Taking place: Parrhesiastic Theater as a model for artistic practice
Kamma, E.

Citation
Kamma, E. (2021, December 2). *Taking place: Parrhesiastic Theater as a model for artistic practice*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3247035

I. Regarding Parrhesia

> "Asked what was man's most precious posses-
> sion, 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) (Syme-onidis, Xenis, and Fliatouras n.d.),[8] 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 ora-tions 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 20th 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 19th 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 artis-tic 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 frame-work, 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 men-tioned 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,

lack of fear. In the majority of sources from the 5th and 4th 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).[9] 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 Anavasis*: "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).

---

9   Foucault builds his argument on ethical differentiation throughout these pages.

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 monstrocities of the First World War and evolved to an art movement. For Sloterdijk, Dada is "the first Neokynicism of the 20th 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, unassailably 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[10] 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.[11] 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.

---

10   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).

11   Iara Lessa, Professor in the Social Work department at Ryerson University, Toronto summarizes Foucault's definition of discourses in his Archaelogy 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 17th-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 (ascesis, 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 19th 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.[12] 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).

12　　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 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ Centuries

Is the notion of parrhesia relevant for other contemporary thinkers and writers in the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ 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 themself. 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.[13] 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)

13   Cornelios Castoriadis on the ERT Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation documentary series *ΠΑΡΑΣΚΗΝΙΟ*, 1984, https://archive.ert.gr/68811/.

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 21st 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 19th 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 20th and 21st 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 in the following chapter, *Strategies of Parrhesia in the Visual Arts.*