is, it is a specific means for artistically visualizing and comprehending reality and, consequently, a specific means for structuring an artistic image, plot, or genre. Enormous creative, and therefore genre-shaping, power was possessed by ambivalent carnival laughter” (Bakhtin quoted in Morson & Emerson 1990, 463).

**LAUGHTER/MOVEMENT**

←Way Out (Georges Bataille) →  
↓  
From Language to a Sound

- Witness and Participant in a movement backwards

**LAUGHTER/ACTIVE VERBS**

(A list inspired by verbs in Anca Parvulescu’s *Laughter Notes on a Passion* (2010).)

Alienate  
Battle with laughter  
Bend in unpredictable ways  
Break  
Burst  
Comfort  
Correct  
Crack down/up with laughter  
Deform  
Die laughing  
Distort  
Disturb  
Faint with laughter  
Interrupt  
Laugh at →  
Laugh until you split  
Make space for  
Overtake the subject  
Shatter  
Split  
Stretch in unpredictable ways  
Twist in unpredictable ways  
Repeat  
Tremble  
Unsettle  
Upset (aesthetic and moral requirement of control)

**LAUGHTER/POSITIONS MIDDLE VOICE**

- At the mercy of (Laughter)
- Engulfed by (Laughter)

**PARRHESIA**

See Chapter I: Regarding Parrhesia.

## PARRHESIASTIC PRACTICES

These are exercises — understood in the ancient Greek context of “askesis” — aimed at finding the courage to speak one’s mind by positioning and expressing oneself in relation to others.

## PARRHESIASTIC THEATER

Events, actions, and performances staged by characters who courageously speak their minds through scenes of excess and laughter, that take place in common view and effect the spectators’ agency to speak their own minds.

## PERFORMANCE/PERFORMATIVITY

The use of one’s body as an expressive tool in order to “appear” in common view, aiming at affecting others within a framework of artistic purposes. Responding to a specific time and place, context, or situation through one’s body. This includes speech-acts, non-verbal use of voice, and bodily movement and gestures. In *Casting Call*, I draw references from experimental uses of performance in the visual arts in avant-garde movements of the beginning of the century such as Dada and focus on strategies of performance art, and employ performative\* strategies to work with others, alternating between directing and delegating responsibility and authority. In doing so, I appraise recent considerations of performance “as a way of engaging directly with social reality, the specifics of space and the politics of identity,” as well as theorist Jonah Westerman’s suggestion of performance as “a set of questions and concerns about how art relates to people and the wider social world” (Westerman 2016).

Here I need to mention the concept of performative language, first described by philosopher John L. Austin and the concept of “performativity,” which can be defined as “the power of language to effect change in the world: language does not simply describe the world but may instead (or also) function as a form of social action” (Cavanaugh 2015). In the 1990s, Judith Butler developed the concept of performativity as a social process, through which the formation of gender takes place. In her *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler examines how the notion of the performative (bodily performativity) relates to protests and assemblies. She suggests that in claiming their right to appear, precarious bodies and communities can strengthen each other by coming together, positively affirming that performativity is about bringing about some change in the world.

## REHEARSAL

In using the term “rehearsal,” *The Engaged Artist* aligns herself with Spanish philosopher José Bueso, who examines the different meanings the term entails in various languages, from the French *répétition*, to the German *Probe*, and the Spanish *ensayo*, which includes multiple meanings: “essay,” “trial,” “test,” and “attempt.” Instead of sticking to the English-language rendering of the term, Bueso proposes a “rehearsal/repetition/Probe/ensayo semantic constellation as an ensemble” (Bueso 2016, 113).

## STAGE

A theatrical space\*. The origin of the public stage is the ancient *bema*, an elevated platform made out of stone, which was part of the Greek agora between the sixth and until the end of the fourth century BCE. By taking a small step up onto the *bema*, the speaker made a simple symbolic gesture that transformed the stone into a podium.

## THEATRICAL SPACE

By theatrical space I mean a physical space where an action can take place in common view, a space in which the viewer’s agency is consciously enabled and mobilized through the physical relationship of their body (and voice) to other bodies, voices, and the architecture within which the action is taking place.

## THEATRON

The semantic ensemble of three definitions of Greek theater at different times in history: initially the group of the spectators/onlookers, later on the actual space or locus of the spectacle, and finally the spectacle itself. In Gezi Park, all three definitions came together in one entity: the spectators were at the same time the actors and producers of the event.

## THROUGH

This refers to all cases where parrhesia takes place through an appropriative relation between language, image, and gesture, incorporating and/or re-enacting methods and strategies from the past.

## TRUTH/ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ

A semantic ensemble of verity/truth/ αλήθεια.

*Verity*: The quality or state of being true or real.

*Truth*: History and etymology for *truth* — Middle English *trewthe*, from Old English *trēowth*, fidelity.

*Αλήθεια* is not *Truth* (Heidegger). According to the *Liddell-Scott Dictionary*, the noun αλήθεια derives from the verb λήθω = λανθάνω (= I escape the attention of someone, I remain unknown, invisible) and the deductive “α.” More precisely, from the verb in future tense: λήθω. So αλήθεια with the -a deprivation is what is not hidden, what does not go unnoticed, the real. «Αλήθεια» is a compound, privative prefix «ἀ-» + verb «λήθω» (which means “to be hidden, be unknown,” a cognate of Lat. latēre, “to be concealed, hidden”).

Georgios Babiniotis, Greek linguist and philologist validates the above:

Speaking of αλήθεια, for example, let us look at its etymological origin. The adjective αληθής (from where αλήθεια) came from the privative α- and -λήθος, («λήθη») [the (“forgetfulness”)] or the very word λήθη (forgetfulness): α-ληθής was therefore originally “he who may not pass into oblivion, be forgotten or concealed”, therefore “he who does not hide, is not concealed, but is obvious, tangible, real, true”. By the way,

it should be noted that the ancient (already in Homer) word ἀληθής and ἀλήθεια does not derive from the same root word λάθος, which appears very late (in later times).<sup>53</sup>

### **WITH (CARE)**

This refers to all cases where parrhesia takes place within healing, therapeutic relation(s) through interactions based on language, image, and gesture. It takes into consideration the Epicurean community's antique form of existential group psychotherapy and Hanna Arendt's proposal in *The Human Condition* for speaking and acting *with* others rather than *against* or *for*.

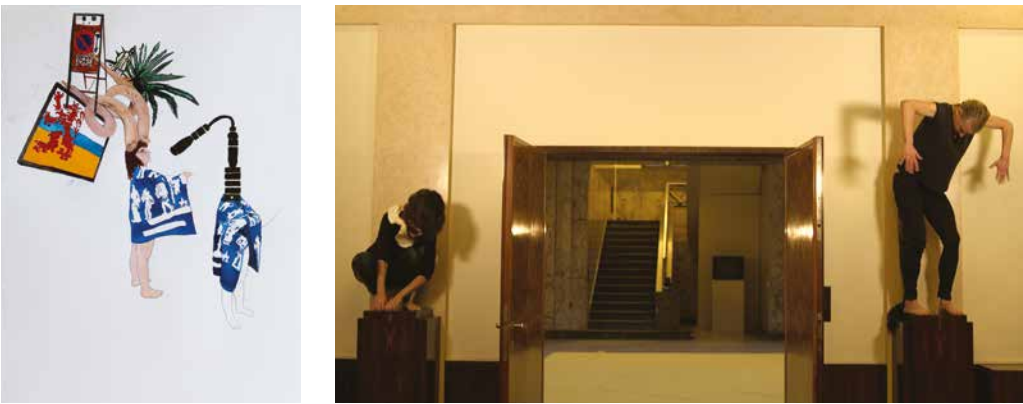
Appendix 1

**Character 1: *The Collector of Proverbs***



[The description of *The Collector of Proverbs* appears in Chapter III, pages 65-66]

**Character 2: *The Animal***



[The description of *The Animal* appears in Chapter III, pages 66-67]

**Character 3: *The Fool***



[The description of *The Fool* appears in Chapter III, page 67]



### Character 4 (Post-Internet): *The Selfie-Junkie*



[The description of *The Selfie-Junkie* appears in Chapter III, page 68]

### Character 5: *The Innocent*

Onschuldig.

This Character draws inspiration from the feasts of The Innocents (1284–1559) in Laon, mentioned in Champfleury's *Caricature Antique*, described by Thomas Wright as “closely allied to, if not identical with, the feast of fools,” “celebrated in many towns of France with the same ceremonies,” including processions and the election of a bishop of Innocents (Wright 1845, 164).

### Character 6: *The Child*



*The Child* wears the world in its totality.

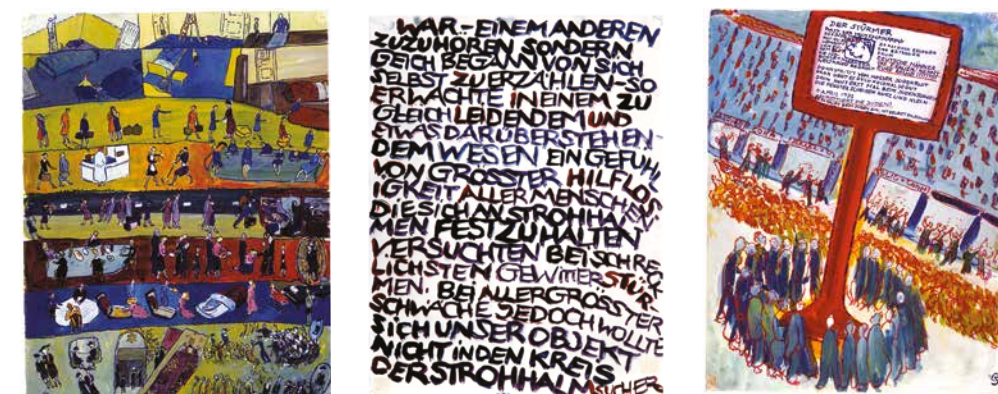
*The Child* is constructed through an accumulation of several stock children's characters that appear in Belgian, Greek, and Dutch film, comics, and so on. Each time *The Child* performs a turn around themselves, one of these characters comes to life. Examples of characters from pop culture that could be used to build this Character's movements, gestures, and expressions include: *Spithas* (Sparkle) is a popular character from the Greek weekly comic *Little Hero* of 1953. He is part of an unbeatable trio of young Greek heroes fighting the German, Italian, and Bulgarian conquerors during the years of the German occupation (1941–44). Agathon, a contributor to Greek cultural and political magazine *Anti* (1972–2008), describes *Spithas* as (my translation) “corpulent ... portrayed as a funny caricature with a large round nose, large eyes, and slight stubble” (Agathon 1995, 77). Filippou Filippou defines him (also my translation) as the “funny one of the gang, the buffoon, eternally hungry and altruistic” (Filippou 2001). *Adhemar*, a Flemish comic-book character in the Belgian comic-strip series *The Adventures of Nero* (1947–2002) by Marc Sleen. He is a child prodigy who is also a professor and an inventor.

### Character 7: *The Drunk*



*The Drunk* utters a parrhesiastic language because alcohol impairs our control over language barriers. *The Drunk's* language can often be aggressive, insulting, and provocative. In fact, *The Drunk* often uses his drunkenness as an excuse to make provocative statements, through which he is clearly seen and heard. References used to build this Character include: Flemish paintings of peasants examined in Gibson's *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter*, famous drunks, and gestures from film and theater.

### Character 8: *The One Who Has Nothing to Lose* (After Charlotte Salomon)



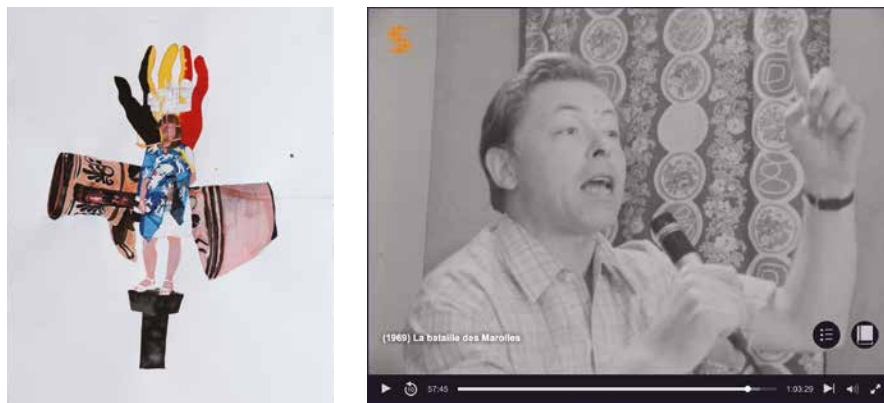
[The description of *The One Who Has Nothing to Lose* appears in Chapter III, page 69]

### Character 9: *The Angry*



[The description of *The Angry* appears in Chapter III, pages 69-70]

### Character 10: *The Authorized Representative (at Higher Powers' Command)*

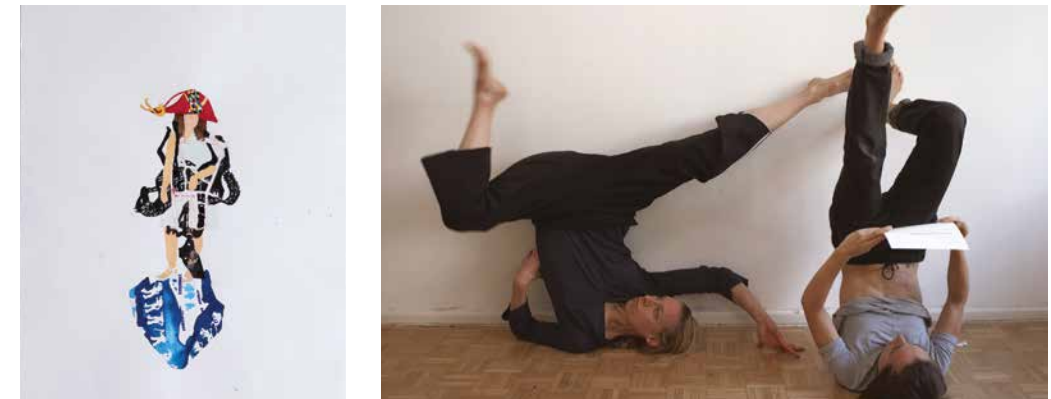


A fighter who is a representative of the people and is accepted by them. Being on duty. Speaking up his mind for the common good because higher powers command him.

Sub-categories: *The Visionary*, *The Idealist*.

The source of inspiration for this Character is Catholic priest Jacques Van der Biest (1929–2016), “the priest of the Marolles,” who was known for his social involvement in that working-class area of Brussels for more than fifty years. He is depicted in the 60-minute Belgian documentary *La Bataille des Marolles* (1969), by Pierre Manuel and Jean-Jacques Piché, as one of the main characters in the fight against the threat of the Marolles’ destruction by a major redevelopment project.

### Character 11: *The One that Brings the World Upside Down, Moving Between Speech and the Irrational*



This Character treads on a Greek flag ornamented by Karagöz figures and ancient Greek motifs. She is clothed in a dress printed with a Google map of her home address — the streets hold the dress around her body. She wears a Napoleon hat (as seen at the Maastricht Carnival) on her head. She holds the image of a horse upside down. Whereas the Ancient Greek word for horse is “ἵππος,” its Modern Greek version is “ἄλογο,” which literally means “ἄνευ λόγου” (without speech). Initially this word appeared in phrases such as ἄλογα ζῷα (animals that cannot speak), as opposed to ἔλλογο (speaking) humans. Later, in medieval times, the meaning of the word changed due to Byzantine military terminology, which categorized living matter and as such distinguished horses, ἄλογα, from men (that is, soldiers). The Greek phrase “πράσινα ἄλογα” (green horses) has negative connotations, suggesting unreal, unattainable situations. “Παράλογον” translates to irrational, absurd. In the tradition of Surrealism, Meret Oppenheim used the irrational as a parrhesiastic weapon. In a similar vein, this Character plays with and overthrows the order of things, bringing the world upside down in order to utter parrhesiastic speech.

### Character 12: *The Displaced*



This Character holds a badge bearing the slogan “Spreek Nederlands met mij,”<sup>54</sup> seemingly using it as a communication tool, but actually using it as a shield. Once she unshields herself,



it is revealed that the words are also imprinted on her body. Her legs are squeezed inside a vase of the Limburg region, a vase which has as many cracks as places that she carries with her in her mind. Her legs dissolve in this watery, cracked landscape, her yellow sandals float, and red lions from the Limburg flag act as her greaves or shin pads. She is tied to her cultural inheritance in the form of a Greek vase she feels obliged to carry around her heart. She cannot yet speak the local language, but she carries a camera on her head, documenting everything. This assemblage is tied onto a plinth, as an exhibit of someone who doesn't speak the language of the region.

Another version of the *Displaced* would focus on how she speaks what she sees as she moves, paying the price of not properly belonging. Her costume emphasizes her emotional displacement and tensions rising from a sense of obligation tied to several places. She holds a walking stick to guide her way. Her face is painted in the national colors of the country written in her passport, and she carries a heavy heritage on her head. This is what others project onto her. She treads on the carpet of the region that hosts her. Her socks are different, one for each of the countries that feed her.

**Character 13: *The Disguised (Elk-Gilles-Domino-Collective consciousness)***



[The description of *The Disguised* appears in Chapter III, page 71]

**Character 14: *The One Who Produces Burning Images***



This character is indebted to a practice with a long tradition, represented by Honoré Daumier, Francisco Goya, and James Ensor, among others. His or her images tell us everything — there is no need for language to step in. Examples of such images include: Daumier's lithograph *Gargantua* (1831), Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels* (1889), and Goya's *The Burial of the Sardine* (1812–14).

My investigation into caricature led me to a genealogy of artists with more “literally organized brains” (painters of parodies), as distinguished by Champfleury from those artists who only care for the beautiful (Champfleury 1867, 191–92). Champfleury also notices that such an artist “deals with the things of his time, is indignant about them, and his indignation is the strength of his pencil; but it is the facts that strike him, the news, current events” (Champfleury 1867, 192). These qualities could be attributed both to a caricaturist and a critical contemporary artist.

**Character 15: *The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains***

Precise and sarcastic, this Character is often understood as cruel. He or she operates in the arena of satire. References include: Diogenes, Aristophanes, Lucian of Samosata and his invention of the Satirical dialogues, a parody of the Socratic dialogues in which he often mocks philosophers, including Diogenes, Heraclitus, Pythagoras and Socrates, Freek de Jonge, Kees van Kooten, and Stathis Psaltis.

**Character 16: *The One Who Negates and/or Contradicts as a Necessary Counterweight to Human Vanity*<sup>55</sup> (Champfleury 1867, 286–7)**





Doe *Niet* Normaal. The Reactionary. The Cynics. Dada. Foucault's 19<sup>th</sup>-century modern artist: parrhesia is about living a life as an artist. Foucault argues that it is within art that the "most intense forms of a truth-telling with the courage to take the risk of offending are concentrated" (Foucault 2011, 189), as opposed to those forms of "good" parrhesia (for example the Socratic) characterized by "a certain harmony, a certain homophony between what the speaker says and his way of life" (Foucault 2011, 169).

**Character 17: *The Pair***  
**(Karagöz & Hatzivat, Jacobse en van Es, droll & internet troll)**

*"Enthusiasm is the face of the medal on the reverse of which is engraved: Irony"*  
 (Champfleury 1867, 288)



"Veer hōbbe eine lestige sjtoulgank"  
 Grote optocht Sittard 2010  
 Theresie Tholen en Sjra Borsboom



Karagöz and Hatzivat

A primordial version of the *Pair* is to be found in the relationship of the *Fool* to his bauble. Parrhesia here takes place through the linguistic and gestural interaction between the two characters. Examples of Pairs include:

*Karagöz and Hatzivat*

Karagöz is the protagonist of Ottoman shadow theater and Hatzivat is his counterpart. Hatzivat is refined, eloquent, careful, upper-middle-class. He holds his tongue. Karagöz is clumsy, awkward, marginal, working-class, and says whatever comes into his mind. Karagöz and Hatzivat interact linguistically by using techniques such as rhyming and misunderstanding, through which parrhesiastic statements are made by Karagöz.

*De TegenPartij* (Jacobse en van Es) Turkenburg<sup>56</sup>

A Dutch version of *The Pair* that also incorporates Character 16 (*The Reactionary*) can be detected in Jacobse en van Es. In his essay titled *Vilstiftlijnen*, historian and journalist Bas Kromhout introduces a sketch of the satirical duo Kees van Kooten and Wim de Bie, broadcast on television by the VPRO in 1980, as follows:

Proud and slightly nervous, Tedje van Es, order leader of the Counterparty, stands in front of his map of the Netherlands. ...On the map thick lines have been drawn with felt pen. These are the boundaries of twenty new provinces, as they have been projected according to the party program. One province for every foreign minority group.

Detecting visual likeness between Africa and the Groningen and Friesland borders, the pair proposes to

stick all the Tunisians, Moroccans, and Algerians here. 'Home Country'. Just like their home. 'The Turks, in their turn, will be based in Drenthe,' because of the spacious possibilities for sheep, and the Surinamese in the south, because 'there it's always a few degrees warmer.' The purpose of this division is that the Randstad becomes a 'Blankstad' [White City]. From now on, the 'Dutch people who can't stand no more foreigners' live here. Foreigners can only enter Blankstad on presentation of a pass. 'And so your Counterparty will make free boys out of all frightened citizens.'



With their 'The Counterparty', comprising stereotypical The Hague characters, they made fun of that part of the Dutch population that was afraid of immigrants and angry with the elite. As often happens with good satire, Jacobse and Van Es became extremely popular with those whom they mocked. (Kromhout n.d.)

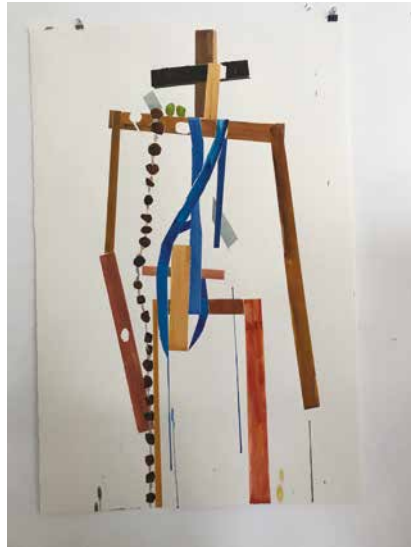
Two starting points – suggested dialogical scenes for *The Pair*, exploring how paradoxical acts of communication may take place through misunderstandings and non-communicative language twists. To be developed in collaboration with performers:

1. A droll ("shit" is "drol" in Dutch) is trying to set up a conversation with an internet troll.<sup>57</sup>
2. *L'Electeur Aphone et le Lecteur I-phone*.

<sup>57</sup>

In the online world, a troll is someone who starts quarrels or upsets people by posting inflammatory or off-topic comments on an online community or comments page to provoke emotional responses or purely to disrupt the discussion.

### Character 18: *The Healer/Caretaker*



Undoing the silence. Words healing meaning. The healing power of laughter. *To heal you, to help you undo your silence, I need to first make you laugh, in order to remove fear from you.*

This Character is inspired by activists such as Louise Dunlap, author of the book *Undoing the Silence: Six Tools for Social Change Writing* (2007), but also practitioners such as author, political journalist, world peace advocate, and inner healer Norman Cousins, particularly his book *Anatomy of an Illness: As Perceived by the Patient* (1979), and pioneer in gelotology and the therapeutic humor movement Allen Klein, particularly his *The Healing Power of Humor: Techniques for Getting Through Loss, Setbacks, Upsets, Disappointments, Difficulties, Trials, Tribulations, and All That Not-So-Funny Stuff* (1989). Also see: <http://www.allenklein.com/particles.htm>.

*The Healer/Caretaker* practices frank criticism in a friendly manner, following the tradition of the community of the Epicureans.

### Character 19: *The One Who Is Out of Place and Out of Time*



The *One Who Is Out of Place and Out of Time* utters parrhesiastic speech and produces laughter through the conflicts, contradictions, and dissonances in the space, time, and language within which he or she operates. Their behavior, words, and deeds are out of phase or out of sync with how reality is perceived by the others, the majority. Being out of context, not adjusting to the environment or the times within which they live, being lost in expressing their own thoughts and words, is used as a strategy that intensifies one's positioning against one's social settings, producing comic effects.

### Character 20: *The Wanderer/ The Traveler*

This Character's courage to speak up stems from a lack of control over the place she or he visits. Sources of inspiration include Agent Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks* (1990) and Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Scene One: A wanderer of the 1990s

The Moon. Sounds from happy Icelanders accompany the next shot, curtain moving with the wind. The camera moves in space, stops at a bedside table. A watch. The interior of a hotel room. A nervous hand picks up the watch, checks the time. The hand takes the audio recorder. Following the movement of the hand, the camera ends up with Agent Dale Cooper confessing to his secretary Dianne via the sound recorder:

"Dianne, it is 4:28 am. I've just been woken up by the most God-awful racket which you can probably hear over the sound of my voice." Agent holds the recorder up. Sound of singers. "Can you hear that? Up until this moment I've experienced nothing at the Great Northern Hotel than the most pleasant courteous service imaginable. However, it just goes to prove the point that once a traveler leaves his home he loses almost 100% of his ability to control his environment" (Lynch & Frost, 1990).

Scene Two: *Erasmus and Erasmushuis*, Brussels, 27 May 2018





I'm not going to say every day, but every week, in order to put an end to the wars in Europe, he describes in his letters the horrors he sees on the roads of Europe. He wonders why we should linger on our French, German, Italian first names and not recognize ourselves in our human surname, something one could still write today. And so, he will fight all his life against that. He will create in Louvain the College of Three Languages, where students can learn Latin, Greek and Hebrew, convinced that finally, if Latin really became the language of all the peoples of the world, well, in reality, there would be no more war. Because they would all speak the same language, they would no longer make war against each other, they would understand each other.

Erasmus travels all over Europe. When he says, "I am a foreigner everywhere," well, he's travelling in an era when people do not travel. Sixteenth-century Brussels inhabitants have never seen the sea or the mountains, only the hills of the Senne valley. This is why this man (Erasmus) is a permanent stranger. He criticizes the Church, but does not want to be a Protestant. He is close to the princes, but criticizes them in his *In Praise of Folly* and criticizes both Charles V and the pope. Nevertheless, Pope Adrian VI proposes that he become a cardinal. He has such an influence upon the thought of his time that he is able to tell the pope what he thinks but also have a pope offer him, at the end of his life, a cardinalship, which he will refuse because he does not want to be a prince of the Church.<sup>58</sup>

#### Character 21: *The One Who Cannot Keep His Mouth Shut, Challenging Common Sense*

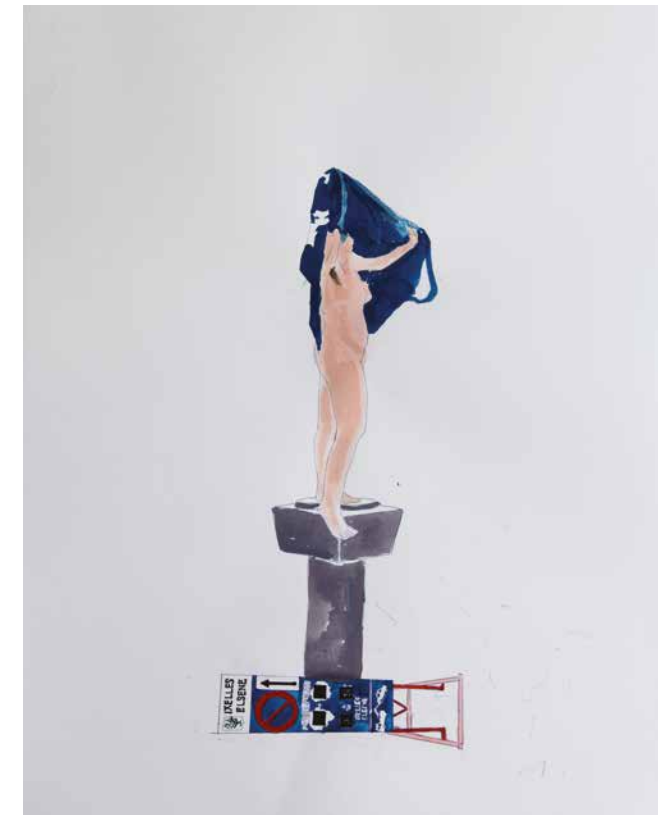


How: Speech diarrhea — challenging and provoking with an incontinence of speech. This Character draws both from an understanding of parrhesia as athyrostomia (see page 16 of this dissertation) and from antique Roman forms of farce, such as the improvised plays of the theater of the Atellanes, and Maccus, speaking a kind of invented language (macaronic language), stuffed with Oscan, Greek, and Latin (Champfleury 1867, 220–21).

#### *The Meta-Characters*

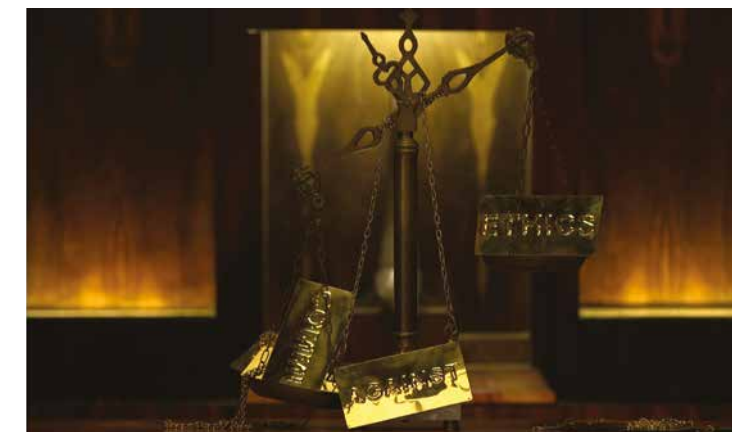
*The Ghost*, *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words*, *The Academic/ Philosopher* and *The Socially Engaged Artist* belong to a separate category from the other characters. They are the four *Meta-Characters* of the parade. This is articulated in the ways in which they enter into the text and/or parade. What differentiates the four *Meta-Characters* from the other characters is that they do not simply act, they also consider the effects of their own actions.

#### Character 22: *The Ghost*



[The description of *The Ghost* appears in Chapter III, page 72]

#### Character 23: *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words*



[The description of *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* appears in Chapter III, page 73]



Character 24: *The Academic/Philosopher*

[The description of *The Academic/Philosopher* appears in Chapter III, page 73]

Character 25: *The Engaged Artist*



[The description of *The Engaged Artist* appears in Chapter III, page 74]







SELFIE STICK :  
monopod used to take  
selfie photographs  
(Narcissistic)  
"WAND OF NARCISSUS"



MAROTTE : PROP STICK  
WITH CURVED HEAD ON IT

Typically carried by  
a JESTER/HARLEQUIN  
The miniature head  
reflects the costume of  
the Jester who carries it.























Appendix 2

The Protagonists

Performers Shila Anaraki, Gaetan Bulourde, Tarek Halaby, Philippine Hoegen, Sahra Huby, Simon Schuffelen, Margo Van de Linde, Jessica van Rüschén, and Joep Vossebeld are invited to embody several parrhesiastic characters from a pool of twenty-five characters in total.<sup>59</sup>

They embody the characters by improvising their roles. They do not learn any text by heart, but rather interpret the texts from their own perspective. They try out various props, costumes, and attitudes associated with these characters. The performers-characters go out in public space and confront real people and situations. Occasionally, in selected scenes, additional performers and extras appear on the spot. They participate and enable further interactions.

- Shila Anaraki:

Rational, self-reflective, serious, dedicated, ironic. Speaks German, Iranian, English, Flemish.
- Gaetan Bulourde:

Self-centered, clownish. Melancholic and subtle. Speaks French, English, gibberish.
- Tarek Halaby:

Caring and affectionate, with a wild, funny side. Speaks US English, Arabic.
- Philippine Hoegen:

*The Narrator*’s voiceover. Tall, loud, of humorous disposition. Speaks Dutch, English, French.
- Sahra Huby:

Active, energetic, body-aware, bold through the body, shy with language. Speaks French, English, German.
- Simone Schuffelen:

Socially engaged, practical, but also curious and intellectually hungry. Speaks Dutch, English.
- Margo Van de Linde:

Selfish, spontaneous, extrovert. Speaks Dutch, English.
- Jessica van Rüschén:

Hyper-sensitive, artistic, angry. Speaks German, Dutch, English.
- Joep Vossebeld:

Wicked sense of humor, introvert, gracious. Speaks Dutch, English, German.
- Eleni Kamma:

Impatient and indecisive, persistent. An introvert who wishes to transform into an extrovert. Speaks Greek, English, French, some Dutch.

59

The pool of parrhesiastic characters and the traits of each is analytically described throughout pages 65–75 of Chapter III and pages 135–148 of Appendix 1.



Participants in specific scenes of Casting Call  
(please note: this is not a complete list)

Beurschouwburg Agora-Parade: Performers-artists-activists: **Anna Rispoli, Oracle (Justine Maxelon and Caroline Daish), Marc Buchy, Anna Raimondo, Kopano Maroga, Einat Tuchman.**

**Dimitris Dimopoulos:** Tall, enjoys looking annoyed and sour. Speaks Greek, English, French, German.

**Camille van der Mey:** Reserved, responsible, serious, kind. Speaks Dutch, English.

**Victoria Bardakou:** Librarian at the Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht. A performer at heart. Speaks Greek, English, French, Dutch.

Extras: Megeira-followers and volunteers appear in several scenes (see for example scenes 20, 23–26).



The Script

1 INT. DESKTOP SCREEN, BRUSSELS – LATE AFTERNOON

*The Narrator* is reshuffling material of *Casting Call*’s project on her desktop. She opens a window with a short video. She starts playing the video while describing the scene according to *Casting Call*’s script:

THE NARRATOR  
(loud voice)

The film starts at a busy Rue Neuve/Nieuwstraat in Brussels. It is rush hour. Among the people, the camera literally zooms in and out. We see several performers lost and found among the passing crowd. They are asking passersby to propose metaphors for Europe in several languages (Greek, English, Flemish, and French). If Europe was a film, what kind of film would it be? (Some propose *Titanic*.) Or what song would it be? What kind of food? In a game between individual and collective bodies, we see the performers sometimes in dialogue with the interviewees. Occasionally we lose sight of them, as they are surrounded by the crowd, but we can still follow them via the audio: we hear their voices.

*The Narrator* opens another window with another video in her laptop. She reconsiders her opening scene. She starts describing what she sees and hears:

2 INT. THEATER STAGE, MAASTRICHT – AFTERNOON

On stage. Technicians are helping prepare the lights. The camera rolls. The scene is overloaded with performers, drawings, props, and costumes. **Camille** is helping unpack the costumes. The performers (**Shila, Sahra, Joep, and Simone**) are sitting on stage, looking at their scripts. They are waiting for the “director.” **Eleni** appears, dressed in *The Narrator*’s costume, followed by the camera. Her role is to provide information to the performers about the project and the objects available on stage. **Eleni** faces the performers, and is always filmed from the back, the audience never sees her face. The camera follows her and this defines the frame. She forms part of the image, which captures the performers’ responses to her, and at the same time she partly obscures the image.

We see the two hands of a performer holding a printed paper with a list of Characters.

THE PERFORMER  
(loud voice)

OK, in bold are the titles of those  
whose costumes and/or props are available on stage.

The camera cuts to a large document, being unfolded by the performer, where the Characters are displayed through illustrations made by the director/artist. Each illustration is accompanied by the Character’s title. This is the complete list:

- Character 1: *The Collector of Proverbs*
- Character 2: *The Animal*
- Character 3
- (Post-Internet): *The Selfie-Junkie*
- Character 4: *The Fool*
- Character 5: *The Innocent*
- Character 6: *The Child*
- Character 7: *The Drunk*
- Character 8: *The One Who Has Nothing to Lose*
- Character 9: *The Angry*
- Character 10: *The Authorized Representative (at Higher Powers’ Command)*
- Character 11: *The One that Brings the World Upside Down, Moving Between Speech and the Irrational*
- Character 12: *The Displaced*
- Character 13: *The Disguised (MEGERA= Collective Consciousness of Silenced Female Voices)*
- Character 14: *The One Who Produces Burning Images*
- Character 15: *The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains*
- Character 16: *The One Who Negates and/or Contradicts as a Necessary Counterweight to Human Vanity*
- Character 17: *The Pair*
- Character 18: *The Healer/Caretaker*
- Character 19: *The One Who Is Out of Place and Out of Time*
- Character 20: *The Wanderer*
- Character 21: *The One Who Cannot Keep His Mouth Shut, Challenging Common Sense*

The camera moves slowly to the final character listed — a character that consists of four different characters.

The Narrator (Meta-Character)

- Character 22: *The Ghost*
- Character 23: *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words*
- Character 24: *The Academic/Philosopher*
- Character 25: *The Engaged Artist*

VOICE OF THE PERFORMER (Shila)  
(reading the text)

*The Narrator’s* voice is that of a meta-character playing four different roles, *The Ghost*, *The Glossary*, *The Engaged Artist*, and *The Philosopher*, at the same time. These four characters highlight the four different perspectives implicated in parrhesia: as a historical notion, a verbal activity, a philosophical term, and a socially engaged practice. According to the situation and social context, emphasis is placed on one of these characters.

The performers share a common language (English), but not the same cultures (for example, in this case they are Dutch, Belgian, German-Iranian, and Greek). **Shila**, **Sahra**, **Joep**, and **Simone** explore the process that occurs when people confront each other’s opinions. They discuss the Characters, and try on the costumes assigned to them or select other ones instead:

1. They share opinions on and methodologies for the dialectical confrontations in Scene 24, *Migration* by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR). **Shila**, **Sahra**, **Simone**, and **Joep** need to decide how to adjust the ballgame to the Europa Stars Sculpture setting.
2. They evaluate the morning’s versions of *Democracy* and make decisions for their performance during Day 3 at Centre Ceramique (Scene 27). So many ways to phys-icalize democracy: What does it mean to move democratically? What is democracy to everyone?
3. They discuss *Europe* — rituals, healing processes, handing around backpacks, and the gestures employed by *The Healers* (Scene 20).

The camera captures their thinking process by following how they move or sit in the space. Some walk around with the props and costumes. Others are in discussion. The viewer feels that time has passed, and by now the performers seem to be sitting together in a kind of a circle.

3 INT. M-MUSEUM COLLECTION, LEUVEN – DAY

**Shila** performs in the Medieval Section of Museum-M Collection in Leuven. There are spectators all around her. She is a *Museum Selfie-Junkie* and carries a reproduction of the head of medieval Giant Megera, the only remaining part of Leuven’s 15<sup>th</sup>-century Ommegang.

SUBTITLE

Shila: Rational, self-reflective, serious, dedicated. Languages: German, Flemish, English.

Shila puts on and takes off the reproduced Giant Megera head while trying to film her-self with her phone. She leads the group of *The Disguised (Collective Consciousness of Silenced Female Voices)*. Shila holds her phone on a selfie stick. She looks at it.

4 EXT. RUE NEUVE AND BOURSE, BRUSSELS – EARLY AFTERNOON

We see a mobile phone screen in close-up. The first of the following two characters is presented on the screen: performer **Gaetan** is trying close-ups on camera as *The Fool* and *The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains*, striking poses along Rue Neuve and at the Bourse. The crew is stopped by a young aggressive stoned guy.

SUBTITLE

Gaetan: Self-centered, clownish. Melancholic and subtle. Speaks French, English, gibberish.

The camera slowly zooms out; we see hands holding the phone.

5 EXT. CARNIVAL PARADE, MAASTRICHT – LATE AFTERNOON

*The Narrator (Eleni)* is standing with her back against Maastricht’s official Carnival parade. She is holding a 3D print (a half self-portrait). The image cuts from a close-up of her hands holding the 3D print to her back as she stands beside the parade, watching masked participants and chariots passing by.

SUBTITLE

*The Engaged Artist.* Sentimental/expressive voice.

A voice-over explains the beginning of this filmic game:

VOICE-OVER  
(Sentimental, expressive voice)

It all started with the seven words, curatorial concepts, in Belvue Museum, Brussels. *The Narrator-Engaged Artist* invited **Dimitris, Joep, Margo,** and **Pieter** to share their visions on Europe, solidarity, democracy and so on, in the form of jokes and in their own native languages. And then performers **Shila, Gaetan,** and **Tarek** joined, as well as other people, and more variations followed. Opinions about how to deal with the jokes eventually became competitive and *The Engaged Artist* could not decide herself which ones to choose and which to leave out. Therefore she gives them now to you, the audience. The performers will fight to win your attention.

6 EXT. PLACE DE LA BOURSE, BRUSSELS – DAY

The parade’s rehearsals take place here. The camera moves around the static historical stock exchange building and observes the patterns of the architecture. Outside the frame we hear a polyrhythmic crowd, nearby. The camera moves to the front of the building where people alternate positions; from spectators sitting on the stairs to active participants — characters and narrators — parading. *The Healers, The Disguised* (led by **Megera**), *The Displaced, The Fool*, and so on. Some carry with them those who found the courage to speak their minds online, through tablet devices, phones on selfie sticks, loudspeakers, and a sound system on wheels (a little trolley) — props and traces, rhythms and leftovers of voice-raising performances in other European localities. The camera follows all characters and narrators parading, organized in groups and tableaux vivants. We see the whole group from a more distant point of view.

7 INT. BELVUE MUSEUM, BRUSSELS – DAY

An image of a white object which is called Pluralism. The object consists of a plinth with the word “Pluralism” engraved on it in Flemish, French, and German. Several cubes, triangles, and other geometrical shapes, with various religious symbols on each side, are placed on top of the plinth. The shot is used as a *pancarte* (carrier of information), announcing the next scene.

8 INT. BELVUE MUSEUM, BRUSSELS – DAY

*Shila-Megera* and three of her disciples (*Margo, Philippine,* and *Tarek*, from *The Group of the Disguised*) position themselves each on one side of the Pluralism object, telling parts of the joke to the object in turn. The camera moves slowly around the performers, each of whom explores possibilities for positioning themselves against, with, and through the others.

SHILA-MEGERA

A bar walked into a Rabbi, an Imam, a Catholic priest, a Buddhist Monk, and an atheist.  
“Who do I serve first?” said the bar, in a jolly good mood.  
But no one replied because they were not used to being entered by a bar. “Oh, come on, you all have entered me at least once, so please, I hope you understand I do the same to you now, just once?”

MARGO

They were just baffled. The bar closed up in itself and started to drink on itself. Quickly, one after the other, the Rabbi, the Imam, the Priest, the Monk, and the Atheist came knocking at the door.  
“Hey, come on, don’t be so monomaniacal, let me in!”  
But the bar kept the door closed. They were all in a circle around the in-itself closed bar and knocking to get in.  
“Alright, alright,” said the bar, “you can come in.”

PHILIPPINE

They all entered and ordered a glass. Nicely seated together, they were ready for the first one to crack a joke.  
They waited and waited.  
It took hours and days.  
The tension was hardly bearable: who would be the first to crack a joke? The bar secretly chuckled and did nothing at all.  
After three weeks they were thin and permeable like ghosts.



TAREK

And then the bar, in one beautiful blow, tangled them all up with each other. The Rabbi saw straight through the Imam, the Priest was so etherized that he used the eyes of the Buddhist, the atheist’s skin was so flimsy that he in turn could feel with the heart of the priest. And that made them all laugh so loud, so brutally seismically loud. For some minutes they were all so earth-shatteringly shaking of laughter that they caused the planet to shake just exactly that perfect tiny amount that each and every human’s spine shifted that precise little millimeter that caused us to all be released — so, so, so incredibly released.

9 INT. ALBERT HEIJN SUPERMARKET, MAASTRICHT – AFTERNOON

Margo, dressed as *The Supermarket Shaman*, enters the supermarket. She is wearing a long robe covered in images of produce: printed scans of bananas, bread, fish, beans, strawberries, and ham against a plastic-shopping-bag pattern. On her head she wears a headpiece of plastic roast turkey.

SUBTITLE

Margo: Selfish, spontaneous, extrovert. Speaks Dutch and English.

She glides through the aisles, rubbing her palms together, humming.

She finds herself in the packaged frozen meats section. She places her hands above the packages, and speaks to those who are directly around her:

THE SUPERMARKET SHAMAN

I am here to re-endow your foodstuffs with their original spirit, their source, their heart, their being. We are part of a system, and within this system we buy, and within this system our nutrients are packaged in these see-through containers.

She holds one up and looks through it with one eye, as if a magnifying glass.

THE SUPERMARKET SHAMAN

This is a part of our evolution. It will take time for the containers to dissolve into our past.

So.

I will shortcut and short-circuit your guilt trip by bringing the original presence of your food into this supermarket, your hands, and ultimately your divine body! The being of this ... burger for example!

This patty, let’s hold it together, you and I.

She places the package in someone’s hands, and hers atop them.

THE SUPERMARKET SHAMAN

We know what animal this belonged to, do we not?  
Or do we not?

THE SUPERMARKET SHAMAN  
(Looks inquiringly into their eyes)

A cow, yes, a cow. But more importantly —

She tunes in and takes a deep breath.

— to Helena. Helena was the fourth daughter of Clara and Simon, both sturdy North Belgian [or insert other appropriate country] cows, long-haired grass-grazers. Helena was a particularly elegant cow, notable for her refined grass chewing and her particularly polka-dotted coat. She had a Mona Lisa smile.

Some say this beauty was within her because her farmers

Close-up of the brand name on the package.

took good care. Took good care. Care. To take care.

She is stroking the package now as though it were a cow still.

Through this container I can still access her!  
I must use her language. Will you join me?  
MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

*The Supermarket Shaman* now attempts to incite others to join her in the calling of the cow Helena using her own language.

Your food has been endowed with the spirit, and, through  
your consuming the spirit, Helena lives on in you!  
No container can separate the being from the being now —  
you are entwined in the holy matrimony of consumption!  
May the cow be with you!

She walks to the fruit section and hold her hands above the bunches of bananas (in the Netherlands these are in plastic bags too).

Oh, great fruit of the tropics! From whence on this great  
globe? Hurlled through space in an aircraft ablaze with  
exhaust fumes all to end here, on this shelf, in this bag, in  
this time, in this EU-registered zone of distribution!  
To those who have plucked thee, to those who have  
packaged thee, we give now our thanks. For it is within your  
second shell, the yellow container, that the essence of your  
exoticism remains! We who have no time to journey to your  
land of origin can experience your soul right here, in our  
mouths! Dear, sacred banana! No amount of packaging can  
hide your soul.

Shots of **Margo** addressing the food alternate with shots of the public looking at her from the back, interacting with her. Some keep shopping, ignoring her and the camera. Others are attracted and start doing what she does. A few are annoyed.

10 INT. A GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH – AFTERNOON

Two Greek performers are performing the following characters: *The Disguised* and *The One Who Negates and/or Contradicts as a Necessary Counterweight to Human Vanity*. They are inside a Greek orthodox church. *The Disguised* is lighting a candle. *The One Who Negates* blows it out. This happens again and again, and each time *The Disguised* looks more annoyed while *The One Who Negates* looks more sardonic.

11 EXT. A GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH – EARLY EVEN.

*The Disguised* is passing a Greek Orthodox church and starts making the sign of the cross with his/her right hand. *The One Who Negates* shows up out of nowhere and starts messing with *The Disguised* to prevent this action. Their physical encounter is not hurtful but rather funny. *The Disguised* leaves, annoyed.

12 EXT. MONASTIRAKI, ATHENS – DAY

Two Greek, one Dutch, and two Belgian performers, *The Healer/Caretaker*, *The Drunk*, *The Animal*, *The Authorized Representative (at Higher Powers’ Command)*, and *The Child* are taking a Segway tour in Athens. *The Authorized Representative (at Higher Powers’ Command)* is live-streaming, and *The Child* is driving right behind

him. The others follow on Segways, until they arrive at a “taverna” with the name Referendum.

13 INT. A GREEK TAVERNA, ATHENS – DAY

Five characters, *The Healer/Caretaker*, *The Drunk*, *The Animal*, *The Authorized Representative (at Higher Powers’ Command)*, and *The Child*, are inside a restaurant called Referendum Taverna. We see the table from above. Heads. Hands, food, gestures. Those who don’t speak Greek are dubbed by Greek speakers.

The characters try to decide what to order to eat, but they are on a budget. They end up voting on what to order.

All sit at the table, except for *The Child* who runs around the table, playing, making noise, etc. *The Healer/Caretaker* holds the menu.

THE HEALER/CARETAKER  
(loud voice)

Τι κάνουμε; Παραγγέλνουμε στη μέση ή ο καθένας τα δικά του;

THE CHILD  
(shouts)

Εγώ θέλω πατάτες!

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Δεν θα φας πάλι πατάτες, θα φας κανονικά σήμερα!

THE DRUNK

Πάρτε ό,τι θέλετε, το ίδιο μου κάνει, τι θα πιούμε;

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Να αποφασίσουμε αν θα πάρουμε στη μέση ή ο καθένας τα δικά του, συμφωνώ.  
Να σηκώσουν το χέρι τους όσοι θέλουν στη μέση.

*The Healer/Caretaker* and *The Authorized Representative* raise their hands.

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Δύο για τη μέση. Να σηκώσουν το χέρι τους όσοι ψηφίζουν ο καθένας τα δικά του.

*The Authorized Representative* raises his hand, then asks *The Animal*:

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Εσύ;

THE ANIMAL  
(grunts)

I don’t know.

*The Animal* starts eating the bread. During the scene he finishes eating the bread and starts eating the plates, the glasses, the table cloth, etc.

THE DRUNK

Οπότε δύο «στη μέση», ένας «ο καθένας τα δικά του» και ένας «δεν ξέρω/δεν απαντώ». Άρα στη μέση, φέρτε μας να πιούμε, ένα λίτρο κρασί για αρχή και βλέπουμε.

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Περίμενε, να ψηφίσει και το παιδί! Αν ψηφίσει «ο καθένας τα δικά του», θα είμαστε δύο-δύο.

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Το παιδί είναι παιδί, δεν ξέρει, δεν ψηφίζει. Επίσης δεν πληρώνει.

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Και ποιος το καλύπτει το παιδί;

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Όλοι μας. Τι τρώει, ένα μπιφτεκάκι θα φάει.

THE CHILD

Πατάτες θέλω!

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Μπιφτεκάκι με ρυζάκι θα φας!

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Να σας πω κάτι, όχι! Δεν το δέχομαι! Θα καταλήξουμε πάλι να έχω προλάβει να φάω μισή μερίδα γιατί θα ορμήξει αυτό το ζώον και θα τα καταβροχθίσει όλα.

THE DRUNK

Αφού ψηφίσαμε. Κρασί!

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Σκάσε! Επίσης, γιατί να πληρώσουμε τα κερατιάτικα του μπεκρή;

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Έχεις δίκιο σ’ αυτό. Ας ψηφίσουμε πρώτα αν θα πάνε χωριστά φαγητά και ποτά. Ποιοι ψηφίζουν να τα υπολογίσουμε χωριστά;

*The Healer/Caretaker* and *The Authorized Representative* raise their hands.

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Ποιοι ψηφίζουν να υπολογίσουμε μαζί φαγητά και ποτά;

*The Drunk* raises his hand, then grabs *The Animal*’s hand.

THE DRUNK

Να ψηφίσει και το παιδί!

THE AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

Άσε κάτω το χέρι του και μην προσπαθείς να χειραγωγήσεις την ψηφοφορία!



Πεινάω...

THE CHILD

Τι ψηφίζεις εσύ;

THE HEALER/CARETAKER asks THE ANIMAL:

I don't know.

THE ANIMAL  
(grunts)

Πεινάω! Πού είναι το ψωμί...

THE CHILD

I don't know.

THE ANIMAL  
(grunts)

Είναι προφανές πως τούτος εδώ δεν είναι σε θέση να αποφασίζει ούτε για τον εαυτό του, οπότε προτείνω να αναλάβει κάποιος την κηδεμονία του.

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Ποιοι πιστεύουν πως πρέπει να του αφαιρεθεί το δικαίωμα ψήφου;

THE ANIMAL  
(grunts in disgust)

The three who voted to have *The Animal's* voting right removed try to catch him. *The Animal* jumps on the table and a commotion starts. It's a very awkward setting.

THE HEALER/CARETAKER

Ωραία, πρέπει τώρα να συσταθεί μια επιτροπή που να διαχειρίζεται την ψήφο του.

THE AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVE

*The Animal* is chased and the other three get more violent as *The Child* keeps shouting:

THE CHILD  
(screams)

Πεινάω. Πεινάω! ΠΕΙΝΑΩ!

14 INT. CHEESE SHOP, BRUSSELS – DAY

A play in a cheese shop between two characters who constitute *The Pair*. Performers **Margo** and **Gaetan** wear realistic flexible masks, which move together with the movements of their own faces, so the viewer really sees them speaking. This makes the conversation seem easy and realistic, and therefore very absurd. **Margo** is wearing a female mask and **Gaetan** a male mask. The female mask is a cast of **Margo's** mouth part, and the male is of **Gaetan's**. Wearing their mouth parts as masks emphasizes the speaking activity and gives the scene an extra strangeness. **Margo** wears additional body parts (breast parts) made from the same material of the masks.

Een man komt de kaaswinkel binnen.

DAME AAN DE KASSA

Kan ik u helpen?

MAN

4 sneetjes jonge kaas alsjeblief.

DAME

Kent u de weg naar het land waar ze Frans spreken?

MAN

Frankrijk?

DAME

Ja, dat moet het zijn.

MAN

Wel, euh ja, dat is vrij ver. Bent u van plan met de trein te gaan of met de auto?

DAME

Bij voorkeur in het Engels.

De man kijkt haar verbaasd aan.

MAN  
(verbaasd)

Kunt u me misschien toch maar eerst 4 sneetjes jonge kaas  
geven alsjeblief?

DAME

Zeker, wenst u ze Duitstalig?

MAN

Excuseer mevrouw, wij spreken dezelfde taal hier toch, wij?  
Niet? Ik heb alleen wat kaas nodig.

DAME

Pronto pronto! Oh ik voel me helemaal hongaars!

De dame doet haar schort uit, knoopt het bovenste van haar bloesje los,  
en ze neemt in elke hand een crèmige Bufala. Ze glijdt de kazen in haar  
haals, haar nek, en op haar borst. De man staat versteld.

MAN  
(bezorgd)

Kan ik u helpen?

DAME

4 sneetjes jonge kaas alsjeblief.

MAN

Wilt u mij over de streep trekken?

DAME

Kan je het in het Spaans?

Hierop neemt de man de stappen die niemand in zijn situatie voordien ooit heeft ge-  
nomen, en hij snijdt de kaas: vier sneetjes, de jonge. Wanneer hij ze zelf zo goed als  
hij kan heeft ingepakt vraagt hij aan de dame, die inmiddels haar vinger in een Chau-  
mes duwt:

MAN

Dat zal het zijn?

DAME

Ik ben zo blij dat wij elkaar begrijpen.

Ze kijken elkaar indringend aan. Hij stopt zijn kaas in een zakje en nadat ze hartelijk  
de handen hebben geschud gaat hij naar de deur. Net voor hij de winkel verlaat keert  
hij zich om.

MAN

Wij hebben de geheime taal geraakt die het goddelijk begrijpen  
grondvest, hier op aarde.

DAME

Ja..Ja.

De man sluit de deur achter zich en verlaat de winkel.

15 INT. BELVUE MUSEUM, BRUSSELS – DAY

We see an object with the word *Taal* (language) written on it. The object reminds us of  
a tree. (This shot is used as an information carrier, connecting the previous scene with  
the upcoming scene.)

16 EXT. OVERLOOKING THE ANCIENT GREEK AGORA, ATHENS – DAY

*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains* overlooks the ancient Greek Agora of Ath-  
ens, keeping in mind that the oldest orator’s platform, the bema, was and still is part  
of it. She then steps onto her own plinth and starts talking loudly about the new cyber-  
bema and its potential.

THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS  
(in English in a heavy Greek accent)

I stand here, talking to you, here where others stood  
a long time ago.  
The language they spoke was understood by many back then.  
The language I speak is understood by many now.  
I need to be heard by many.  
I stand here, where others stood, to be heard by many.  
All of you standing here hear me.  
And many of you standing here understand me.  
I need to be heard and understood by more.  
I stand on the bema, but I do not have to.  
I have a bema of my own, a bema that can reach the world.

17 EXT. PLACE DE JEU DE BAL, BRUSSELS – DAY

Shila, Gaetan, and Tarek are trying out different versions of *The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains*.

*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains* steps onto an orator’s platform and starts talking loudly about the new cyber-bema and its potential.

THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS  
(holds his mobile phone high)

Ιδού το Βήμα του σήμερα!  
Behold the bema of today!  
A bema of words and images!  
A bema of hyperlinks and hashtags!  
A bema of algorithms and worldwide reach!  
A wi-fi Bema.  
A bluetooth bema.  
A hot-spot bema.  
A google bema.  
A wiki bema.  
An insta bema.  
A Facebook bema.  
A Twitter bema.  
A bema that beams and radiates globally.  
A whole new bema, for a whole new world.  
A brave new bema, for a brave new world.  
Now we can connect!  
To the world!  
To one another!  
To ourselves!  
We can do it now!  
Free speech!  
Global reach!  
Now we can connect!  
The means IS the message!  
To connect is to connect!  
To connect is to be heard!  
To connect is to be understood!  
So connect!

*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains* is now ecstatic and tries to connect on his phone to spread the message.

Connect!  
Connect!

There is no signal.

Κονέκτ, γαμώ τη συνδεσή μου, γαμώ!  
(Connect, my fucking connection, connect!)

*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains* wanders off trying to get a good connection.

18 EXT. VRIJTHOF PLEIN, MAASTRICHT – EARLY MORNING

*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains*, performed by **Margo**, faces the empty Vrijthof Square and starts talking loudly, trying to connect, etc.

Scenes 15, 16, 17 and 18 are shown simultaneously on a fourfold split screen of this otherwise single-screen film. This is a synchronicity game, emphasizing how performers try to address uninterested audiences throughout Europe.

19 INT. BELVUE MUSEUM, BRUSSELS – DAY

An image of a white object that looks like a large globe. In the middle of the sculpture is a Europe-shaped hole. The performer, **Tarek**, starts reading Pieter de Buysser’s joke *Europe*.

TAREK

“Add one,” said the rabbit.  
“Take two back under conditions,” said the donkey.  
“Start-up procedure,” said the mole.  
And when they looked the floor was further crumbled.  
“Revision of the agreements,” said the crow.  
“Provided an exception rule,” said the guinea pig ...

20 EXT. LUXEMBURGPLEIN, BRUSSELS – EARLY AFTERNOON

**Tarek** is carrying a bag with an image on his back. The image is a reproduction of Honoré Daumier’s lithograph depicting the 1830 Conference of London, a painful historical moment from the redistribution of Europe. Animal-headed figures in costumes represent Prussia, Austria, Russia, Britain, and France. They are shown discussing a document while stepping obliviously on the corpse of a woman — Poland; Holland and Belgium are chained and crucified on the left and right sides of the image respectively.

**Tarek** arrives at Luxemburgplein. On one side, **Victoria**, *The Child*, in a pink jumper and white shoes, with a huge pink ribbon in her hair, wears the world globe, as a prop, around her torso. *The Child* spins slowly around herself, repeating Dimitris Dimopoulos’ *Europe*, a satirical poem in Greek, while listening to it through her headphones:



CHILD

I am Madam Europe the good faithful lady,  
whom people worship in every corner of the earth ...

The camera shifts slightly to the left: four *Healers/Caretakers* (performed by **Shila**, **Sahra**, **Joep**, and **Simone**) enter the frame and help each other to walk across the EU ground on which they are stepping. They play a game of stepping on their bemas and passing among themselves flags of the European Union. Their backpacks each bear reproduced parts of Daumier’s lithograph. The performers caress the fabric of the backpacks. Each performer utters the marked bold phrases of *Europa* by Pieter De Buysser (BE) above (Scene 19) and below, in his/her own native language (**German**, **French**, or **Dutch**).

VOICE-OVER  
(dreamy atmosphere, different languages, various voices)

... They looked up and noticed that a few of them were sinking away already.  
“**Again object of negotiation**,” said the hamster rapidly.  
But there was no ground anymore, no land, no sand, only falling animals clawing in the void who, each for themselves, looked for support at each other, and irrevocably fell and fell and kept on falling.  
But yet a small miracle happened. They succeeded in coming together in the glass eye of the last president of Europe. While she was asleep, wide-legged and naked, the animals mirrored themselves in the glass eye, and disappeared into it.  
In the morning the last president searched for her glass eye on the night table, she curled up her open sleepy legs and the glass eye pinpointed and launched itself right there where the new Europe begins.

Throughout Scene **20**, a number of **Extras** (**Anonymous** wearing **Megera masks**) are watching the shooting. They are part of the frame, in the background, applauding, laughing, and so on.

21 EXT. EBEN-EZER TOWER, EBEN-EMAEL – AFTERNOON

VOICE-OVER (MILES O’SHEA)

It happened in the park, where a lot of refugees pass the night.

In the background is the suggestion of sleeping animal heads (**Shila**, **Sahra**, **Joep**, **Simone**, and **Eleni**): one only sees hair, blankets, and some stuff. A puppet-volunteer

walks over them without respect. A hand, shoes, feet, etc. come out of the blankets. The puppet-volunteer just stands on the blankets obliviously.

Close-ups of heads and legs, arms, etc.

A wide shot of the park, the refugees, and environment.

Various shots of the action, with the puppet and immigrant extras in the background.

VOICE-OVER (MILES O’SHEA)  
(question comes from above,  
like a god out of the sky)

How does a European politician save a refugee from drowning?

He says: take your foot off his head.

The politician looks up, waits for the answer and starts a long, hysterical laugh. Then the politician’s head explodes (maybe with an exploding sound). The head starts to smoke, and then burns; the burning smoking head is torn apart in the end. The whole process is filmed.

Wider shot of the puppet politician looking around, and a bit of the park.

One shot of the puppet looking up while listening to the voice.

Close-up of the head from different angles.

Close-ups of the smoking and burning head: the whole process!!

VOICE-OVER (MILES O’SHEA)

And that was the decisive headbutt that changed the historic game. The asylum-seekers and refugees ran away in all directions.

The actors with animal heads — **Shila**, **Sahra**, **Joep**, **Simone**, and **Eleni** — don’t see a lot, and “run confused like blinded animals.”

VOICE-OVER (MILES O’SHEA)

The park was closed and a couple of weeks later reopened with The Monument for the Reversal. After that, no one had to run away from anyone anymore. Jokes were not needed anymore because everyone was laughing out of joy, gusto, and contentment.

When a curious reporter asked an ex-refugee,  
who was enjoying a nice little soup, how on earth  
all this had come about, he replied in the same  
words that only a few weeks ago were still  
considered to be a joke.

Wide shot of happy people in the park (**Shila, Sahra, Simone, Eleni, Peter, Joost, Bernardo, Denise, and Juliette**) wearing realistic masks and walking around eating vegetables and drinking water, playful and happy.

We see **Joep** with a puppet in the wide shot; in the background walk the happy people wearing masks that hide their faces. **Joep**, wearing a moveable face part, walks with them holding a puppet (journalist) on his hip. The puppet is a curious reporter. **Joep** is the ex-refugee who is interviewed by the puppet. **Joep** doesn't make sounds but moves his mouth; he speaks the words in voice-over. **Joep** looks funny: half official, half odd. Once he is further in the foreground than the group, closer to the camera, the journalist-puppet asks the question like a TV news anchor.

PUPPET-REPORTER

How on earth has all this come about?

Close-up: Face with mask, **Joep** saying the last sentence:

EX-REFUGEE (**JOEP** WITH MASK)

It is not that they treat me here as illegal, it is that they simply  
haven't found yet the way to welcome me.

Het is niet dat ze me hier als illegaal behandelen,  
ze weten gewoon nog niet hoe ze me kunnen verwelkomen.

Zoom out: We see **Joep** with the puppet in a wider shot embraced by the happy people wearing realistic masks that hide their own faces; they all dance together.

22 EXT. CENTRAL TRAIN STATION, MAASTRICHT – DAY

**Joep**, as *The One that Brings the World Upside Down*, **Margo**, as *The Animal-Horse*, and **Shila**, as *Megera*, are sitting next to each other on a bench on one of the platforms of Maastricht train station. The trains come and go while they tell each other jokes about Europe:

MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Europa is net een seksclub: niemand die lid is durft er thuis over te vertellen.

JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS  
THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Europa is net de Melkweg: licht van allang gedooftde sterren.

SHILA-MEGERA

Europa is als een Hollands verjaardagsfeestje: veel gezeur en weinig sfeer.

JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS  
THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Europa is als theater: het drama begint in Griekenland.

Europa is als een oude lerares: alleen de Franse president raakt er opgewonden van.

Europa is als Britney Spears: populair in de jaren 90', nu vooral treurig.

23 EXT. EUROPA STARS SCULPTURE, MAASTRICHT – DAY

Panoramic shot from the higher bridge level, above and far away, capturing all together a) the people playing the ballgame in between the steel stars and columns of Maastricht's Europe Stars Sculpture (Scene 24), b) **Shila**, as **Megera**, talking to her tablet (Scene 25), and c) **Joep** giving his speech (Scene 26).

24 EXT. EUROPA STARS SCULPTURE, MAASTRICHT – DAY

A crowd of Characters performed by **Sahra, Simone**, and eight **Extras**. All ten are **Anonymous Megera Disciples** wearing **Megera masks**. The Crowd plays a Greek game called "Who should stay in the furnace and burn?"

A ball is passed around among the members of the Crowd. On taking the ball, each player states the name of the country he or she is playing. One member of the Crowd is chosen to be the leader. All put their right foot in.

LEADER  
(chants)

«Να μένει, να μένει στο τρύπιο το καμίνι και να τσουρουφλιστεί η  
[NAME OF COUNTRY]! » (To stay, to stay in the broken furnace and burn is  
[NAME OF COUNTRY]!)

As the country is named, the leader throws the ball in the air, and the one whose  
country was called tries to catch it as the rest spread away. The one whose country  
was called catches the ball.

THE ONE WHOSE COUNTRY WAS CALLED  
(shouts)

«Στοπ! » (Stop!),  
  
(chooses country to get hit by the ball, calls it out)

If it’s a hit, the country hit is out, and if it is a miss, the one that threw the ball is out.  
This continues until there is a winner.

In the film, the countries’ names should be countries that many people are currently mi-  
grating from, and we should witness the violence through the game of immigrants try-  
ing to secure a place as the winner of a residence permit that is announced as the prize.

There is no written dialogue, as this sketch relies heavily on chance and improvisation.

The camera is on the same field as the **Anonymous Megera Disciples**, encircling the  
field, focusing on the ballgame.

25 EXT. EUROPA STARS SCULPTURE, MAASTRICHT – DAY

**Shila-Megera** is looking at her phone against the stars backdrop. **Shila-Megera** ad-  
dresses her online audience, while people — **Anonymous Megera Disciples** wearing  
**Megera masks** — play the ballgame in the background.

26 EXT. EUROPA STARS SCULPTURE, MAASTRICHT – DAY

Opposite **Shila-Megera**, on the other side of the stars sculpture, **Joep-The One that  
Brings the World Upside Down** performs a pro-colonial monologue about migration in  
Dutch. In the background we see the people — **Anonymous Megera Disciples** wear-  
ing **Megera masks** — playing the ballgame in between the steel stars and columns of  
Maastricht’s Europa Stars Sculpture (Scene 24).

JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS  
THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Nou word ik de laatste tijd nogal droevig van al die verhalen over vluchtelin-  
gen. Het raakt me echt, en dan met name het feit dat ze Europa niet in zouden  
kunnen. FORT EUROPA noemt men het zelfs. Dat hele gezinnen dus hun lev-  
en moet wagen om Europa in te komen. Dat vind ik triest. Diep Triest.  
Want het is dus onzin. Dat kun je ons niet kwalijk nemen. Ik bedoel, zij zijn  
begonnen! Zo hoorde ik gisteren over een jongeman die net in Parijs is aange-  
komen vanuit Senegal, dagen lang verstopt in een vrachtauto. Terwijl Senegal  
eerst bij Europa hoorde, het was gewoon Frankrijk. Als ze dat nu zo hadden  
gelaten, dan waren ze vanzelf bij de EU gekomen, ook nog twee keer wereld-  
kampioen voetballen geworden en had hij gewoon de bus kunnen pakken naar  
Parijs. Of de TGV, net zoals iedereen.  
En trouwens, Fort Europa, we hebben toch niet eens een muur?...

*The Narrator’s* hands appear, one holding the 3D head and the other a balance scale.  
*The Narrator* hands the head to a passerby. Focus on *The Narrator/The Glossary’s*  
dress instead, consisting of many words made out of brass and copper. Together with  
other participants they slowly start weighing the parrhesiastic words-dress.

27 EXT. BRIDGE & THE PROVINCIEHUIS, MAASTRICHT – DAY

The camera follows *The Narrator* slowly walking along the bridge. *The Animal Group*  
(**Shila, Sahra, Simone, and Joep**), wearing *business suits and masks of a fox, a dog,  
a rabbit, and a goat respectively*, move faster than *The Narrator*. The camera starts  
running behind them, leaving *The Narrator* behind. **Shila, Sahra, Simone, and Joep**  
arrive before a building of the Provinciehuis.

*The Animal Group* refers to the animals wearing costumes in Daumier’s print *The  
Conference of London*. Daumier assigned animal traits to the great European pow-  
ers involved in redrawing the borders between Belgium, Luxemburg, and Holland.  
The dog represented Holland, the fox Britain, the hare France, and so on. *The Animal  
Group* try three variations of coming together and taking turns to rhythmically speak  
parts of the text in a press-conference manner.

THE ANIMAL GROUP  
(speaks in a rhythmic way in turns, starting with  
one animal acting as the choir-leader to the group)

A nationalist and a cosmopolitan are sitting next to each other  
in a plane. High above the middle of the ocean the pilot  
announces that the motors have fallen off and they will  
all die in four minutes. The cosmopolitan starts to laugh.  
“What’s so funny about this?” says the nationalist.  
“Well, we’ve always been just a drop in the ocean and now the  
metaphor becomes real, the word becoming flesh, how  
beautiful is that?” The nationalist says, “So you think about



abstraction the last minutes before you die? I think of my family and my country.” “What do all the anecdotes mean in the face of death?” says the cosmopolitan. “The values rooted by community give me strength and confidence,” says the nationalist. At that moment the pilot announces that he has managed to get one engine running again, and that they might be able to make it.

Once landed, the nationalist and the cosmopolitan each go their own way. There has been no joke, no release, no pun, no insight, no salvation, not even a tragedy. Just the same, the nationalist and the cosmopolitan go each their very own way. But the birds in the trees on the roads they each took saw this same of the same and cried so long and so hard that their tears moved other animals as well, and soon all the animals were crying and their tears caused such a tsunami that human life was extinguished.

That the monkeys found really funny. They organized themselves together with all the other animals and, for the first time ever, planet earth became acquainted with a form of democracy that no human being had ever seen, but if they could have, it would have saved them.

Three versions:

- 1. The camera moves in a choreographed way around the performers. All performers stand still. Each *Animal* keeps a distance from the others.
- 2. The performers move in a pre-planned choreography, the camera stays still.
- 3. Camera and performers are static. Camera shoots *The Animal Group* from the hole. *The Animal Group* stands in front of the flags. They each talk to the camera frontally. First *Shila*, *Sahra*, *Simone*, and *Joep* tell the joke without masks, to make sure we have better audio on the spot. Then we register the same version, wearing the animal heads.

28 EXT. PLACE DE LA BOURSE, BRUSSELS – DAY

The parade’s rehearsals continue, but we observe them from a closer view than the first scene at the Place de la Bourse (Scene 6). The sound of the people parading increases in volume. We see *The Narrator/The Glossary* from the back.

VOICE-OVER  
(mechanical sound)

Affect, truth, post-truth, speak up ...

*The Narrator* is surrounded by all the Characters that made it to Brussels to join the parade. Some join online, others only as traces, voices, rhythms, and so on ... *The One Who Has Nothing to Lose*, *The Wanderer*, *The Ghost*, *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words*, and *The Engaged Artist* are standing with the other Characters, all speaking up, singing and dancing, and celebrating at the same time; delirium of parrhesia. The Characters come close to the screen, confronting the viewer. *The Narrator-Ghost* lifts up *The Glossary* dress and whispers about parrhesia’s relation to democracy.

29 EXT. CARNIVAL PARADE, MAASTRICHT – LATE AFTERNOON

Shots of Maastricht’s Carnival parade. *Shila-Megera* and *Margo-The Animal-Horse* enter the parade and become integrated. There is interaction between *Margo-The Animal-Horse* and a group of carnival participants riding wooden horses.

30 INT. BELVUE MUSEUM, BRUSSELS – DAY

Shot of a white object with the title *Solidarity*. The object is a white house on a square plinth. Several words of various sizes are carved on the four sides of the house. The camera zooms in on a few words: Solidariteit, Pension, Allocations de Chômage, etc.

31 INT. CENTRE CERAMIQUE, MAASTRICHT – LATE AFTERNOON

Three *Collectors of Proverbs* (*Victoria*, *Basil*, and *Pieter*) parade along the Library of Centre Ceramique, demonstrating seven placards bearing written community-related concepts that create disagreement: Europe, Solidarity, Migration, Pluralism, Democracy, Prosperity, and Language.

VOICE-OVER  
(Dimitris Dimopoulos & Lina Kalpazidou)

THE COLLECTOR OF PROVERBS  
(in Greek)

Όλοι μαζί κι ο ψωριάρης χώρια.  
Το ‘να χέρι νίβει τ’ άλλο και τα δυο το πρόσωπο.  
Χίλιοι καλοί χωράνε.  
Μοιρασμένη χαρά, διπλή χαρά.  
Μοιρασμένος πόνος, μισός πόνος.  
Ο καλός ο φίλος στην ανάγκη φαίνεται.

32 EXT. PLEIN 1992, MAASTRICHT – LATE AFTERNOON

*The Collectors of Proverbs* exit Centre Ceramique. The group is now marching along Plein 1992.

VOICE-OVER  
(Dimitris Dimopoulos & Lina Kalpazidou)

THE COLLECTOR OF PROVERBS  
(in English)

United we stand, divided we fall.  
A friend in need is a friend indeed.  
You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.  
All for one and one for all.  
We're all in the same boat.

THE COLLECTOR OF PROVERBS  
(in German)

Nicht Milch und Quark – Solidarität macht uns stark.  
Mit nur einer Hand läßt sich kein Knoten knüpfen.  
In der geballten Faust sind alle Finger gleich.

THE COLLECTOR OF PROVERBS  
(in French)

Un pour tous, tous pour un.

*The Collectors of Proverbs* approach passersby and ask for proverbs in any language on these topics, which they then collect, either by writing them down in a reporter's notebook or by registering them as audio (using audio recorders/phone recorders).

33 EXT. NICE FANCY LOCATION WITH WIDE STREET, POSH HOUSES, AND A LOT OF GREEN, BRUSSELS – DAY

A goodhearted puppet-philanthropist (voice of **Bart Verschaffel**, CASTING CALL's special guest: rational voice, clinical approach) is driven back to his house after a long hard day's work. The puppet-philanthropist looks like Character 24: *The Narrator/Philosopher*. He sits in the back of a car and looks outside. The chauffeur is an actor in costume with a black tie. We only see him from behind. The car drives very slowly.

The camera on the backseat of the car tries to take a 360-degree shot of the chauffeur, the philanthropist, and the world outside, where a poor family with three small children on their knees eating the grass at the bank along the road appears in a wide shot. We see the family from a distance: father, mother, and children. They are actors, both adults and children, with heads of a horse, a monkey, a chicken, a rabbit, and a fox. The various animals, dressed in human costumes, are eating the grass.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(to the driver)

Stop!

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(to the family)

Stap in lieve mensen!

When they arrive at his home:

MOTHER  
(to the PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST)

Oh meneer, ik kan u niet genoeg bedanken.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(showing the way to his garden where the grass stands  
2 feet high)

Geen probleem, ik heb meer dan genoeg, kijk maar.

Ga gerust je gang.

The joke is interrupted by a brief questioning by *The Narrator/Philosopher* of the role of parrhesia today.

34 EXT. STREET WITH CARS AND GREEN AREA, BRUSSELS – DAY

The family starts to eat the grass in the philanthropist's garden. Wide shot and close-ups.

The philanthropist takes an oyster out of the fridge. Unfortunately, he cuts his lip on the oyster and starts to bleed. Kitchen scene, close-up.

The father in the garden sees the man and asks if he can help. The philanthropist keeps on bleeding and the father decides to press his lips against his. Close-up and over shoulder.

The philanthropist is shocked by this gesture and flaps his hands. The father keeps on gently kissing the philanthropist on his mouth. Close-ups and whole scene.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(throws up a bit)

Dit is walgelijk! Ik moet overgeven!

The children in the garden arrive and they see how the philanthropist vomits while kissing their father.

They decide to help and propose that the man lie down.

There is no sofa or bed in the kitchen so the mother lays herself on the marble floor and the philanthropist lays himself on his back on her.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(utters)

Dddd I itt is ww aw wa algelijk!

The father on his knees next to his wife with the philanthropist on top of her keeps on kissing.

The children start spontaneously to clean.

The philanthropist is so embarrassed he shits in his pants, on top of the mother.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(to himself)

Dit overleef ik niet.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(to the children)

Breng me alsjeblief mijn telefoon.

The kids do so and the man calls his lawyer.

PUPPET-PHILANTHROPIST  
(BART VERSCHAFFEL)  
(just before he dies)

Ik laat mijn hele vermogen na aan deze familie!

Years later the father (rabbit) of the family is driven back home by his driver in his Audi after a long, hard day’s work. He sees along the road a family with three children on their knees at the bank eating grass. He asks his driver to stop ... Same framing as in the beginning of scene 33. Now the father is a rich posh rabbit in black tie. The family in the grass is human family on hands and knees.

35 EXT. BEURSPLEIN, BRUSSELS – EARLY EVENING

VOICE-OVER  
(mechanical sound)

Affect, truth, post-truth, speak up ...

VOICE-OVER  
(mechanical sound turning to emotional/philosophical tone)

The car, the family, all characters (performers and extras) and tablets and phones come together. While each of the three *Solidarity* groups — the performers who enact the Greek, Dutch, and Belgian/Flemish commissioned texts/jokes/propositions] — claims its own truth, time, and place, they are all interrupted by the Attack Choir who play their own *Solidarity* song in French. A chaotic multilingual universe unexpectedly unfolds.

Sounds get increasingly loud. Delirium of parrhesia ... Nothing makes sense anymore and this is fine. We have by now entered the agonistic space, expressing our right to dissent. *The Narrator (Engaged Artist* and *Philosopher* together in voice-over) starts walking backwards toward the camera. The camera focuses on her right hand, holding a vintage film-reel case. Facing the celebrating crowd, *The Narrator* reflects on the fact that in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, film and carnival masks, two mediums serving the collective imaginary, were made of the same stuff: celluloid. She wonders if the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s collective imaginary can be served by screens and pixels.

36 EXT. ALONG RIVER MAAS, MAASTRICHT – EARLY AFTERNOON

*Shila-Megera* is wearing the reproduction of *Megera’s* Giant head. *Margo-The Animal-Horse* is wearing a white horse head. They are walking side by side along the river Maas, facing the camera. They enter into a fiery conversation about big heads and normality. The dialogue is an improvisation on the joke *Voorspoed* by Joep Vosseveld (NL). Below is an excerpt.



SHILA-MEGERA

Oh, wat is hij mooi groot!

MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Ja, hij heeft echt een groot hoofd!

SHILA-MEGERA

Hè?

MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Wat?

SHILA-MEGERA

Dat kun je toch niet zo zeggen, ‘hij heeft een groot hoofd.’

MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Hoezo? Ik bedoel dat niet verkeerd. Een groot hoofd is toch positief? Een groot hoofd is veel beter dan een klein hoofd, want wie wil er nu een klein hoofd?

SHILA-MEGERA

Neehee, je moet gewoon geen opmerkingen maken over grootte.

MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Dat moet jij nodig zeggen, je begon zelf met te roepen dat hij zo ‘enorm groot’ is.

SHILA-MEGERA

Ho ho, ik zei: ‘mooi groot.’ Dat zegt helemaal niks over formaat, het betekent ‘precies goed’. Als ik had gezegd: ‘wat is hij klein en schattig’, dan had dat exact hetzelfde betekend. Dat weet iedereen.

[...]

End credits start while the conversation continues ...

Commissioned Texts

In the following pages the reader will find my selection of commissioned texts, which make up part of the script, in the language that they were originally written in and delivered to me by their authors.



**Europa** door Joep Vossebeld (NL)

Een lijst met bar-grappen, vergelijkingen zoals ze verteld worden op feestjes en in cafés. *The Jester* is een karakter waar dit bij past, maar ook *The Collector of Proverbs* zou hiermee overweg moeten kunnen: een opsomming van alle fouten opmerkingen over Europa. Europa kan overigens makkelijk vervangen worden door Europese Unie of EU, maar in dagelijks taalgebruik wordt Europa sowieso als synoniem gebruikt.

\*Ik heb geprobeerd zoveel mogelijk perspectieven op Europa te gebruiken: bureaucratie, Brussel, Oost vs. West, Griekenland, brexit, vluchtelingen, etc.

Europa is net de Melkweg: licht van allang gedoofde sterren.

Europa is net een seksclub: niemand die lid is durft er thuis over te vertellen.

Europa is: achtentwintig man spelen en aan het eind winnen de Duitsers.

Europa is als de zon: komt op in het Oosten en gaat ten onder in het Westen.

Europa is als de katholieke kerk: alleen Afrikanen geloven er nog in.

Europa is een goocheltruc: als je weet hoe het werkt haak je af.

Europa is net een carrière: Als je er een hebt wil je er weer mee stoppen.

Europa is als het Nederlands elftal: duurbetaald, weinig effectief.

Europa is als een neushoorn: gefotografeerd door Amerikanen, opgejaagd door China.

Europa is als urineren in het openbaar: alleen in Brussel zijn ze er trots op.

Europa is als regen: vooral leuk voor de boeren.

Europa is als bier met schuim: alleen de Britten lusten het niet.

Europa is als theater: het drama begint in Griekenland.

Europa is als een wandelstok: vooral oudere mannen lopen ermee weg.

Europa is als een Hollands verjaardagsfeestje: veel gezeur en weinig sfeer.

Europa is als een oude lerares: alleen de Franse president raakt er opgewonden van.

Europa is als het Vaticaan: de populariteit daalt als er een Pool de baas is.

Europa is als een etentje met collega's: gezellig tot er betaald moet worden.

Europa is als Britney Spears: populair in de jaren 90, nu vooral treurig  
(iedere andere boy/girlband uit de jaren 90 is mogelijk).

Europa is als een bejaarde oma: men wil er niet voor zorgen, maar wacht wel op de centen.

Europa is als het universum: we snappen nog steeds niet hoe het werkt en het blijft maar uitdijen.

**Europa** door Pieter De Buysser (BE)

‘Één toevoegen’, zei het konijn ernstig. ‘Twee terug nemen onder voorwaarden’, zei de ezel. ‘Opstartprocedure’, rispoteerde de mol. En wanneer ze keken was de grond verder verkruid. ‘Herziening van de akkoorden’, zei de kraai.

‘Mits een uitzonderingsmaatregel’, zei de cavia.

Ze keken op en stelden vast hoe enkelen onder hen al aan het wegzinken waren.

‘Opnieuw onderwerp van onderhandeling’, zei de hamster snel.

Maar er was geen grond meer, geen land, geen zand, alleen vallende dieren die in de leegte klauwen en elk voor zich steun zochten en onherroepelijk vielen en bleven vallen. Toen gebeurde een klein wonder. Ze slaagden erin samen te komen in het glazen oog van de laatste president van Europa. Terwijl zij sliep, wijdbeens en naakt, spiegelde de dieren zich in haar oog, en kropen erin.

Die ochtend zocht de laatste president tastend naar haar glazen oog op het nachtkastje. Ze krulde haar benen slaperig de hoogte in en opende ze. Stante pede mikte en schoot het glazen oog zichzelf recht in de oorsprong van het nieuwe Europa.

*Europe* by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR)

Ευρώπη (EUROPE)

CAST  
The Child

LOCATION  
Statues, pictures of women. Melina Merkouri near the Acropolis, The Sleeping One at the 1<sup>st</sup> Graveyard of Athens, Aliki Vougiouklaki’s ad for Fix in a tavern, etc.

PLOT  
The Child recites a school-play poem about Europe.

SKETCH  
*As THE CHILD recites the poem, the location changes.*

THE CHILD  
Είμαι η κυρά-Ευρώπη  
Η καλή, πιστή κυρά  
Που λατρεύουν οι άνθρωποι  
Στης γης καθεμιά γωνιά

Μ’ αγαπούν από τη Δύση  
Μέχρι την Ανατολή  
Κι ο Βορράς, κι ο Νότος ίσοι  
Στην αγάπη τους κι αυτοί

Κάποτε, συχνά, μαλώνουν  
Να τους πω ποιον αγαπώ  
Και καμιά φορά θυμώνουν  
Που δεν θέλω να τους πω

Οι λαοί όλοι, παιδιά μου  
Ξέρω κάθε τους λαλιά  
Μα τη γλώσσα τη δικιά μου  
Τη μιλά κάθε καρδιά

Είναι γλώσσα που ενώνει  
Είναι γλώσσα φυσική  
Κι όσοι νιώθουν κάπως μόνοι  
Τη μιλούν στο πι και φι

Και γελά αλλά και κλαίει  
Κάνει ό,τι χρειαστεί  
Για να πει αυτά που λέει  
Και να κατανοηθεί:

«Αν με ψάχνεις, μη φοβάσαι  
Ξέρω πού ‘σαι, θα σε βρω

Θα σε βρω όπου και να ‘σαι  
Μέσα ή έξω απ’ το Ευρώ

Κι εσύ θα με καταλάβεις,  
Έχω δάδα που κρατώ  
Και φωτιά θα παραλάβεις  
Που σε σώζει στο λεπτό:

Έτσι όπως σπινθηρίζει  
Βγάζει λάμψη τρομερή  
Και την πλάση τριγυρίζει  
Με αγάπη και σπουδή

Λέγεται ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
Η τρανή αυτή φωτιά  
ΛΟΓΙΚΗ και ΙΣΟΝΟΜΙΑ  
Και κυρίως ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΑ»

Δεν πιστεύει σε θρησκείες  
Ούτε προσκυνά θεούς  
Μα πιστεύει σε αξίες  
Και σε νόμους κραταιούς

Όλοι ίσοι, όλοι ένα  
Όλοι, κάθε μου παιδί  
Κι όπως βλέπω τον καθένα  
Κι ο καθένας να με δει

Και μαζί να προχωράμε  
Σ’ ένα μέλλον φωτεινό  
Που όλοι όλους αγαπάνε  
Με τιμή και σεβασμό.





*Talen* door Pieter De Buysser (BE)

[The complete joke appears in Scene **14**, pages 179–181]

*Language* (ΓΛΩΣΣΑ) by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR)

CAST  
*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains*

LOCATION  
Bema at Ancient Agora

PLOT  
*The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains* stands on the bema at the Ancient Agora and speaks about the new cyber-bema and its potential.

SKETCH  
*THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS* steps on the rock and starts talking loudly.

THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS  
Στέκω εδώ και σας μιλώ, εδώ που στέκονταν και μιλούσαν παλιά, άλλοι.  
Στέκω εδώ και σας μιλώ, και με ακούτε μόνο όσοι είστε εδώ.  
Στέκω εδώ και σας μιλώ, και με καταλαβαίνετε μόνο όσοι μιλάτε την ίδια γλώσσα.  
Λίγοι ακούτε, λίγοι καταλαβαίνετε!  
Μα ο λόγος είναι για όλους, ο λόγος είναι για παντού!

*THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS* continues in English in a heavy Greek accent.

I stand here, talking to you, here where others stood a long time ago.  
The language they spoke was understood by many back then.  
The language I speak is understood by many now.  
I need to be heard by many.  
I stand here where others stood to be heard by many.  
All of you standing here hear me.  
And many of you standing here understand me.  
I need to be heard and understood by more.  
I stand on the bema, but I do not have to.  
I have a bema of my own, a bema that can reach the world.

*THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS* holds his mobile phone high.

Ιδού το Βήμα του σήμερα!  
Behold the bema of today!  
A bema of words and images!  
A bema of hyperlinks and hash tags!  
A bema of algorithms and worldwide reach!  
A wifi bema.  
A bluetooth bema.  
A hot-spot bema.  
A google bema.  
A wiki bema.  
An insta bema.  
A Facebook bema.  
A Twitter bema.

A bema that beams and radiates globally.  
A whole new bema, for a whole new world.  
A brave new bema, for a brave new world.  
Now we can connect!  
To the world!  
To one another!  
To one’s self!  
We can do it now!  
Free speech!  
Global reach!  
Now we can connect!  
The means IS the message!  
To connect is to connect!  
To connect is to be heard!  
To connect is to be understood!  
So connect!

*THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS* is now ecstatic and tries to connect on his phone to spread the message.

Connect!  
Connect!

*There is no signal.*

Κονέκτ, γαμώ τη συνδεσή μου, γαμώ!

*THE ONE WHOSE WORDS PENETRATE BRAINS* wanders off trying to get a good connection.



*Pluralisme* door Pieter de Buysser (BE)

Een bar wandelde binnen in een Rabbijn, in een Imam, in een Katholieke priester, in een Boeddhistische monnik en in een atheïst.

‘Wie bedien ik eerst?’, zei de bar goedgehumorst. Maar niemand antwoordde want ze waren het niet gewoon te worden binnengewandeld door een bar.

‘Och, komaan, jullie zijn allemaal meer dan één keer bij mij geweest, dan hoop ik dat ik toch eens een keertje bij jullie binnen mag?’

Ze waren met verstomming geslagen. De bar sloot zich dan maar op in zichzelf en begon op haar eentje te drinken. Al snel kwamen één na één de Rabbijn, de Imam, de Priester, de monnik en de atheïst aan de deur kloppen. ‘Hé, doe nu niet zo monomaniakaal, laat mij er in!’ Maar de bar liet de deur gesloten. In een cirkel stonden ze rond de gesloten bar en alle vijf klopten ze op de deur om binnen te kunnen.

‘Ok, ok...’, zei de bar. ‘Kom maar binnen dan.’

Eén na één schuifelden ze de bar in en bestelden ze een glas. Gezellig bij elkaar zaten ze te wachten tot de eerste met een mop zou afkomen.

Ze wachtten, en wachtten.

Het duurde uren en dagen.

De spanning was nauwelijks te harden: wie zou als eerste een mop afsteken? De bar zat stiekem te gniffelen en deed helemaal niets. Na drie weken waren ze doorzichtig als geesten. En toen, in één magnifieke zucht, blies de bar ze allemaal in een wirwar door elkaar. De rabbijn keek dwars door de imam, de priester was zo ijl geworden dat hij de ogen van de boeddhist nodig had, de huid van de atheïst was voldoende dun zodat hij kon voelen met het hart van de priester. Daar moesten ze allemaal ontzettend hard om lachen. Seismisch hard. Gedurende enkele minuten schudden ze zo tellurisch van het lachen dat ze een dermate precieze, minuscule aardshok veroorzaakten waardoor iedere menselijke ruggenwervel exact die millimeter verschoof waardoor wij allen zoveel loslieten, zo, zo, zo ongelooflijk veel loslieten.



**Pluralism** (ΠΛΟΥΡΑΛΙΣΜΟΣ) by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR)

CAST

*The Disguised*

*The One Who Negates and/or Contradicts as a Necessary Counterweight to Human Vanity*

LOCATIONS

Inside a Greek Orthodox church, outside a Greek Orthodox church, souvenir shop.

PLOT

A three-part sketch. Sketch 1: inside the Greek Orthodox church, *The Disguised* is trying to light a candle, but *The One who Negates* keeps blowing the candle out. Sketch 2: *The Disguised* it making the sign of the cross, passing outside a Greek Orthodox church, but *The One who Negates* keeps messing with *The Disguised*. Sketch 3: *The Disguised* is buying only religious souvenirs, but *The One who Negates* keeps taking them and giving *The Disguised* artifacts of other cultures.

SKETCH 1

*Inside a Greek Orthodox church, THE DISGUISED is lighting a candle. THE ONE WHO NEGATES blows it out. This happens again and again. Each time THE DISGUISED looks more annoyed, while THE ONE WHO NEGATES looks more sardonic. There is no dialogue.*

SKETCH 2

*THE DISGUISED is passing a Greek Orthodox church and starts making the sign of the cross with his/her right hand. THE ONE WHO NEGATES shows up out of nowhere and starts messing with THE DISGUISED to prevent this action. Their physical encounter is not hurtful but rather funny. The DISGUISED leaves, annoyed. There is no dialogue.*

SKETCH 3

*THE DISGUISED is at a souvenir shop and picking out only religious souvenirs. He/she picks up a CD with a Greek Orthodox liturgy. THE ONE WHO NEGATES snatches it away and hands him another CD of “world music.”*

THE ONE WHO NEGATES

Το πήρα από τους μαύρους. Ξέρεις, όχι αυτούς που είναι δεύτερης και τρίτης γενιάς, τους άλλους, τους μετανάστες, που προσπαθούν να επιβιώσουν μέχρι να πάνε σε μια κανονική ευρωπαϊκή χώρα.

*THE DISGUISED is annoyed. THE ONE WHO NEGATES smirks. THE DISGUISED picks up a kitsch magnet or miniature of a church. THE ONE WHO NEGATES hands him the same one of the Hagia Sofia.*

THE DISGUISED

Η Αγιά Σοφιά!

THE ONE WHO NEGATES

Ήταν ορθόδοξος ναός. Έγινε τζαμί. Τώρα είναι αξιοθέατο. Ξέρεις, που πληρώνει και μπαίνει όποιος θέλει, ανεξάρτητα από την πίστη του και την υπηκοότητά του.

*THE DISGUISED is visibly irritated and moves to another aisle and picks up a calendar with pictures of Greek Orthodox saints. THE ONE WHO NEGATES keeps showing him pictures of a calendar that has depictions of sexual acts drawn as ancient Greek drawings on vases.*

THE ONE WHO NEGATES

Καλό;

*Depending on the calendar available, THE ONE WHO NEGATES keeps showing THE DISGUISED the sex acts in graphic details, e.g.:*

THE ONE WHO NEGATES

Καλός ο Άγιος Παύλος, αλλά για δεξ εδώ που την έχουν βάλει κάτω και την πάνε πίπα-κόλο.

*At some point THE DISGUISED leaves, running. THE ONE WHO NEGATES is left alone and asks:*

THE ONE WHO NEGATES

Σε ατζέντα το έχετε ή μόνο σε ημερολόγιο τοίχου;

*THE ONE WHO NEGATES turns to the camera.*

Ξέρεις, καπιταλισμός, που ο πελάτης έχει πάντα δίκιο και ο πλουραλισμός είναι απλώς μια αφορμή για μια φαινομενική διαποίκιση προϊόντος ώστε να ικανοποιήσει διαφορετικές δημογραφικά μερίδες καταναλωτών.

*Pluralism* by Margo van de Linde (NL)

[The complete joke appears in Scene 9, pages 172-174]



***Solidariteit*** door Pieter De Buysser (BE)

Een goedhartige filantroop wordt terug naar huis gereden na een lange, harde werkdag. Langs de weg merkt hij een straatarme familie met drie kleine kinderen op. Op hun knieën grazen ze het gras en het onkruid van de berm. Hij vraagt zijn chauffeur te stoppen en nodigt het hele gezin uit in zijn Audi. Wanneer ze thuis aankomen zegt de moeder: ‘Oh meneer, ik kan u niet genoeg bedanken.’ ‘Geen probleem’, zegt de filantroop, ‘ik heb meer dan genoeg, kijk maar.’ En hij toont hen het gazon waar het gras twintig centimeter hoog staat. ‘Ga gerust je gang’, zegt hij. De familie begint het gras te eten en de filantroop neemt een oester uit de koelkast. Helaas snijdt hij zijn lip en begint deze te bloeden. De vader in de tuin ziet het gebeuren en vraagt of hij kan helpen. De filantroop blijft bloeden. De vader beslist zijn lip tegen de zijne te drukken. De filantroop schrikt van dit gebaar en begint met zijn handen te flapperen. De vader blijft de filantroop kalm op de mond kussen. De filantroop stamelt dat hij het walgelijk vindt en dat hij zal moeten overgeven. De kinderen komen de keuken vanuit de tuin binnen en zien hoe hun vader de kotsende filantroop blijft kussen. Ze besluiten te helpen en stellen voor de man op de grond te leggen. Er is geen sofa noch een bed in de keuken, dus gaat de moeder op haar rug op de natuurstenen vloer liggen en wordt de filantroop op haar gelegd. ‘Dddd iitt is ww aw wa algelijk!’, zegt de filantroop die nog een beetje overgeeft. De vader zat intussen al op zijn knieën naast zijn vrouw en de man en kust hem geduldig voort op de lip. Wanneer de filantroop merkt dat de kinderen spontaan beginnen op te kuisen is hij zo verveeld met de situatie dat hij jammerlijk in zijn broek schijt. Bovenop de moeder. ‘Dit overleef ik niet’, zegt de filantroop, ‘breng me alsjeblief mijn telefoon.’ De kinderen doen het en de man belt zijn advocaat. Hij dicteert dat hij zijn hele huis en vermogen aan de familie nalaat, waarna hij sterft.

Jaren later wordt de vader van de familie terug naar huis gereden in zijn Audi na een zware dag in de filantropie. Hij ziet langs de weg een familie op de knieën het gras in de berm eten. Hij vraagt zijn chauffeur om te stoppen...

***Solidariteit*** door Joep Vosseveld (NL)

De dronkaard\* oefent zijn toespraak in afwezigheid van publiek, slechts meubilair hoort toe. Misschien ‘s nachts op een plein met lege terrassen (bijv. OLV plein), in een toiletruimte met zwijgende urinoirs of een verlaten bankje in het park.

\*overeenkomsten met Jean-Claude Juncker zijn toevallig en onopzettelijk

\**The Authorized Representative* zou deze monoloog ook op zich kunnen nemen. Het verschil tussen een dronkaard en een visionair is soms nauwelijks waarneembaar.

Europeanen! Vrienden! De integratie van financiële markten, munteenheid en arbeid hebben het continent economische vooruitgang gebracht. Het openstellen van de grenzen is een krachtige motor voor handel en recreatief verkeer, voor de uitwisseling van goederen en personen. Onze jonge inwoners, de toekomst, worden bediend door het Erasmusprogramma waar studenten kennis maken met elkaars taal, ideeën en gewoontes. Bij terugkomst verrijken ze hun geboorteland met deze nieuw opgedane kennis.

Echter!

Te lang heeft Europa zich gericht op de mentale barrières in taal, valuta en cultuur. Heeft deze commissie gepoogd om plooiën glad te strijken in netwerken, in zowel data, vliegverkeer als weggennet. Maar rechtvaardigt dit het bestaan van deze commissie? Zijn wij, als inwoners van dit continent, niet te divers, zijn de verschillen niet te groot? Fysiek gezien blijven Hollanders en Italianen, Esten, Zweden, Portugezen, Polen en Maltezers steeds tegen dezelfde barrières aanlopen. Barrières die op het eerste gezicht onoverbrugbaar lijken.

Zo zijn Hollanders altijd te lang om recht in de ogen te kunnen kijken, eten Italianen veel zonder dik te worden en kunnen Polen zwaar werk doen zonder last te krijgen van fysieke klachten. Is dat eerlijk? Wat dacht u van de Portugezen met hun onstuitbare gevoel voor melancholie of de gave van Grieken om egaal bruin te kleuren in de zon, de adaptatie van de Fin aan zelfgestookte alcohol?

Sommigen van u noemen dit de diversiteit van een kleurrijk continent.

Naïef!

Ik zeg u, wil Europa werkelijkheid een eenheid worden, een vuist kunnen vormen op het wereldtoneel, dan is fysieke integratie van haar inwoners een onvermijdelijke stap. De commissie zal dan ook besluiten tot de oprichting van het E.I.O.E.: het European Institute for Organ Exchange. Iedere Europese burger krijgt het recht om voor zijn achttiende verjaardag een ledemaat of orgaan naar keuze te ruilen voor dat van een leeftijdsgenoot uit één van de lidstaten. Uitwisseling en integratie kan immers bestaan uit een paar snelle Roemeense vingers, het metabolisme van de Oostenrijker of de viriliteit van de Fransman. Ik zeg u, hadden wij allen de zonnebrand op onze huid ervaren zoals de Britten, dan was een brexit voorkomen. Solidariteit krijgt pas inhoud als wij onze problemen met stoelgang, stijve gewrichten en brandende onderbuikgevoelens weten te delen met onze mede-Europeanen. Pas dan kan er wederzijds begrip en respect ontstaan. Graag wil ik afsluiten met een slogan, de lijfspreuk van het European Institute for Organ Exchange: ‘Europa, het zit in ieder van ons’.



***Solidarity*** by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR)

Solidarity (ΑΛΛΗΛΕΓΓΥΗ)

CAST  
Crowd of Characters

LOCATION  
A street

PLOT  
A demonstration on the street in which proverbs about solidarity are the slogans that are shouted, are painted on signs, etc.

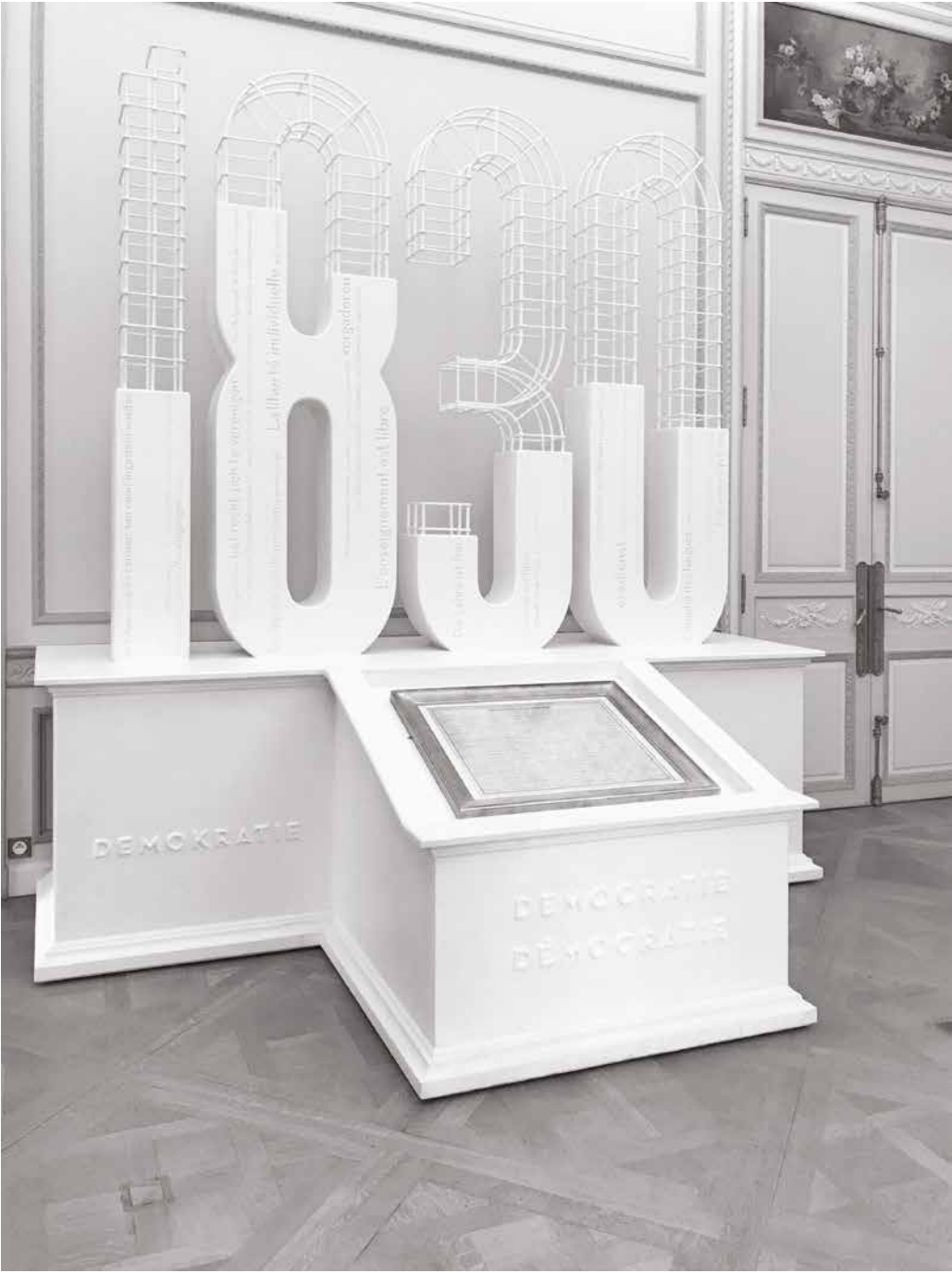
SKETCH  
The CROWD is marching down the street, shouting, chanting, and protesting

GREEK  
Όλοι μαζί κι ο ψωριάρης χώρια.  
Το ‘να χέρι νίβει τ’ άλλο και τα δυο το πρόσωπο.  
Χίλιοι καλοί χωράνε.  
Μοιρασμένη χαρά, διπλή χαρά. Μοιρασμένος πόνος, μισός πόνος.  
Ο καλός ο φίλος στην ανάγκη φαίνεται.

ENGLISH  
United we stand, divided we fall.  
A friend in need is a friend indeed.  
You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.  
All for one and one for all.  
We’re all in the same boat.

GERMAN  
Nicht Milch und Quark - Solidarität macht uns stark.  
Mit nur einer Hand läßt sich kein Knoten knüpfen.  
In der geballten Faust sind alle Finger gleich.

FRENCH  
Un pour tous, tous pour un.



*Democracy* (ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ) by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR)

[The complete joke appears in Scene **13**, pages 175–179]

*Democratie* door Pieter De Buysser (BE)

[The complete joke appears in Scene **27**, pages 189–190]



***Migratie*** door Joep Vossebeld (NL)

Onderstaande tekst is bedacht voor *The One That Brings The World Upside Down*.

**FORT EUROPA**

Nou word ik de laatste tijd nogal droevig van al die verhalen over vluchtelingen. Het raakt me echt. En dan met name het feit dat ze Europa niet in zouden kunnen. Fort Europa noemt men het zelfs. Dat hele gezinnen dus hun leven moet wagen om Europa in te komen. Dat vind ik triest. Diep Triest.

Want het is dus onzin. Dat kun je ons niet kwalijk nemen. Ik bedoel, zij zijn begonnen! Zo hoorde ik gisteren over een jongeman die net in Parijs is aangekomen vanuit Senegal, dagen lang verstoep in een vrachtauto. Terwijl Senegal eerst bij Europa hoorde, het was gewoon Frankrijk. Als ze dat nu zo hadden gelaten, dan waren ze vanzelf bij de EU gekomen, ook nog twee keer wereldkampioen voetballen geworden en had hij gewoon de bus kunnen pakken naar Parijs. Of de TGV, net zoals iedereen.

En trouwens, Fort Europa, we hebben toch niet eens een muur? China wel, die hebben een gigantische muur. Chinezen zijn al tweeduizend jaar onvriendelijk naar vluchtelingen. Geen wonder dat iedereen naar Europa wil als China zulke dikke muren bouwt. Maar hoor je ze daar ooit over klagen bij de VN? Wedden dat in heel Beijing geen enkele Syriër te vinden is? Trouwens wat die Syriërs betreft: Syrië, dat was dus een Romeinse provincie. Gewoon een mooi stukje Italië! Hadden ze daar nou niet zo moeilijk over gedaan, dan was het daar helemaal prima geweest. Dan waren we daar allemaal op vakantie gegaan voor het mooie weer en het lekkere eten en dan was heel dat gedoe met die bootjes over die zee niet nodig geweest. Trouwens, die Middellandse Zee, is dát de schuld van Europa? Wij hebben die zee toch niet gemaakt? Laat staan de Alpen, waar die arme mensen nu doodvriezen? Die bergen duwen de Afrikanen met hun continent toch zelf omhoog, hoor. Had van ons niet gehoeven, zo'n massa bergen, echt niet.

Trouwens, we waren eerst één groot continent, gezellig met zijn allen. Maar die anderen moesten zich zo nodig losmaken en afdrijven. Al die mensen hadden gewoon te voet kunnen komen, maar nee hoor. De hele vluchtelingencrisis, die zijn ze dus al 5,3 miljard jaar zélf aan het veroorzaken. En nu is het opeens, uit het niks, de schuld van Europa? Miljarden jaren de verkeerde kant op drijven en dan daar iemand anders de schuld van geven. Daar word ik dus intens verdrietig van. Triest.

***Migratie*** door Pieter De Buysser (BE)

Het gebeurde in het park waar veel migranten de nacht doorbrengen. Een politicus werd tegen zijn zin verwelkomd en rondgeleid door een vrijwilliger. De vrijwilliger was in zijn nopjes en had wel zin in een mop.

‘Wat doet een Europees politicus om een vluchteling van de dood te redden? Hij zegt: haal je voet van zijn hoofd.’

Hier moest de politicus zo hard om lachen dat zijn hoofd explodeerde. Dit was de beslissende kopstoot die alles kantelde. De vluchtelingen en asielzoekers renden weg naar alle kanten. Het park werd gesloten. Enkele weken later was de heropening met een Monument van de Kering. Sindsdien liep niemand nog van iemand weg. Grappen waren niet meer nodig want iedereen lachte uit tevredenheid, vreugde en plezier. Toen een nieuwsgierige reporter een ex-vluchteling – die net van een warm soepje aan het genieten was – de vraag stelde hoe dit alles zo heeft kunnen gebeuren antwoordde hij in dezelfde woorden die slechts enkele weken voordien nog als een grap beschouwd werden: ‘Het is niet dat ze me hier als illegaal behandelen, ze weten gewoon nog niet hoe ze me kunnen verwelkomen.’



*Immigration* (METANASTEYΣH) by Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR)

CAST  
Crowd of Characters

LOCATION  
An open space

PLOT  
The CROWD plays a Greek game called “Who should stay in the furnace and burn?”

SKETCH  
*A ball is passed around each member of the CROWD. As each person takes the ball, they state the name of the country they are playing. One person is chosen to be the leader. All put their right foot in and the leader chants «Να μείνει, να μείνει στο τρύπιο το καμίνι και να τσουρουφλιστεί η [NAME OF COUNTRY]!» (To stay, to stay in the broken furnace and burn is [NAME OF COUNTRY]!). As the country is named, the leader throws the ball into the air and the person whose country has been called tries to catch it as the rest spread away. The person catches the ball and shouts «Στοπ!» (Stop!), then calls out which country is chosen to get hit by the ball. If it’s a hit, the country hit is out, and if it is a miss, the person that threw the ball is out. This continues until there is a winner.*

*In the film sketch, the countries named should be countries that many people are currently emigrating from, and we should witness the violence through the game of immigrants trying to secure a place as the winner of a residence permit that is announced as the prize.*

*There is no dialogue written, as this sketch relies heavily on chance and improvisation.*



*Voorspoed* door Joep Vossebeld (NL)

Wat is voorspoed en voor wie? Voorspoed maakt Europeanen langer, ouder en ‘gewichtiger’ (dikker). Toch kan voorspoed niet objectief worden afgelezen; overgewicht is in de ene cultuur een teken van rijkdom, in de andere juist van armoede. Daarnaast is voorspoed nooit democratisch, het vergaat de een beter dan de ander. Jaloezie en roddel lijken bij uitstek verbonden aan voorspoed.

In dit gesprek over ongelijke maatvoering bediscussiëren twee vrouwen\* een moeder met kind die langslopen.

\* ‘Vrouw 1’ zou *The One Who Cannot Keep His/Her Mouth Shut* kunnen zijn, waarbij ‘Vrouw 2’ aansluit bij *The Innocent* (hoewel *The Naïve* misschien een betere omschrijving is).  
\*\* overduidelijk geïnspireerd op mijn eigen nabije toekomst.

Vrouw 1: Oh, wat is hij mooi groot!  
Vrouw 2: Ja, hij heeft echt een groot hoofd!  
Vrouw 1: Hè?  
Vrouw 2: Wat?  
Vrouw 1: Dat kun je toch niet zo zeggen, ‘hij heeft een groot hoofd.’  
Vrouw 2: Hoezo? Ik bedoel dat niet verkeerd. Een groot hoofd is toch positief? Een groot hoofd is veel beter dan een klein hoofd, want wie wil er nu een klein hoofd?  
  
Vrouw 1: Neehee, je moet gewoon geen opmerkingen maken over grootte.  
Vrouw 2: Dat moet jij nodig zeggen, je begon zelf met te roepen dat hij zo ‘enorm groot’ is.  
Vrouw 1: Ho ho, ik zei: ‘mooi groot.’ Dat zegt helemaal niks over formaat, het betekent ‘precies goed’. Als ik had gezegd: ‘wat is hij klein en schattig’, dan had dat exact hetzelfde betekend. Dat weet iedereen.  
  
Vrouw 2: Nu moet je niet doen alsof jij nooit iets verkeerd zegt. En het was trouwens helemaal niet erg, want ze zei zelf: ‘Ja, maar het trekt wel weer bij, het komt wel goed.’  
  
Vrouw 1: Pfff...Dat zei ze vast uit beleefdheid.  
Vrouw 2: En het is toch zo, een groot hoofd is beter dan een klein. Kleine hoofden zijn niet mooi, dat wil je gewoon niet. Dus was het een compliment! En ze zei nog dat ze inderdaad moeite had om de kleertjes over zijn hoofd te trekken.  
  
Vrouw 1: Zie je wel, dat zei ze omdat jij haar in verlegenheid had gebracht! Je moet gewoon niet zo met uiterlijk bezig zijn! Als je complimenten geeft blijf dan in hemelsnaam neutraal. Je gaat toch ook niet zeggen ‘wat is ie lekker bruin’ of ‘wat lijkt ie op zijn vader’. Misschien weet ze niet eens wie de vader is! Of is het een vluchteling!  
  
Vrouw 2: Ik bepaal toch zeker zelf wel wat een compliment is of niet...  
Vrouw 1: Luister nou, je zegt gewoon, ‘wat heeft ie lekker dikke wangen’, want dat betekent ‘hij ziet er gezond uit’. Zeg iets leuks over de kleertjes, over de kinderwagen, vraag naar de bevalling desnoods, maar begin in hemelsnaam niet over het hoofd.  
  
Vrouw 2: Wat is er nou zo erg aan hoofden?  
Vrouw 1: In onze cultuur ligt dat gevoelig.  
Vrouw 2: Hallo, weet ik veel...  
Vrouw 1: Het is gewoon niet netjes van je om zoiets te zeggen, geef het toch gewoon toe in plaats van het achteraf goed te praten. Iedereen maakt weleens fouten.  
  
Vrouw 2: Fouten!  
Vrouw 1: Sssjt!t!  
Vrouw 2: Hè?  
Vrouw 1: Moet je haar daar kijken. Die heeft ook gebrek aan aandacht zeg.

Vrouw 2: Jezus ja, wat een jurk.  
Vrouw 1: Te kort!  
Vrouw 2: Te roze!  
Vrouw 1: Te oud!  
Vrouw 2: En zo warm is het helemaal niet vandaag.  
Vrouw 1: Precies! En het past gewoon niet bij haar proporties.  
Vrouw 2: Hoe bedoel je?  
Vrouw 1: Dat zie je toch! Ze heeft een enorm groot hoofd in die jurk.  
Vrouw 2: WAT??

Co-developers of Casting Call

Main Team

Performers

Shila Anaraki, Gaetan Bulourde, Tarek Halaby, Sahra Huby, Margo van de Linde, Jessica Van Rüschen, Simone Schuffelen, Joep Vossebeld

Costumes

Esther van de Pas



Puppets and Masks

Denise Castermans



Props

Ron Bernstein, Van Eyck Maastricht, Jelle Spruyt, AlmarOntwerpt

Camera

Vincent Pinckaers, Boris van Hoof

Sound & Sound Mix

Laszlo Umbreit

Editing

Inneke Van Waeyenberghe

Director’s Assistant (Maastricht Scenes)

Bernardo Zanotta

Additional Performers, Participants & Collaborators

Maastricht

Victoria Bardakou, Camille van der Mey, Alejandro Perozo, Isa Goessens, Joost Bakker, Basiel de Gouw, Jeanine Tessers, Sam van der Velden, Julie van der Velden, Frans van der Velden, Marjo van Knippenberg, Simone Lemmerlijn, Zidane, Isabel, George, Karen Weijers, Anne, Ilse, Stef, Ingeborg, Laura Verhaegh, Peter Out, Pablo Hannon

Brussels

Marc Buchy, Philippine Hoegen, Loes Jacobs, Oracle (Caroline Daish and Justine Maxelon), Anna Raimondo, Anna Rispoli, Kopano Maroga, Einat Tuchman

Sittard

Buuteredner Jan Heffels

Varberg

Henric Benesch, Cecilia Gelin, Petra Johansson, Anna Larsson, Ingrid Martins Holmberg, Elisabeth Punzi, Krystallia Sakellariou, Hugo Tham, Eivor Bengtsson, Fredrik Bilén, Tarek Halaby, Henny Hanselius, Margareta Hjortsberg, Lena Hjalmarsson, Kerstin Persson, Davor Abazovic, Katarina Sundberg, Margareta Hjortsberg, Helena Persson

Script Editing for Tarek,The (Wounded)Healer

Tina van Baren

Composition (for The Time-Choir)

Tina van Baren

Voice-overs

Dimitris Dimopoulos, Philippine Hoegen, Lina Kalpatzidou, Martin O’Shea

Additional Camera

Kristina Meiton (Varberg), Shila Anaraki, Sahra Huby, Ivo Neefjes and Faustine Cros (Leuven)



**Additional Sound & Sound Mix**

Jeroen Leemans, Helena Persson

**Adittional Editing**

Léo Ghysels, Jessica Van Rüschén

**Color grading**

Miléna Trivier

**Supporting Institutions**

- Art Inside Out, Sweden
- Beursschouwburg, Brussels
- Centre d’Art Le Lait, Albi
- Grensverleggers - de Buren
- The Mondriaan Fund, The Netherlands
- Playground Festival (STUK, & M-Museum), Leuven
- Research Grant art/ recherche asbl, Belgium
- Royal Academy of Arts, Brussels
- Stichting De Zaaier, The Netherlands
- Theater aan het Vrijthof, Maastricht
- VGC, Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie, Brussels
- Vlaamse Gemeenschap, Belgium
- WAB (Wandering Arts Biennial), Brussels
- Development Grant, Kunstendecreet, Belgium
- Film Development Grant, VAF (Flanders Audiovisual Fund), Belgium
- West Den Haag, The Netherlands

**Casting Call Afterthoughts:**  
**A correspondence between Sahra Huby and Eleni Kamma**  
**following the Maastricht shoot**

**Huby sahra**

To: Eleni Kamma  
 after thoughts...

November 11, 2019

Dear Eleni,

I sit in the train, on the way to Brussels. Full of so many thoughts and impressions from the shooting with you. I would have loved to stay for a drink with you guys — now I have a bad conscious that I didn't stay. But it is very important for me to have this one evening with my parents. (I see them only a few times a year....)

I wanted to share some of my thoughts about the last days with you, and I think now is actually the best moment for it, because it is so present in me.

First about our last tryout with an audience: I had to think about the fact that you said you want to facilitate a kind of “collective creation” with the audience. And it is quite funny that you chose Daumier's picture of the Conference of London for that. Because there is such a hierarchy in it. And we also recreated this hierarchy by directing the people like puppets. (Especially in my proposition and the proposition of Simone, where we placed ourselves as the leading countries and let the audience play Belgium and Holland.) It was nice that the people kind of proposed on their own to change this situation.

It made me think how crucial it is to think about the situation that we want to create. For me, it was quite consciously that I placed the audience in the situation of “being manipulated,” putting them in the role of the oppressed countries.

I had in mind to re-enact the picture with the audience, not in the sense of having an audience active in the creation process, but more to create a dialogue and exchange about their experience. But if I think about “collective creation,” I think it would be much more interesting to first discuss and exchange ideas with the people, and then try out something together, that result of their input (which can still be guided by us).

I think it is really interesting to think about it more if we want to keep involving people in the process. What situation do we want to create with them?

I think anyway, the question of the collectivity and hierarchy will always stay present in this work, which is nice because it is related to democracy as a topic. I personally think that it is clearly not a collective work, because we enter your artistic universe, and your aesthetic, that is very defined, and linked to years of research and knowledge about what you do. I like to see us as a resonance body to that material. How do we respond to it?

I think sometimes I have been lost in the process, when it is not clear for me how open the space is for propositions from our side. For me is always easier when the situation is totally

open (but with a clear task, for example “these two characters interact” or “interact with that object”), or when it is the opposite: when you tell us exactly what we have to do (like when we have to dance with the vegetable, or lie on the ground and sleep). But if it is a mix between these two, it is more difficult for me.

I felt very much in these last days that I should just formulate my needs in the process more. Because you deal with a lot of people that are very different. And I think you are very open to what our needs are. We should just formulate them.

In these three days I had a hard time during the moments with the extras (as we did the ballgame at the Stars, and also this morning at the river), because in both cases there is a very clear scene that you want to shoot with the extras, but there is nothing planned for the performers. With ballgame, we were needed to direct the people and lead them through the game, so we had a clear role (even if I didn’t enjoy that role, but that is another thing). But this morning I had the feeling that there was already so much to do with the extras and the Child that you actually really didn’t need us at that moment. And so I feel a bit between just recognizing that, and then at the same time, knowing that our time is so precious and I come specially from Germany for this shooting and so I want to try things out and propose things — that’s why I pushed to bring the Fool into the scene. But at the start this felt like a push. In general I very often had this feeling that you prepared all the actions with the extras very well, and left space open for us. Which in a way is super nice, to have space to play and propose, but because the time was so short, there were a lot of moments where I had the feeling there is just no time for propositions on top of the “planned scenes.”

Maybe next time we need to be fewer people. And maybe it could also help to be more specific about who takes part in which scene. We don’t have to all be part of all. As Shila has a special history with Megera, and me with the Fool, and Simone has a strong link with the Europe jokes, and me not. I mean, I can feel that we are still in the process of discovering who has a connection to who and to which material.

I’m very curious about how this process will keep unfolding. Personally, I have no need to participate or influence your choices concerning the filmic “end product” — I think these are decisions for you and the camera team. And I also think you are the one that should decide where this project goes, on a general level. But I think that it could be interesting to be involved in how the character of the Fool develops. Where does it go? What does this costume mean for the physicality, with which other element does the Fool interact ... etc. (This is about the Fool, but even if we decide to keep working together without the Fool, I think it is the question of what are our roles in this work, what can we bring, etc.)

So in a few words, to summarize my feelings, it was challenging, and sometimes I was really lost, or felt that I could not really unfold myself on a dance level. (I’m a very physical dancer, and when I don’t move I get very quickly frustrated.) But at the same time, I keep being fascinated by your artistic universe, and am happy to play with all these props, costumes, and ideas. And I really enjoyed meeting Shila more, I feel very connected to her. And I think that you and Bernardo are a perfect team. Because he brings a clarity and concreteness in the moments when you are overwhelmed, but in a very fine way. I also really like the way he involves himself in the artistic decisions, with a lot of care and respect.

I would be great to be a part in the next adventures of this big project. I think I learned a lot in these last days about our collaboration, and how I like to work with you. I hope next time we get more time for preparation together — I think that’s an important point (which I know

is always related to money). I’m looking forward to staying in dialogue with you, and please send me some footage! I want to see how it looks.

Thank you for having me in this boat, and for doing all the organizational work around it, to make this possible. Sending you a big hug, arriving in Brussels.

Sahra

**Eleni Kamma**

To: Huby sahra

Re: after thoughts...

May 30, 2020

Dear Sahra,

I am writing back to you with a delay of several months. Events caught up with you, me, and the rest of the world. The coronavirus crisis deprived us of the pleasures of physically meeting each other and prevented us from performing in public space. While we were deprived of physical space, we were offered time instead to reconsider the current state of things in the world in which we live. I cannot help reflecting on how far I am mentally from 2016, when I started my PhD trajectory under the title “Taking Place: Parrhesiastic practices of social transformation within local forms of theatricality.” Writing at this moment in time, during a lockdown in the Netherlands and Belgium five years later, a large part of the art world seems to increasingly associate the role of art to times of social transformation. There is a feeling of urgency in the air, an urgency to reconsider how artistic practices relate to the world.

I wish to thank you for your email. I appreciate your thoughts and feedback on the *Casting Call* process, especially as you have been with me, on and off, for this process since its very early stages. In the spring of 2017, through the a/r grant, we had the opportunity to experiment with caricatural gestures in public spaces around Brussels, which led us to build the posture and movements of *The Selfie-Junkie* character. In fact, I consider your comments and reflection as a parrhesiastic gift, a sharp testimony of how you experienced what I have been trying to build, of how the working process has affected you as participant and performer, and of how my efforts may have generated new ideas. Before I attempt to address the issues that you raise in your email, I shall first briefly recapitulate how we were led to filmic tests of November 2019.

After the development of the research, characters, texts, and sketches, as well as film tests (2017–9), for three days that November I gathered four performers and a small crew, with costumes and props, around the script of *Casting Call* in order to shoot a number of the script’s scenes in Maastricht. We also had several “extras”: people willing to join in for the fun of it, out of curiosity, or for self-promotion. The presence of these participants varied per day and per scene, from seven to twenty in total.

The public spaces that appear in the film relate to questions such as: How can we laugh in the post-truth Europe of 2020? How can we, as artists and participants, investigate what happens in this process of attempting to articulate meaning, speak up, share a joke, address listeners,



grasp their attention, and provoke dialogue through a hybrid post-media artistic practice? What is the place and role of caricature today?

This process of questioning is carried out through jokes and mini-dramaturgies written by screenwriters in their own first languages, with the understanding that jokes are often untranslatable or no longer funny in another language. In keeping with its development phase (2017–2019), *Casting Call* (the film) brings together various approaches and narratives that are intertwined and that complement each other, including puppet scenes, scenes in public space, reflective and dialogical interior scenes, and so on.

The three shooting days presented this main challenge: how to go beyond consuming the commissioned texts, to make use of them to actively participate in the quest for parrhesia? This was not an easy task. People shied away or took pauses, others used the filmic space for self-promotion. Not everyone was satisfied with the process. Some of the professionals (including yourself) often felt cornered and uncomfortable, not having enough time or mental space to develop their own “thing.” In contrast, amateurs felt free and loved the experience. Spectators’ reactions ranged from extremely tentative (their fear for offending leading to self-censorship of any potentially offensive imaginative output) to angry or aggressive to funny and/or entertaining. I was confronted with the role of the individual conflicting with the collective, very loose societal tissues, heterogeneous urban communities who shared very little in common, and non-existent relations or an alienating distance between maker and spectator. I tried to bridge the latter. In exploring dynamics between different types of interaction and participation, I observed how tensions within a heterogeneous group opened up a space for confrontation and consequently for reflection.

Your email critically evaluating your experience as a participant proves that you have been very actively engaged in the process, which triggered your own thoughts and reactions. I would like to focus on your dissatisfaction and uneasiness about the lack of clear direction, your concerns and second thoughts about the processes employed in the shooting, on the lack of sufficient time to explore concepts such as, to quote you, “being manipulated,” “collective creation,” and how to “keep involving people in the process and what situation do we want to create with them.”

In my understanding, the situation we (by “we” I mean all of us who actively engaged with the shooting, whether professionals, volunteers, amateurs, invited audience members, or accidental viewers) wanted to create has been consistent from the project’s start: to explore how to develop parrhesiastic practices\* together. To reiterate my glossary definition, parrhesiastic practices are exercises aimed at finding the courage to speak one’s mind by positioning and expressing oneself in relation to others. So, for me, any kind of facilitation of “collective creation” should fall in that field of exploration and serve this purpose. And a theatrical space is a condition for parrhesiastic practices to take place: I believe it was necessary to be exposed to each other in public view.

Six months later, during the COVID-19 lockdown, two of my propositions included in my film application (by then rejected) still resonated in me:

- a) Between directed and delegated performance — in working with people who can contradict me, cheat, take the space — a space opens up that cannot be controlled and keeps transforming (a parrhesiastic space).
- b) The courage to speak with, against, or through others is a trial-and-error process — never a final situation.

You write: “The question of the collectivity and hierarchy will always stay present in this work, which is nice because it is related to democracy as a topic.” Creating a democratic structure for the making of *Casting Call* went far beyond the representation of parrhesia as a subject; indeed, the democratic structure used during the making process produced a platform that brought parrhesiastic speech and action into existence. It was important for me to create a set of conditions which we could enter into as equal partners, although of course we were each different, with different skills and knowledge — some being professionals and others amateurs and volunteers. In my mind the equality would be generated if we let go of all certainties and comfort zones of knowledge in the filmic scenes (which I consider to be the space of negotiation), being as much as possible open to the questions of how could we co-exist and where the limits of each person’s freedom of speech and action start and stop. I would like to give a sense of how this was envisioned and achieved through a few examples.

For Pieter de Buysser’s “Migratie” scenes we worked with puppets and humans interacting, which enabled us to do things that would be outrageous if real (like setting a politician on fire), and explored its impact on participants and later on viewers. For the same scene, performers wore masks with distorted reproductions of their own faces. This created a very weird alienating and exciting effect, increasing the scene’s impact for the twelve participants during the shooting, which ended up with a carrot dance and hysterical laughter. The exaggerated game between reality and imagination opened up further possibilities for how to act.

The scenes at Centre Ceramique, a multiple-use public building hosting Maastricht’s library and various exhibitions, turned it into a public film set. Three *Collectors of Proverbs* (amateurs) walked through the library holding placards inscribed with community-related concepts that create disagreement: “Democracy,” “Prosperity,” “Solidarity,” “Europe,” “Languages,” “Migration,” and “Pluralism.” Then they exited the library and sought to collect proverbs from bystanders on Plein 1992, many of whom shared their views on these concepts by contributing a proverb to the collection.

Later on, around two big reading tables inside the Ceramique, you, Shila, and Simone each suggested your own take on Honoré Daumier’s *Conference of London* lithograph of 1830. I didn’t choose Daumier’s lithography singlehandedly. You may or not remember, but during the filming in the theater the first day and in a café the second day, the five of us (Shila, Simone, Joep, you, and myself) discussed staging a public moment at Ceramique on the Sunday. The only givens were the space and the time: a large corner next to the windows with two very large tables on the first floor of the building was reserved for us for a period of two hours that afternoon. In the end we collectively decided to work with Daumier’s picture. But I agree that this was an interesting choice, partly because of the specific space we were allocated for the event. We jointly agreed that each performer would propose a ten-minute improvisation; each of you were absolutely free to choose what you wanted to improvise. Each performer proposed a re-enactment of Daumier’s picture. We invited several people to participate in the performative tryouts and give feedback. You invited the respondents to play Belgium and Holland; performers with animal masks would manipulate the respondents and decide for them who goes to Belgium and who to Holland. Simone proposed an even more physical and dominating version: the animals would take over on the table, splitting countries, while the respondents would all be squeezed under the table. Shila proposed a clear audience situation: based on Daumier’s image, the animal-performers and one respondent would take four positions with their eyes closed. They would walk blindly from position to position however they could. They were to be careful with each other, but not be afraid of each other. The respondents participated, gave feedback, and proposed their own fourth version. We set the framework together, but each of you had the freedom and responsibility to choose how to use

that time, to recreate or undo the hierarchy of the picture, direct the people like puppets or just talk and exchange ideas with them, and then try out something together. It was nice that the respondents proposed their own change to the situation. I was quite surprised and found it revealing that no one, neither a performer nor a respondent, proposed over-turning the situation, for example that the respondents take over and send the animal-performers under the table.



From left to right, top to bottom: the performers introduce the tryouts to invited participants and respondents at Centre Ceramique. Sahra's, Simone's, and respondents' propositions follow.

Although it was not my intention to confuse and challenge you as a professional, I realize now, after reading your email, that the lack of clarity from my side concerned whether you should assume the interpreter's role (either in an open situation with a clear task or following precise instructions) or take the initiative to act on the spot as yourself, Sahra (which is what I really wanted). In addition, there was tension between your individuality and your desire to respect the collective. I am now convinced that the frustration you felt that Sunday, due to not having a clear role and feeling side-stepped by the extras, led you to do an amazing job with *The Fool*. I am so happy you took over then, even if this felt initially like a push for you, because you have such strong physical presence and energy, you are not afraid to try out things, and you have a lot of humor. I have found your presence absolutely necessary for this project. *Casting Call* needs people who will take over and have no problem ridiculing themselves. If the only voice directing everyone for everything in this project was my own, without participants taking the initiative, we might have produced representations of parrhesia, but without any possibility to go beyond that.

Through *Casting Call* we wanted to explore different types of tension between individual bodies and a collective body at the same time, but our time for rehearsal, repetition, probing, and ensayo was very limited. We had no time to be inefficient. Still, a precondition for learning through a trial-and-error collaborative process that respects the participants and compensates them financially for their efforts is funding. As this was a hybrid artist's research project, I am very glad to have managed to finance parts of *Casting Call* and make this three-day gathering possible, among other things, through several funding bodies. This financing needed considerable personal effort from my side, and in fact ate into my own creative and artistic time.

Following a long period of doubt and hesitation in defining my own role and position in this project, I can finally agree with you: *Casting Call* is not a collective work. It is an artistic project initiated and led by me, through which I have been conducting my research since 2016. It is my project because I am the one with the urgent need to answer those questions that I set out to explore, and I am the one who chose to invite you to help me explore them. Throughout these years *Casting Call* provided me with numerous opportunities to be in exchange with all of you, and through them to investigate as an artist what happens in this process of attempting to articulate meaning, speak up, share a joke, address listeners, get their attention, and provoke dialogue through a hybrid post-media artistic practice. You rightly argue that you "entered my artistic universe," a universe linked to my research on caricature, parades, carnivals, and other popular practices of entertainment in the geographic areas of Belgium, Dutch Limburg, and Athens. However, I would counter that the ways in which each of you acted, interpreted, and responded as "a resonance body to that material," as you beautifully describe it, defined the final aesthetic. See for example the costumes of Esther and the puppet-props of Denise, whose particular aesthetic is very present. I have hesitated to assume total responsibility for *Casting Call* because all this time I was looking for a righteous way to acknowledge everyone's participation, their thoughts and contributions to the project. Through the material produced (objects, costumes, props, performances, and filmic notes) and the solution I found to trace contributions throughout the script of *Casting Call*, I am now confident that this is happening.

So in a few words, to summarize my position and feelings about this process that I created and to which I invited all of you, I entered naively and optimistically into a universe I had not yet mastered and only partially comprehended, because to me it was evident very early on that there was no other way to question, investigate, and understand the mechanisms involved in parrhesiastic acts than the inclusion of several voices and minds and by complicating rather than simplifying the situation.

Big hug and until soon, looking very much forward to the next adventures,  
Eleni

## Research Summary

This research project addresses the question how local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater — by which I mean events, actions, and performances staged by characters who courageously speak their minds through scenes of excess and laughter, that take place in public view and incite the spectator’s agency to speak their own minds — possibly relate to and/or provide new insights into critical artistic practices today. In this context, the project also examines the place and role of caricature today.

I approach the issue as an artist-researcher concerned with socially engaged artistic practices. The experience of the playful, humorous, and sharply critical attitude of Gezi Park protesters speaking their minds in Istanbul in 2013 led me to critically reconsider my own courage in positioning myself within contemporary artistic production. Throughout the dissertation I work along a Möbius strip schema, which continually shifts from me as individual artist to dialogic collaborations to writing about the process. The research subject is investigated through a circulation process within which concepts such as communication, dialogue, and listening are continuously performed and put to the test. The dissertation aspires to provide new insights into how tensions between the roles of individual and group, “I” and “we,” may open up a parrhesiastic space for critical artistic practices.

The dissertation explores the notion of parrhesia by looking into the forms, conditions, and characteristics of parrhesiastic theater in Greek antiquity, both through Michel Foucault’s genealogical analysis of the concept as a mode of discourse and by visiting the Greek sources. Furthermore, I examine how several thinkers, writers, and activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries relate to the notion of parrhesia and in what ways they may find it relevant for contemporary society and art. These include moral and ethical aspects of parrhesia examined through contemporary societal lenses, such as the use of new media, the internet, and virtual reality (David Brin). I also examine how these conditions and characteristics of parrhesiastic theater in Greek antiquity manifest in several contemporary visual artists’ practices and works, and the strategies they have used to bring parrhesia into being, aiming at constructing a portrait of the parrhesiast-artist through these examples of artistic strategies.

Parrhesia is examined both through a discursive process (the writing of this dissertation) and through *Casting Call*. In this way, the artistic body of work (*Casting Call*) and the written component (dissertation), within which *Casting Call*’s script is contained, complement each other. To address aspects of miscommunication between citizens of the European Union due to its many languages and regional rituals, I employ performative strategies in *Casting Call* inspired by old, stereotypical characters from European popular culture, art, theater, and cinema.

The artistic part of the research project is conducted through the format of a parade, which corresponds with the subject matter of parrhesia. The parade builds up and evolves in a successive manner, through the augmentation of a heterogeneous collection of commissioned texts, characters, props, voices. In the preparation of the parade, the Characters are carriers of historical knowledge, invoking collective memory. The parade appropriates old entertainment strategies and tools in bringing people together, not to re-enact an old parade, but rather to enable participants to “appear” in common view: in *Casting Call*, a mix of professionals, extras, respondents, and accidental audience members (bystanders) were invited to speak their minds by using the Parade’s collection in playful ways. They joined improvised public mises en scène that functioned halfway between stages and filmsets. *Casting Call* is conceived as an ongoing rehearsal, a continual attempt to generate parrhesia and question its role in contemporary art.

My investigation into local and traditional European forms of parrhesiastic theater provided me with an understanding of the urgency for artistic practices to critically reflect upon



the social role of the artist in the current Western European context. By undoing dignity and seriousness, art reveals uncomfortable truths about social conventions and issues. Revitalizing an old parrhesiastic practice triggers social awareness and enables the expression of political consciousness for both spectators and performers. In attempting to relate to local communities, *Casting Call* bridged many distances. The aim for us as participants was to understand what happened when we come together, and to embrace, when necessary, the impossibility of communicating.

In my search for parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, the tensions and compromises regarding my various tasks within this research project led me to a reconsideration of my own role in it: the artist-as-researcher oscillates between the sovereign prerogative of the artist and the need for justification of the research. This becomes apparent both through the dissertation's written component and the format of an exhibition, an installation unfolding as a parade.

## Onderzoekssamenvatting

In dit onderzoeksproject staat de vraag centraal hoe lokale en traditionele Europese vormen van parrhesiastisch theater zich mogelijk verhouden tot en nieuwe inzichten verschaffen in kritische hedendaagse artistieke praktijken. Met ‘parrhesiastisch theater’ bedoel ik events, acties en performances, in het openbaar uitgevoerd door personages die zich openlijk uitspreken middels scènes die vol exces en humor zijn, en die het publiek aansporen om zich eveneens uit te spreken. Het project stelt hiermee de rol en betekenis van hedendaagse karikatuur ter discussie.

Ik benader het onderwerp als een kunstenaar-onderzoeker die geïnteresseerd is in maatschappelijk geëngageerde kunstpraktijken. Mijn ervaring met de speelse, humoristische en scherp kritische houding van de demonstranten in Gezi Park (Istanbul, 2013) bracht me ertoe om de manier waarop ik mijzelf positioneer binnen de hedendaagse kunstwereld te heroverwegen.

De opzet van het onderzoek volgt het schema van de Moebiusband, waarbij ik voortdurend schakel tussen mijzelf als individueel kunstenaar, samenwerkingsverbanden met anderen, en geschreven tekst. In dit proces spelen onderlinge communicatie, dialoog en lusteren een belangrijke rol. De dissertatie ambieert nieuwe inzichten te verschaffen in de spanning tussen de rollen van ‘individu’ en ‘groep’–‘ik’ en ‘wij’–, waarbij het gaat om de vraag hoe die spanning een parrhesiastische ruimte voor kritische artistieke praktijken kan ontsluiten.

Het begrip parrhesia wordt uitgediept door tradities en eigenschappen van parrhesiastisch theater in de Griekse oudheid te onderzoeken. Hiertoe ging ik te rade bij historische Griekse bronnen. Ook neem ik Michel Foucault’s genealogische analyse van parrhesia als een discursieve modus tot uitgangspunt. Verder bestudeer ik hoe verschillende twintigste- en eenentwintigste-eeuwse denkers, schrijvers en activisten zich verhouden tot het begrip parrhesia en hoe zij het als relevant beschouwen voor de hedendaagse samenleving en kunst. Hierbij komen morele en ethische aspecten aan de orde die ik bezie door een hedendaagse lens, middels het gebruik van nieuwe media, het internet, en virtual reality (David Brin). Ik bestudeer ook hoe eigenschappen van parrhesiastisch theater in de Griekse oudheid zich manifesteren in het werk van verschillende hedendaagse kunstenaars. De strategieën die zij gebruiken om parrhesia in praktijk te brengen helpen me om de parrhesiastische kunstenaar te karakteriseren.

Ik onderzoek parrhesia zowel door middel van het schrijven van deze dissertatie en het discursieve proces dat daaraan ten grondslag ligt, als door middel van mijn artistieke praktijk die hier zijn uitdrukking heeft gekregen in *Casting Call*. Zo vullen het artistieke oeuvre en de dissertatie, waarin het script van *Casting Call* is opgenomen, elkaar aan. In *Casting Call* gebruik ik performatieve strategieën geïnspireerd door oude, stereotypische personages uit Europese volkscultuur, -kunst, -theater en -cinema, om de miscommunicatie aan te kaarten die bestaat tussen de burgers van de Europese Unie, door de veelheid van talen en regionale rituelen.

Het artistieke deel van het onderzoek, *Casting Call*, heeft het format van een parade, overeenkomstig het onderwerp van parrhesia. De Parade is opgebouwd als een heterogene verzameling van teksten, personages, props en stemmen. In de Parade worden strategieën en methoden ingezet die ontleend zijn aan oude tradities van volksvermaak, niet om een oude parade te na te spelen of opnieuw uit te voeren, maar om het participanten mogelijk te maken om in het openbaar te verschijnen. In *Casting Call* werd een mix van professionals, figuranten, respondenten en toevallige passanten uitgenodigd om zich uit te spreken door speels gebruik te maken van de genoemde verzameling van de Parade. De deelnemers kwamen bijeen in geïmproviseerde openbare mises-en-scène die het midden hielden tussen podia en filmsets.

*Casting Call* is opgezet als een voortdurende repetitie, in een poging om parrhesia teweeg te brengen en de rol van parrhesia in de hedendaagse kunst te onderzoeken.

Door het onderzoek naar lokale en Europese vormen van parrhesiastisch theater ben ik gaan begrijpen hoe urgent het is dat artistieke praktijken kritisch reflecteren op de sociale rol van de kunstenaar in de hedendaagse westeuropese context. Door waardigheid en serieusheid onderuit te halen openbaart de kunst ongemakkelijke waarheden over sociale problemen en conventies. Door een oude parrhesiastische praktijk nieuw leven in te blazen wordt een sociaal en politiek bewustzijn geactiveerd bij deelnemers en publiek. In een poging om lokale gemeenschappen hierbij te betrekken heeft *Casting Call* grote afstanden overbrugd. Het doel voor ons als deelnemers was om te begrijpen wat er gebeurt als we samenkomen, en ook om, indien nodig, de onmogelijkheid van communicatie te omarmen.

In de zoektocht naar parrhesiastisch theater als model voor een kunstpraktijk hebben de spanningen en compromissen rond mijn uiteenlopende taken in het onderzoeksproject ertoe geleid dat ik mijn eigen rol als kunstenaar moest heroverwegen: de kunstenaar-als-onderzoeker beweegt zich tussen de bevoorrechte soevereiniteit van de kunstenaar en de noodzaak om het kunstproject als onderzoek te legitimeren. Dit wordt gedemonstreerd door de twee componenten van het onderzoek, de geschreven dissertatie en een tentoonstelling of installatie die zich als een parade ontvouwt.



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## **Biography**

Eleni Kamma was born on November 2, 1973 in Athens, Greece. She holds a degree in painting from the Athens School of Fine Arts (BA- 5 years course, 1995–2000) and a MA Fine Art from the Chelsea College of Art & Design, London (2001–2002). In 2008/2009 she was a Fine Art Researcher at the Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht.

Kamma's practice circulates from her as individual artist (through drawings and objects), to dialogic collaborations (films, performative events, journals) and back again, by writing about it and further developing this practice with others.

Her drawings, films, installations, performances and publications have been presented at various exhibition venues, film and performance festivals world-wide, including, among others, the 10<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial; EMST National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; NAK Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen; the 5<sup>th</sup> Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Wiels, Brussels; Netwerk, Aalst; ARGOS Centre for Audiovisual Arts, Brussels; Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn; the 1st Limburg Biennale, Marres, Maastricht; Centre d'art Le Lait, Albi; Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg; Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht; DESTE Foundation, Athens; SALT, Istanbul; Dazibao, Montreal; Centre de la Gravure et de l'Image imprimée, La Louvière; Kristianstads konsthall, Kristianstad, GIBCA extended 2019, Gothenburg; Transmediale, Berlin; Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin and Playground Festival, Museum-M, Leuven.

Kamma was an artist in residence at, among others, Iaspis, Stockholm; Villa Romana, Florence; NiMAC, Nicosia; Nida Art Colony, Lithuania; Cittadellarte –Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella; and Art-Inside Out, Varberg, Sweden.

Kamma is a member of the artist platform Jubilee, Brussels. She lives and works in Brussels and Maastricht.

