

Anonymous Subjects: Performing Anonymity Across Media 1890-1948

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Abstract

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This dissertation introduces “anonymity” as a critical concept that reshapes how we understand modernist performance, subject formation, and political agency. Challenging the enduring association between naming and power, this dissertation shows how anonymity operates as a performative structure across dance, theatre, and cinema to unfix identity and enable alternative forms of individual and collective action. Each chapter analyzes a central aesthetic object through archival research, inductive formal analysis, and critical theory. Chapter 1 reads *Les Noces* (1923) by Bronislava Nijinska and Igor Stravinsky as a critique of J.L. Austin's theory of the performative, staging non-sovereign collective agency through the ballet's anonymous peasant chorus. Chapter 2 examines interpellation in Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind* (1890) and Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), arguing that anonymity structures the formation of subject positions. Chapter 3 turns from the anonymity of the interpellated individual to that of the collective, focusing on the figure of the proletariat in *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), and showing how the film mobilizes choral anonymity to untether class from fixed identity and open the possibility of an anonymous revolutionary subject. Across these case studies, the dissertation reframes anonymity as a performative mode of appearance that unsettles dominant theories of

action, collectivity, and representation. In this account, anonymity displaces the centrality of named identity in theories of agency and appearance, revealing how political subjectivation emerges through structurally anonymous, non-sovereign acts. By reading modernist performance as a site in which anonymity materializes subjectivity and agency, the dissertation reframes anonymity as a critical resource for aesthetic form and political theory alike.

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Acknowledgments

My committee, my parents.

Dedication

虹虹...

... 乃降明德，乃生明翼.

...τῆ μὲν τὴν Ἀσίην τῆ δὲ τὴν Εὐρώπην ἐπισκιάζειν.

Introduction

In the final minutes of *The Great Dictator* (1940), a nameless Jewish barber, played by Charlie Chaplin, escapes from a concentration camp by impersonating the fascist dictator he resembles. The real dictator, Adenoid Hynkel, also played by Chaplin, has been arrested by his own soldiers, who mistake him for the barber after encountering him out of uniform. The barber, still as Hynkel, is brought to the frontier, where the fascist army has just completed its annexation of a neighboring country and the enthralled crowds await his appearance. “Your excellency, the world awaits your word,” a Nazi officer tells him. The barber ascends a narrow staircase built into the side of the monumental stage, its fascist symmetry crowned by towering pylons. Behind him, the word “Liberty” is etched in block letters across the backdrop. His discomfort, perhaps due both to being in the eye of the Nazi machine and for fear of being discovered, registers visibly, marking a subtle shift from the anonymity of the nameless to the anonymity of impersonation. Although Field Marshal Herring, a senior official in Hynkel’s regime, remarks that he “looks strange,” the impersonation continues.

Before the speech begins, a Nazi officer offers a brief introduction that makes the regime’s position unambiguous: democracy has been abolished, Jews are no longer citizens, and opposition is grounds for exclusion or worse. The Jewish barber, still mistaken for Hynkel, listens from the platform with increasing panic. He stands cautiously before beginning to speak, haltingly at first, then with increasing confidence delivers a passionate if trite appeal for “human brotherhood” and “democracy.” The crowd erupts in applause, apparently indifferent to the ideological reversal, and entirely unaware that the man speaking is not Hynkel but an unnamed Jewish barber. This final speech is remembered now for its plea for peace and solidarity, but it is

first and foremost an anonymous act: a speech made by an anonymous man impersonating someone else, addressed to everyone.

And yet, as André Bazin's 1948 response makes clear, the final speech does not seem attributable solely to the Jewish barber. By a paradoxical action of revealing and covering, "the most disconcerting of metamorphoses,"

Charlie's lunar mask disappears little by little, corroded by the gradations of the panchromatic stock and betrayed by the nearness of the camera, which intensifies the telescopic effect of the wide screen. Underneath, as if it were a superimposition, appears the face of an already aging man, furrowed here and there by grief, his hair sprinkled with white, the face of Charles Spencer Chaplin. (Bazin 110–11)

What Bazin identifies as the sudden appearance of Chaplin, the emergence of the actor from behind the character, is not simply a revelation, it is an unmasking that is also a "superimposition," the layering of a new image onto another. This duality marks a boundary of cinematic mimesis, a point at which performance begins to exceed its representational function. The character is no longer mimetically coherent or contained. For Bazin, the appearance of Chaplin displaces the nameless Barber, who Bazin recognizes as an extension of Chaplin's familiar character, The Tramp, insinuated by the "lunar mask." With this speech, what Gilles Deleuze calls a transformation of "action" into "discursive image," that mesmerizing figure lingers as a residue of performance history, of what we might call silent film's "gestural vocabulary" (Deleuze 172). Through the flatness of form the Tramp is still visible through the recognizable makeup, moustache, and outfit, not to mention posture, gait, and bearing, that circulate across Chaplin's oeuvre. The image, as Bazin notes, is doubly exposed, Chaplin's face within Hynkel's mask, but it is this very superimposition that marks the anonymous dimension

of the performance. What surfaces is not simply the biographical actor nor the diegetic character, but an anonymous third figure, unresolved and unnameable, at once more particular and more abstract than either.

That this figure is recognizable only in excess of the fiction, as a real person, Chaplin, suggests a deeper structural principle: anonymity as the undoing of mimetic coherence. This form of anonymity emerges when representation begins to host another logic altogether: when a body, gesture, or voice becomes too dense, too layered, too historically overdetermined to belong to a single role. Where Bazin sees the outline of Chaplin pressing through, we might instead understand the scene as staging a limit condition of figuration: the moment at which performance ceases to signify individuality and begins to act instead as a vehicle for a collective or structural presence. The anonymous enters not by withholding the name, but by multiplying the frames through which the named is made visible. In other words, as one form of anonymity gives way to another and yet another and yet another, we struggle to name those anonymous performances through the aesthetic and political logics available to us.

Deleuze similarly reads the final speech as the emergence of Chaplin, but not as a return of the actor beneath the role. What appears instead is Chaplin as a “Figure of discourse,” a cinematic form in which language is staged as image. The speech is delivered by Chaplin, but it is no longer attributable to the Barber or to Hynkel. Its force arises from its formal structure, which isolates speech as an act untethered from identity. For Deleuze, this shift is also a political diagnosis. He recalls Bazin’s remark that *The Great Dictator* would have been impossible had Hitler not first appropriated the Tramp’s moustache. This appropriation transforms a trivial resemblance into the structural condition for substitution. A minimal difference in appearance gives rise to a maximal difference in political consequence. The speech that follows delineates

two distinct social orders, “two opposable Societies, one of which makes the slight difference between men into the instrument of an infinite distance between situations (tyranny), and the other which would make the slight difference between men the variable of a great situation of community and communality (Democracy)” (Deleuze 172). For Deleuze, this contrast is not a matter of moral character but of political structure, whether difference is used to distribute power vertically or dispersed horizontally through forms of mutual recognition. What speaks in this moment is a figure formed at the threshold between these two orders. Following Deleuze, anonymity stages the separation of discourse from identity and, as the masses cheer, a speech act that does not require a name in order to take effect.¹

The reversal of the dramatic situation, the anonymous Jewish barber mistaken for a dictator and asked to speak for a people, also teaches us how to interpret the music that bookends his speech. The barber insists he cannot speak, a refusal that reflects both the generic conventions of silent film and his profound misplacement within the fiction. “It’s our only hope,” his German ally tells him. As he rises, the Prelude to Wagner’s *Lohengrin* begins faintly beneath the scene, underscoring the moment in which the barber crosses from impersonation into an

¹ Chaplin later recalled that “most of the critics objected to the last speech. The *New York Daily News* said I pointed a finger of Communism at the audience,” and others claiming it was “not in character” (Chaplin 398). “The public as a whole loved it,” he wrote, though the film’s reception abroad told another story. In Latin America, *The Great Dictator* was banned in Argentina and Peru, tear-gassed in Chile, disrupted by masked raids in Paraguay, and targeted by anti-Semitic propaganda in Mexico (Hiatt). If Deleuze calls the speech a Figure of discourse, what gave that figure its force was not only the instability of the historical moment, defined by competing ideologies, economic interests and diplomatic entanglements, but the aesthetic dislocation of the speaker. The anonymity of the figure allowed the speech to bypass the coordinates of cinematic realism and genre logic. Emerging at the intersection of burlesque and fascist spectacle, the scene condensed what I call above the Tramp’s “gestural vocabulary,” Hitler’s theatricality, and the collapsing boundary between comic representation and political address. In doing so, it escaped character entirely and entered circulation as a speech without identity.

The passage from representation into political form continues to echo across registers, where the slippage from “Tramp” to “Trump” becomes a catachrestic version of the Tramp’s moustache, a phonetic and figural passage that reanimates the difficulty of distinguishing comic performance from sovereign display. As Marx writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, repetition in history transforms tragedy into farce, thickening rather than depleting their theatricality. Tramp, Hitler, Tramp, Trump. Each becomes legible through another, until the question of who represents whom no longer admits a stable answer. This is the problem of the Brumaire, and it is also the logic of the mask. Anonymity, here, does not veil identity but disorients representation itself; it names the gap through which ideology performs its substitutions without anchoring them in any self-sustaining subject.

irruptive anonymity that moves beyond mimesis. When he finishes speaking, the same music returns, nearly inaudibly, after the final line.

Wagner's opera tells of a mysterious knight who will marry Elsa only if she refrains from asking his name. When she breaks the taboo, the knight's identity is revealed: he is Lohengrin, son of Parsifal. With this revelation, he must depart. The story moves from the sacred potency of the unnamed toward the tragic necessity of naming. Recognition ends the miracle. *Lohengrin* stages anonymity as a temporary veil whose lifting restores the logic of history and destiny. Wagnerian destiny, that is, writes aesthetic progress as one in which the hero is recognized and the nation is mythologized. Chaplin's film quietly reverses this trajectory so that the anonymous, not the name, becomes politically generative. In place of the tragic logic of recognition, the barber's speech is an act of misrecognition. No one asks, like Elsa, "Who are you?" and no answer is offered.

If *The Great Dictator* stages a reversal of power and identity, then its use of Wagner's *Lohengrin* Prelude initiates a reversal of musical ideology. By the time Chaplin reappropriated the music in 1940, the Prelude had long been enlisted in service of a nationalist imaginary. Although no anti-Semitic subtext of the opera has been discovered, musicologist Lawrence Kramer notes that Wagner's 1853 revision of the Prelude's program note rewrote the piece as a redemptive fantasy of emancipation from capital. Kramer identifies this precisely as "the underlying structure of anti-Semitic and other pariah-generating ideologies" (Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture* 73). In other words, Wagner retrofitted the Prelude to dramatize a world corrupted by "barren care for profit and property," and restored only through visionary redemption—a scenario that, in his broader polemical writing such as *Judaism in Music*, he had come to associate with Jewishness as the force of contamination. In this light, the Prelude—

mythic, cyclically structured, and hinging on (dramatic) recognition—had come to function not only as musical transcendence but as a mask for ideological longing.

Chaplin, in Kramer's account, explicitly reverses that supposed transcendence and ideological cover by "tinkering with the mechanism of citation" (Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture* 43). Rather than restore Wagner's authority as a purveyor of national destiny or cultural transcendence, this most anti-Riefenstahl of films turns the music "against the Hynkel-like values it was meant to serve...which the music itself innately opposes" (Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture* 43). His use of the *Lohengrin* Prelude does not remove Wagner's ideological frame so much as perform a counter-frame. Like Liszt before him, whose own program note subtly rewrote the moral telos of *Lohengrin* by stipulating that its God "avenges the oppressed and asks only for love and faith," Chaplin stages an interpretive act that is itself performative. Kramer's later work in *Interpreting Music* turns to the language of speech acts and performativity to describe this production of subjectivity through music. He defines "interpretation" not as commentary or explication, but as a semi-open ontological structure of musical meaning-making. An interpretation, for Kramer, is a performative intervention, an event that not only recontextualizes but reconstitutes the object. "Subjects make interpretations; interpretations make subjects" (Kramer, *Interpreting Music* 3). Interpretation is not the act of an already stable subject but the site in which subjectivity is performed into being. In this light, Chaplin's use of the Prelude does not simply reposition the music, it produces a subject position.

It is this performative condition that prepares the ground for anonymity as a mode of subjectivation. The barber does not speak as Hynkel, as himself, nor as Chaplin. Meanwhile, *pace* Deleuze, the nameless Tramp does not let language free from the body: we are indeed still tethered to a material social position, albeit an anonymous one. Barbara Korte has drawn our

attention to a fascinating yet elusive point, that “Chaplin’s Tramp films present poverty, but with an aesthetics that resists readings for a clear-cut ‘identity’ of poverty” (Korte 139). The Tramp does not represent poverty as a coherent identity. Pushing Korte’s argument farther, I argue that the Tramp eludes identity through his incongruity within the world he inhabits. He manages to appear both produced by the world around him yet unassimilable to it. He does not belong, yet is its result. He is more like a spectator who has been “forced to be an actor,” as Louis Althusser would put it. He is subject to a machinery. When we see him, we see an effect of social process, translated aesthetically into the stylized choreography of his movements and gestures, his gestural vocabulary. In *The Great Dictator* the Tramp animates a Jewish character and the result is the same. He is believably Jewish and poor not as identity but as social effect, revealing the performative coming into being of a subject. Class, like Jewishness, does not precede the figure, nor does it retrospectively stabilize it. The anonymity of the final image, the fact that all of these names, both of the characters and actor, seem insufficient, extends the machinery of that “authorless theater” beyond the frame of the film, both horizontally into the audience and temporally, asking not “who are you?” but “who will we become?” The materiality of this gesture refuses the anonymous as a form of transcendence, either towards “discourse” or towards the idealist “humanity” of the address, it insists on the movement from one performative moment to the next, producing what I call an anonymous performing subject.

Modalities of Anonymity

In a charged moment of an October 2011 talkback at Verso’s “Communism: A New Beginning?” conference, held just a month into the Occupy Wall Street encampments, the conversation turned to the role of theory in relation to unfolding political action, especially the

refusal of the Occupy movement to articulate a single program or demand. Susan Buck-Morss, flanked by Slavoj Žižek and Bruno Bosteels, tells the audience that “the best thing a theorist can do is keep it unnamed,” cautioning against premature interpretation (*Communism*). She observes that each time someone tries to name the movement, they do so by linking it to something that came before: one calls it “American populism,” another associates it with 1960’s progressivism, and still others try to frame it through national or historical precedent. Each of these acts of naming, she suggests, risks pulling the event back into the past, closing down the possibility of something new taking shape. “If we’re thinking about it, if we already know it, and we try to name it, we push it back down” (*Communism*). For Buck-Morss, naming in this context contracts the space of possibility, foreclosing emergence. To keep the event unnamed is to hold open a scene in which new alignments, affiliations, and subject positions might still be enacted.

Perhaps with Theodor Adorno’s rallying cry against “identity thinking” in her ear, Susan Buck-Morss warns of the conceptually debilitating power of the name. Lying behind that warning is the durable pairing of naming and power, a dyad that, especially when coupled with the looming or actual deployment of force, shapes much contemporary political theory. That dyad has also supplied the left with its principal analytic, particularly as joined to a politics of presence and several strands of identity politics. Across philosophical programs and political perspectives, the capacity to name and the force that naming exerts remain decisive: names secure legibility, while the act of naming produces recognition and consolidates collective identity. Western thought inherits this premise from Plato, whose *nomothetes*, the lawgiver who binds language to civic order, is perhaps the principal figure of this dyad itself. Aristotle’s *zōon politikon* can be read as a democratized counterpart to the lone *nomothetēs*, moving the power of lawgiving from a single founder to the citizenry, yet leaving intact the basic problematic of

speech and order. Hobbes secures sovereignty by fixing public meanings, and Schmitt draws community's boundary through the naming of the enemy. A genealogical thread that runs from Nietzsche to Foucault shows how names manufacture the subjects they appear to describe, while decolonial writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o expose the violence of forced renaming. The intersectional and presence theorists, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Anne Phillips, and Linda Alcoff, retool naming to reveal compounded injuries and to press institutional claims. Across these divergent projects a shared premise persists: legibility requires a name, and politics begins with its utterance and inscription. Performativity and interpellation, together with the figure of the proletariat, each the focus of a chapter here, enter contemporary debate through that premise; each concept has been read as an effect of naming and has thereby obscured the anonymous procedures that sustain it.

Without dismissing the projects that rely on such acts of naming, I take Buck-Morss's provocation seriously. Her comment points to a political horizon that resists demands and desires for premature coherence or stable identity. This project follows that impulse, and ultimately casts that horizon as a vanishing point, a point of perpetual deferral. My move towards the anonymous not a wholesale repudiation of naming/power (which would dialectically become an acceptance of it), but a counterpart. This dissertation exposes the way anonymity is already materially at the center of our thinking and practices and theorizes how we might put it to better use. What does it mean to think and act from the position of the unnamed, not as an exception or refusal, but as a recurrent condition of appearance? In what ways do the concepts and procedures which appear to instate a named subject actually gain potency through anonymity?

In my account, anonymity is a performative structure: a contingent and repeatable accomplishment produced through procedures, rituals, and social gestures that condition how

subjects appear and circulate within politics and representation. Anonymity is thus always in process, a “becoming anonymous” that allows us to glimpse the systems that produce performances outside of names that are left defunct, unavailable, or structurally inadequate. Just as modern societies have developed procedures of naming and identification, they have developed procedures of anonymization: formal and institutional operations that mask faces, efface names, and separate names and faces from bodies. As a complement to what Gil Eyal and Jordan Brensinger call “techniques of identity,” the sociological mechanisms that fasten subjects to positions within institutional fields, I search for “techniques of anonymity:” those points of detachment, substitution, or dispersal through which the subject is partially suspended from recognition (Brensinger and Eyal 268).² Anonymity in this sense is not a state but a relation. It does not precede the subject or replace it but conditions its appearance, and, like naming, is never neutral; it can be imposed, assumed, resisted, or instrumentalized. The question, then, is not simply whether the subject is named or not, but how anonymity operates in art as a condition of possibility for social and political action.

² This is precisely what Odysseus invented in his fabled escape from Polyphemus the cyclops when he declared himself “No one” (*outis*). We can register briefly that while today we take many forms of anonymity for granted, in Homer’s archaic Greece anonymity had to be invented. In the *Iliad*, identity appears transparently across a battlefield despite warriors wearing both the armor of both their fallen comrades and that of the opposing army. Specific instances of donning another’s armor may temporarily disguise, but the general effect is a doubling of vision that reflects the perception of a doubled subject. As for Achilles, armor remains identifiable and associable with its owner, nearly imbuing the bearer (Patroclus) with his power and personality. Without negating the first act of near absolute recognition, when armor changes hands in Homer the structure of recognition also persists without lapsing into a structure of masking. The same structure appears in the Homer’s treatment of deities. When deities assume the form of humans, they are almost always recognizable as both themselves and as the form they assume, both to the characters within the narrative and most certainly to the listeners/readers of the epic. *The Odyssey* thus concludes with Athena intervening in the narrative in disguise. The epic’s final line then names the duplicity of identity that posed no contradiction to the Greeks of the Archaic period: Pallas Athena is both herself and Mentor in “form” and “voice.” By Vergil’s time, however, armor is no longer simply a trophy but potentially a disguise, a possibility which was not the default in Homer. In the *Aeneid*, the tragic deaths of Nisus and Euryalus are precipitated by their attempt to escape in captured enemy armor, which ultimately gives them away. The shift from armor as extension of personal identity to armor as potential deception marks a historical transformation in how anonymity and recognition were conceived.

Across works of dance, theater, film, and political theory, I track the emergence of what I call the anonymous performing subject: a figure that does not resolve into recognition, and whose appearance reconfigures the terms of mimetic representation. It does this primarily in two related ways. First, the trajectory towards recognition (*anagnorisis*), is either omitted from narrative structure or else rewritten as misrecognition. Second, anonymous performances often prompt figures to appear “chorally,” as if part of a chorus, even if that chorus does not itself appear.

I am thus not proposing a space of definitive coercion or freedom outside the name; anonymity is not pure erasure or liberation. I am instead proposing an integration of anonymity into the way we think about the production of subjectivity and social and political participation. That is, a consideration of the practices, techniques and procedures that render subjects anonymous. From the vantage point of the anonymously performing subject, I then show how various concepts at the heart of political theorization today (performativity, interpellation, and class production), and that typically imagine the installation of a named, individuated subject, in fact rely on and produce forms of anonymity. The fact that anonymity is wrapped up in epistemology (who knows what about whom), or temporary (no one is anonymous forever), or partial (they have a name but that name does not seem to fully apply) does not make these anonymous performances less concrete. To the contrary. In everyday life, the separation between a person and their name is never complete; it is partial, temporary, and context specific. Kathleen Wallace defines anonymity as “noncoordinatability of traits in a given respect,” a formulation that already acknowledges how “anonymity is never perfectly complete; in other words, an anonymous person is identified or identifiable in some respect...and that trait is not coordinated with other traits or locations of the person, making it difficult or impossible for the known trait to

pick out the person in other respects and vice versa” (Wallace 25–26). Literature and political myth often imagine anonymity as total erasure or sovereign opacity. In Herodotus, the Atarantes are described as the only people who have no names—“the whole people are called Atarantes but no man has a name of his own”—a people whose individual anonymity is absolute, yet collectively known (Herodotus, bk.4.184). Rivers wash away identity, plants dissolve memory, and bodies disappear in oubliettes. These figures are not mere fantasy. They mark the imagined boundaries of social being at which anonymity becomes perceptible as a formal problem, as a disturbance in how identity is structured, changed, or denied. This project returns those imaginaries to material analysis, treating anonymity not as a metaphysical void but as a mode of figuration that emerges within social and aesthetic systems as a partial condition, a structural effect and a performative resource.

The first “barrier of entry,” so to speak, in declaring my “interest” in the anonymous is its duplicity, the way it is always partial and unfinished. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “anonymous” across a dispersed but patterned spectrum. At one end lie definitions in which a name is simply not provided or not known: conditions of partial or suspended knowledge, where a figure or object is encountered without identifying reference. Further along, the anonymous appears as a withholding: names are intentionally obscured, stripped away, or never inscribed, such as the anonymous grave, the unsigned document, the withheld authorship, which all imply that a name either once existed or might still be claimed. Still further, the unidentified and ungiven shade into interchangeability. A person or thing becomes indistinguishable from others of its kind, absorbed into a category or class that renders it generic, unexceptional, or procedurally equivalent (“Anonymous”). These definitions range from epistemological uncertainty to practices of erasure to systems of abstraction and administration. But in each case,

anonymity marks not the absence of a name in some absolute sense, but the ongoing possibility that the named and unnamed might reverse positions. That possibility of substitution, deferral, duplication, or refusal is what gives the anonymous its meaning; it is never complete because it is a “becoming” sustained by processes of doing and undoing that shape how subjects and objects appear in different contexts.

Anonymity, then, is not a question of being nor the basis for a philosophical inquiry into the anonymous as a metaphysical horizon or ethical relation. There is no grand impersonal *il y a* or an encounter with the face, for example, as in Levinas. Anonymity here is not approached as an ontology but as a relational structure. I am, however, interested in how the language of being, essence, or origin appear within artistic and political forms as figures, claims, rituals, or constraints. When Goethe’s Faust signs his name in blood he binds his name to his physical body, and his body to his soul. The blood signature dramatizes a structure in which naming anchors identity within juridical, religious, racial, and philosophical categories. Yet Faust himself explicitly questions the seriousness of this action, dismissing it as mere theatricality, just another document whose authority he openly doubts. Indeed, by the end of *Part II*, the blood contract inexplicably fails to hold, a narrative choice that has troubled critics precisely because it undermines the pact’s supposed metaphysical and ideological authority. The play thus places name, body, and soul into performative alignment only to quietly set it aside. Rather than reinforcing stable identity, *Faust* emphasizes transformation and theatricality. This shift toward ambiguity signals a critical space in which the ideological certainty of naming is suspended or neutralized, unfixing and opening the very identity it seemed to cohere. The question is never whether the subject is named, but how the name functions, and how its interruption through the narrative, theatricality, gesture, choreography, etc, reorients the scene in which it was expected to

act. What interests me here are the many operations through which both naming and anonymity take hold. Rather than isolate the named from the unnamed, I attend to the procedures that make them exchangeable, interruptible, or reversible. In the move from a “being-anonymous” to a “becoming-anonymous,” to echo Jacques Rancière, the relations that structure anonymity begin to appear as the condition of its emergence, what Marx, in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach, calls an ensemble of social relations (Rancière, *Sobre políticas estéticas*, chap.5. Política y estética de lo anónimo).

In his reading of Marx’s sixth thesis on Feuerbach, Étienne Balibar dwells on the phrase, noting that “*ensemble*” is itself a foreign word in German retained by Marx as if to signal a concept that resists assimilation. For Balibar, this word does not function as a synonym for “society” or “community,” nor does it indicate a homogeneous collective. Instead, it points to the irreducible “multiplicity” and “heterogeneity” of the social, and its “seriality” suggests that it is an ever-changing set of mediations, structures, and relations in which no single element can claim priority or self-sufficiency (Balibar, “Marx’s Sixth Thesis” 10). The *ensemble* cannot be anchored to a singular subject, a center, or a preexisting logic; its meaning emerges through a shifting, contingent articulation of roles, functions, and forms. What takes shape through *ensemble* is not a group constituted by identity, but a site where the relations themselves remain in flux, unclaimed by any one name or position. In other words, the “*ensemble* of social relations” becomes an invitation to think social being without essence or identifiable center, and to consider the anonymity of those relations signals the unfixed and ongoing work of exchange, circulation, and mediation through which subjectivity is produced.

Further, these three terms (exchange, circulation, and mediation) should already ward against innocent readings of either the social or the anonymous. The *ensemble* constantly forms

and renews itself precisely through real forms of conflict and subjection. In other words, the ensemble appears, both to its members and to others through the terms of alienation, in which relations are inverted, displaced into commodity and juridical forms that organize experience as if between things/objects, rather than people/subjects. Labor relations and the division of labor concretize this inversion, making exchange and class struggle the terrains on which social being is articulated. As Balibar argues, Marx's redefinition of essence itself acts as a "performative gesture," simultaneously transforming the conceptual field it names (Balibar, "Marx's Sixth Thesis" 9–10).

However, if Marx's intervention performs the ensemble at the level of thought, throughout this dissertation I conceive of the "chorus" as a material performance of the *ensemble*. Classicist Simon Goldhill has recently noted that some of the most influential critics of tragedy and political theater have neglected theorizing the modern chorus, despite its centrality to representing the people, the state, and the masses.³ Implicit in his argument is the insufficiency of German Idealist models, which taught us to view the chorus as an aesthetic symbol of universal community. My analysis of anonymity has led me to take up this gap by formulating a materialist theory of the chorus as the historical performance of anonymous social being: a material enactment of the *ensemble* of social relations. Rather than reflecting an idealized spectator, the chorus performs the unstable work of assembling, fragmenting, and reassembling collective life under changing historical conditions. It stages the political as the continual production and articulation of the ensemble itself. In this sense, "chorality" becomes a historical practice that, in its own mediated way, does not simply reflect but performs the

³ He provocatively begins, "It is a remarkable fact that in Terry Eagleton's book-length discussion of tragedy and the tragic, *Sweet Violence*, there is absolutely no discussion of the chorus" (Goldhill, *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy* 166).

production and articulation of relations of domination and subjectivization. To return to Balibar's terminology, it materially performs the instability and "plasticity," the historical "transformability" (*Veränderbarkeit*) of social relations (Balibar, *The Transindividual* 145). By reading transformability as a performative capacity materialized through the anonymous chorus, I extend Balibar's reading of Marx's "performative gesture" into the aesthetic field where anonymous social being is enacted. I am also conscientiously resuming his analysis in which alienation itself contains the performative capacity for refiguration. For Balibar, alienation constitutes the "effective reality" of social being, the historically active mode through which relations appear. There is no return to an original immediacy or outside of alienation, only the contingent and continual activation of new historical forms. Where Marx, Balibar argues, ultimately reinscribed the *ensemble* within a restricted and unifying, homogenizing, horizon of "labor," my materialist theory of the anonymous chorus reactivates its suppressed potential: the performance of collective being through unstable, heterogeneous, and continually refigurable social relations (Balibar, "Marx's Sixth Thesis" 14).

"Class" and "chorality" thus become two of the primary interventions I make through anonymity. Through my reading of anonymous performances, I attempt to reopen the representation of "class" not simply as the metaphorical representation of identity—the resemblance of poverty on stage or screen to real world poverty, and thus the identification of "class" (and class identification) based on the logic of substitution—but rather in its anonymous relationality. Class must appear in the anonymous because it does not, in either the first or final analyses, appear as an identity. As Althusser insists in his "Reply to John Lewis," the class struggle does not presuppose stable classes but constitutes them, displacing the bourgeois fiction of an underlying "man" who acts in history (Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism* 53). If history is

a process without a subject, and class struggle itself is the motor of history, class must be understood as a shifting, unstable effect of material contradiction, not a nameable entity. Reading class through anonymity therefore allows us to register both the instability and the historical specificity of collective formation without reifying identity.

In Chapter 3, I pursue this theoretical line by turning to Balibar's concept of the nonsubject, where history unfolds through the contradictions and antagonisms that fracture any stable figure of collective identity (the proletariat). Rancière complements this reading by showing how political subjectivation is a process of "dis-identification," where the "un-qualified" lay the anarchic ground of politics (Rancière, "What Does It Mean to Be Un?" 562). The proletariat, he argues, was historically constituted precisely through this dis-identification as an "un-identity" that emerged from the condition of exclusion, asserting political capacity where none was recognized (Rancière, "What Does It Mean to Be Un?" 564). This structure continues to resonate through formulations such as "the part that has no part" and "the class that is not one" (Rancière, *Disagreement* 89). Anonymous chorality, in this sense, does not represent inclusion or exclusion, but a scene of dissensus that performs the unstable conditions under which political and historical agency materializes. Balibar's account of "anthropological difference" deepens this framework, showing that difference does not merely oppose the universal but constitutes it by introducing instability at its core. He calls this "unstable" site an "*Unwesen*," a "non-being," or as he prefers, an ill-being: a relational "monster" that never coheres into stable social substance (Balibar, *Citizen Subject* 301). Chorality materializes this instability, staging the mediated orchestral space between performers and audience as a performative site of contestation and displacement. Anonymous, choral performances thus reopen the ensemble of social relations as a space of historical possibility.

What matters, then, is not only that anonymity interrupts or stalls identity, but that it does so “performatively,” where anonymity becomes a mode of acting within and upon the social world. Wallace's definition cited earlier signals that anonymity persists by disjoining recognizable features across contexts. Contrary to Wallace's more pragmatic approach, I find that those traits which construct identity are neither stable nor in natural accord; they are themselves produced as effects of performance. Wallace's definition alerts us to the always incomplete project of identification and anonymity, but it must be extended to include the processual and performative becoming of the features themselves.

Performativity, in my account, does not mark an immediate passage from art into life. It names a materialist *theatrum mundi* in which every act—on stage, on screen, and in political life—is staged through historically sedimented forms, aesthetic conventions, and structures of social (mis)recognition. Performance produces these frames and moves within them, exposing their contingency through acts that cannot fully coincide with the scenes they traverse. It is in this space of performative misalignment that we might “undo Lear's button for him,” so to speak, stepping into the scene not as characters within the fiction, but as readers and spectators who mistake the porousness of the stage for an invitation (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, sc.24.303-4).⁴ The act of loosening the button is not scripted by the play, nor is it called for by the other figures on stage; it arises from the fracture where the address fails to land, and where a different kind of participation becomes possible. In that misrecognition, the boundary between

⁴ Lear's request to undo his button occurs in two distinct moments depending on the textual edition. All editions include Lear's final plea to “undo this button” during his death scene. However, in editions incorporating Folio readings, such as the Cambridge edition, Lear also commands, “Come, unbutton here!” during the storm scene on the heath (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act3.4.108-9). The Oxford edition, based primarily on Quarto 1, omits this earlier instance, retaining instead an ambiguous Quarto reading (“Come on bee true”), which the editors interpret as possibly addressing himself or an imaginary attendant. In my performative reading of these speeches to an absent and ambiguously situated addressee, both “unbutton here” and “be true” amount to the same request: an impossible performance of releasing his body from his own name.

representation and material life is disturbed, and the figure of Lear reemerges, thanks to us, as the “poor, bare, forked animal” he glimpsed in the storm, the “unaccommodated man” stripped of institutional protections and symbolic guarantees. To loosen his button is to accompany his exposure, placing the discussion itself in the position of the poor, the mad, and the disenfranchised. In this configuration, performativity traces the conditions under which action becomes possible where recognition is structurally denied.

The misaligned performances I have been tracing suggest the need for a theory that treats anonymity not as a static condition but, as Thomas DeGloma puts it, as a “performative accomplishment.” DeGloma’s 2023 monograph *Anonymous* offers one of the most comprehensive sociological accounts of anonymity to date. As DeGloma says, anonymity must be “moved into action—brought to life in social situations” where actors intentionally obscure personal identity while producing meaning for specific audiences (DeGloma 5). Through a wide array of historical and contemporary cases, DeGloma demonstrates that anonymity is a “social accomplishment” enacted through the careful management of cover representations that separate particular acts from personal biography (DeGloma 170). Echoes of Erving Goffman’s foundational theory of social performance are audible through DeGloma’s treatment of anonymity, wherein actors use expressive equipment such as masks and pseudonyms to craft their performances for particular audiences, adjusting what is revealed and concealed in response to shifting interactive demands. Crucially, DeGloma also recognizes that audiences “comprehend and attribute agency in various impersonal ways,” leading him to propose four “interrelated notions of *someone*, *anyone*, *everyone*, and *no one*” that categorize the “somewhat amorphous agencies” behind anonymous performances (DeGloma 18).

Yet even as DeGloma's sociology of anonymity foregrounds the strategic ways actors obscure their personal identities in social situations, it leaves intact the deeper logic of personalization that structures both identity and action. Naming is a way of fixing the subject and attributing agency across time and relationships, it "allows us to establish, comprehend and express the nature of an individual actor's unique personal identity in relation to the personal identities of other people," (DeGloma 9). Anonymous actors, in this view, assume a "cover representation" in order to "suspend" the visible link between the act and the person (DeGloma 10). In other words, for DeGloma as for Wallace, anonymity momentarily covers the continuous self. He reaffirms this claim in the final lines of the book. Speaking specifically about the "unmasking" of anonymous performances, he asserts that "Personalization stands as the antithesis of anonymity. It undoes the someoneness, anyoneness, everyoneness, and no oneness of anonymous and pseudonymous acts, further revealing how our lives and our experiences were impacted by the performance of hidden identities" (DeGloma 178).

What I think he misses here is that naming and anonymity often work in tandem, a tension that emerges directly in his reading of W. E. B. Du Bois's veil and second-sight. For DeGloma, second-sight appears to affirm the resilience of personal identity beneath the "veil" of typification, a perspective that survives anonymization intact and reasserts the individuality of the subject (DeGloma 160). Yet second-sight is not just the hidden preservation of an interior self, it is the doubled consciousness generated by racial anonymization, a perspective that arises because of the veil rather than in spite of it.⁵ The view from behind the veil is predicated on the

⁵ Supporting the centrality of sight and eyes to the uniqueness of the individual, DeGloma cites the etymological connection between face, person and eyes through *prosōpon*, drawing on A. David Napier's reminder that *pros* ("toward") and *ōpa* ("face" or "eye") together define the human as relationally directed. Yet DeGloma omits that *prosōpon* was also the Greek word for mask. To recover this fuller genealogy is to register that the figure of the person has always been mediated by performance: the "face" offered to the world was never simply organic but already a surface of address and concealment alike.

anonymizing gesture itself: it is because the subject is typed, misrecognized, and socially effaced that second-sight becomes possible. Like the ensemble of social relations that present alienated forms as objects relating to other objects, second-sight reflects not only a critical view of objectified material reality but also the possibility of a truer, potentially revolutionary relation to it. Precisely the point which DeGloma believes would assert the presence of a singular, complex identity, also does the opposite. Rather than opposing naming and anonymity, Du Bois shows how their interplay constitutes a doubled mode of appearance: a subject formed through the tension between being seen and remaining unseen, being named and remaining anonymous.

Further, while DeGloma locates the performativity of anonymity in its ability to generate effects in the social world, he overlooks a deeper performative logic: the anonymous performance constitutes the very subject who emerges from the scene. Goffman's neglected insight becomes indispensable here: "A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it" (Goffman 252–53). The self, in Goffman's language, is a "dramatic effect" of the scene, not an organic being who survives it whole (Goffman 253). Nor does Du Bois posit a continuous self preceding and surviving the veil, implying instead the production of a new self, wrought in the tension between visibility and effacement, between the typifications that obscure and the openings they inadvertently create. It is this logic of production that underwrites Du Bois's metaphor as it resounds through the folk imagery of a caul, or veil, at birth; that is, it is an act of creation, a performative becoming.

The anonymous hymns that open each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* stage this dynamic: like Lear's request that we undo his button, they invite the reader to perform from that anonymous space where the body and its recognitions come undone. We are asked to sing, if we

can only read the notes, and as we sing have to imagine not only our solitary voice but ourselves as part of a chorus. Perhaps we do so as Tarkovsky's "modern man" who only "opens and closes his mouth according to the song's rhythm but does not make any sound." Even still we participate in that anonymous chorality which Du Bois constructs through the "literary figure" of the veil rather than the "sociological category" of race. Through that participatory attachment engendered by the anonymous we can, perhaps, not just become aware of the act or effects of typification, as DeGloma would have it, but alter the performance itself. This chorality is what Goffman makes space for when he says in the quotation above that the self is an "imputation," a performative effect folded into the perception, recognition and misrecognition of others, that DeGloma's distinction between passive and active anonymity collapses. Typification cannot be cleanly separated from performance: it furnishes the ground and material through which anonymous action takes shape, the screen upon which the "amorphous agency" of anonymity is projected.

Discourses of Modern Anonymity

Immediately after the French Revolution, Friedrich Schiller sought to "save society" by inventing a program of aesthetic education meant to stabilize the new republican commonwealth (Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education* 19). His 1795 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* warns that either undisciplined feeling or unmoored reason will strip the subject of stable presence. The "Thirteenth Letter" begins with the tension of these "material" (sensuous) and the "formal" (rational) impulses and culminates in the figure of the "nonentity" (*Null sein*), a self that registers on no civic or moral ledger once one impulse overwhelms the other (Schiller). Human integrity, in both social and metaphysical terms, depends on a provisional equilibrium in which

“receptivity” and “autonomy” reciprocally limit one another. When receptivity subsumes autonomy, the self dissolves into pure flux, whereas unrestrained autonomy freezes the self into a contentless form. To counter this two-fold danger Schiller introduces the *Spieltrieb*, the play-impulse that synthesizes the two impulses in lived wholeness. Play reconciles the citizen with the state by giving form to feeling without annihilating its vitality, while the nonentity marks the breakdown of that balance. Schiller thus supplies an early philosophical vocabulary for the idea that anonymity can arise through excess rationality as well as through sensory overload. His nonentity is anonymity *avant la lettre*, an ontological and sociocultural vacancy generated by asymmetrical personal refinement. The risk to culture, in his view, is that either physiological distraction or intellectual monomania can evacuate the historical and ethical person, leaving a nonpresence unable to claim political or aesthetic standing.

Søren Kierkegaard’s *The Present Age*, published in 1846, transposes Schiller’s interior drama onto a public sphere, primarily mediated by the press, and crucially gives “anonymity” its modern sense: not just a cover for authorship but also as a condition. He argues that a modern “leveling” takes place through a “phantom,” the public, “a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing” (Kierkegaard, *Two Ages* 90).⁶ The press supplies this phantom by binding dispersed readers into a conceptual aggregate while absolving each contributor of embodied presence. The result is a body of “unsubstantial individuals who are never united” and therefore never accountable (Kierkegaard, *Two Ages* 91). In antiquity a citizen had to appear and answer for each decision; in the reflective nineteenth century, in the void left by that “*en masse in corpore*” which could only appear as itself, one participates by reading at home and can “write anonymously over their signature, yes, even speak anonymously”

⁶ “Leveling” generally refers the Christian equalization of souls before God. Here Kierkegaard gives it a pejorative sense of obliterating qualitative difference by a mass that speaks with no accountable voice.

(Kierkegaard, *Two Ages* 103). During the hours of reading, the single reader “is a nobody,” surrendered to the ghostly nonentity that claims to voice all opinions at once (Kierkegaard, *Two Ages* 93). Kierkegaard thus pivotally extends “anonymity” from its sense as a publishing convention and tactical veil for authors to a structural property of modern social life: the erasure of individuality and their exchangeability.⁷

If Schiller’s “non-entity” dissolves the person from within, Kierkegaard exports the same vacancy into the social realm, showing how the solitary reader or writer is occupied by a spectral “public.” Taken together, their analyses launch the modern polemic against anonymity: an inward erosion of substance that doubles as an outward technology of domination. That dyad reverberates through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from Hippolyte Taine’s revolutionary mobs, through Gustave Le Bon’s crowd psychology, to Aldous Huxley’s “mass-man,” and finally to Adorno and Horkheimer, who recall Schiller’s anxiety about intellect unmoored from feeling and, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, convert it into a full-scale indictment of a culture-industry that anonymizes and administers life itself. Just as crucial, Kierkegaard’s coining “anonymity” hands later critics the very word under which they arraign the faceless crowd, the interchangeable worker, and the disembodied rationality that welds them together.

If Kierkegaard’s “monstrous abstraction” names the peril, Karl Marx provides the pro-anonymous rejoinder. Arguing in the 1842-1843 Prussian press debates, he ridicules the fantasy of “authorized” writers and insists that “the press is the most general way by which individuals communicate their intellectual being” (Marx and Engels 177). If writing must be licensed, then “reading” must be too, an absurdity that, when taken seriously, exposes the politics of cultural production and consumption (Marx and Engels 176). From that *reductio* he draws a positive

⁷ “*Anonymitet*” in the original Danish (Kierkegaard, *En Literair Anmeldelse* 96).

claim. “It was the *unauthorised* writers who created our literature” (Marx and Engels 178).

Anonymity is not a loophole but the condition that lets excluded voices speak and, by speaking, refashion the public itself. He then enacts the principle. When Prussian officials demand that he sign a *Rheinische Zeitung* exposé, Marx publishes it unsigned and supplies the theoretical rationale:

anonymity is an essential feature of the newspaper press, since it *transforms* the newspaper from an assemblage of many individual opinions into the organ of *one mind*.

The name of the author would separate one article from another as definitely as the body separates one person from another. (Marx and Engels 333–34) (*italics in original*).

The missing signature, in other words, is a performative act that summons the “unauthorized” into collective existence. Marx thus recasts anonymity as a political technology of “transformation” and inaugurates a “culture from below,” the beginnings of a political project of the “unauthorized” that continues today. This early, affirmative wager on nameless speech will shadow every subsequent attack we excavate: Marx already hints that anonymity is not just a symptom to be feared but a resource that critical theory—and this dissertation—must learn to handle.

I focus on the modernist decades because collective anonymity becomes newly legible when Modernist techniques intersects with technological reproduction between roughly 1890 and 1950. Gesture, in Lucia Ruprecht’s sense, mediates this intersection; it materializes a “social imaginary” that circulates across stage, camera and score.⁸ During these years emerging media

⁸ Ruprecht clarifies how such anonymous performances gain force through what she calls a “gestural imaginary,” the modern field where bodily movements, isolated, framed, and set loose across stage, page, and street, circulate as forcefully as words. For her, a gesture becomes “second-order” when it is severed from continuous action, foregrounded, and rendered quotable, allowing it to reach beyond expression and reflect on the social logics that produced it (Ruprecht 41). Ruprecht turns to Benjamin’s essay on epic-theatre because it stages “gesture” in the social-historical sense. In that founding scene a stranger steps into a bourgeois quarrel, halts the violence, and freezes the tableau into a *Zustand*—a “condition” now visible, quotable, ready to be deployed elsewhere (Ruprecht

such as phonography, cinema, radio, and the photographic print recast how performance circulates; each chapter tracks a specific relay between stage, screen, and score to show how anonymity migrates across those channels. The anxieties charted by Schiller, Kierkegaard, and Marx soon intersect with the material upheavals of the long nineteenth century, when anonymity crystallizes as a diagnostic of modern life: the industrial division of labor, the spatial and demographic ruptures of colonial expansion, and the explosive migration to urban centers. Eric Hobsbawm's description of these shifts as “revolutions” captures the scale of upheaval, which generated both leftist and reactionary responses. If alienation as a loss of individuality spurred Marxist analyses of labor and social relations, the anonymous masses that crowded cities and challenged political order provoked a surge of anti-democratic writings that cast racialized, feminized, and working-class collectives as threats to the rational, named individual. Anonymity is everywhere and nowhere: everywhere in wage-labor and slavery, metropolitan crowds, and bureaucratic files, nowhere in the proliferating devices of surveillance, legal individuation, and credit-based accountability. These contradictions multiplied theoretical efforts to explain how a person could be simultaneously, named yet nullified, hyper-visible as a data point and invisible as a political voice. The excavation of a sustained anti-anonymous discourse shows how the named individual becomes the normative unit of ethical, aesthetic, and legal attention. While its roots reach back to classical personhood, the discourse sharpens under industrial division of

81–84). What perhaps passes by unnoticed here is that the stranger is unnamed, allowing the gesture to slip free of a single subject and begin to circulate. Anonymity thus enables the Brechtian *Gestus* by offering an outside to character psychology and presenting an action whose meaning lies in its social readability and repeatability. Every social gesture “cites” through the dual etymology of *citare*, a verb that knots quotation to motion, and every “citation” presumes a public capable of response. The nameless body that inaugurates the gesture thus installs a relay between isolated act and collective uptake. By tracking how namelessness is materially produced I show why such gestures travel so easily, how they convene impromptu publics, and where their political bite originates. Anonymity, far from accidental, conditions the mobility, the reach, and the political efficacy of the gestural imaginary.

labor, colonial space-making, and the secret-ballot controversies that follow 1848. In short, to name promises responsibility, while refusing a name claims either emancipation or menace. Fixing this genealogy in place clarifies the charged valences that the artworks analyzed in later chapters must confront.

The wane of an anonymous press was shadowed by the rise of the anonymous ballot, a device that restaged Schiller's tension between autonomy and receptivity in the simple act of naming or withholding a political choice. Classical practice had already rehearsed the dilemma: Athenian assemblies voted openly while their juries experimented with concealed tokens, and the contrast provoked an early debate over whether secrecy guards free judgment or hollows out civic accountability.⁹ Rome pushed the question further. Once the *tabellae* were introduced, Cicero warned that "the entire authority of the optimates was stolen" by the secret ballot, allowing people to hide factions to prey on an electorate no longer answerable for its choices (Cicero 3.34).¹⁰ Modern liberal theory inherits that unease almost intact. Montesquieu, citing Cicero, insists that in democracies suffrage "ought doubtless to be public," lest the multitude "seek its own destruction;" Rousseau, also citing Cicero, repeats the formula, allowing secrecy

⁹ In the ancient Greek world, secret balloting in juridical and electoral contexts functioned less as a principle and more as a strategic protection against powerful patrons. Although Classical sources do not celebrate open voting as a positive value, they do acknowledge the dangers that secret procedures were designed to counteract. The gradual movement toward greater anonymity in juridical contexts reflects an implicit recognition of the need to shield citizens from pressures that could distort public judgment. This tension between the visible collective body and the safeguarded, hidden judgment of individuals marked democratic life in antiquity. It is important to recall that in the Athenian system, the *dikasteria* were seen as the primary seat of democratic power, empowering ordinary citizens against wealthier classes. As Aristotle notes in *Athenaion Politeia*, "The people has made itself master of everything, and administers everything by decrees and by jury-courts" (Aristotle, pt.41.2). The ancient practices of voting thus reveal an early bifurcation of technologies: one tending toward semi-appearance, sustaining the public visibility of political action, and one tending toward semi-disappearance, protecting the judgment of the individual within collective institutions. In addition to Aristotle, for further descriptions of specific voting practices see Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Assembly: In the Age of Demosthenes* and Jon Elster (ed.), *Deliberative Democracy*, especially the introduction.

¹⁰ Cicero argued that the introduction of secret ballots in Roman elections allowed the populace to act without deference to their social superiors. Although he framed open voting as safeguarding the public good through the leadership of the *boni viri* (the good and honorable men), the underlying concern was the erosion of aristocratic dominance. In the same passage cited above, Cicero claims that secret balloting was never demanded when the people were free, but only when they were oppressed by powerful men.

only as a late remedy against intimidation. John Stuart Mill hardens the rule: a vote is “not an individual right but a public function,” to be cast “under the eye and criticism of the public.” Temporary concealment may shield the weak, he concedes, but prolonged secrecy “dwarfs the voter’s moral stature” and breaks the educative bond between citizen and commonwealth. Across this canon, then, the liberal tradition yokes political judgment to the signature and treats nameless choice as a strictly provisional expedient, tolerated only until power can again operate in the clarifying light of mutual recognition.

Across this canon, the liberal tradition yokes judgment to the signature and tolerates nameless choice only provisionally. By the mid-nineteenth century anonymity had also been codified in the economy itself: France’s *société anonyme* law of 1863 let capital circulate behind the impersonal shield of the joint-stock company. No wonder, Roland Barthes would later quip, that “the bourgeoisie is defined as *the social class which does not want to be named*” for its hegemony lies in “exnomination,” turning its own anonymity into the universal norm while leaving “proletariat” as the only marked, nameable class. (Barthes 137). Where the liberal tradition tethered legitimacy to the voter’s public signature, Émile Durkheim turns the argument inside out. Anonymity, he warns, is not too egalitarian but too atomizing. In the Bordeaux and Paris courses later published as *Physique des mœurs et du droit* (1896-1915), he calls French secret balloting “nothing more than a quantitative census of individual opinions;” voters, as a group, “do not know one another, they have not contributed to a collective political opinion in the past, and they merely go along in single file to the ballot box” (Buchstein 26). Citizens cast votes as an “unreflected, automatic, and blind action,” resulting in “*particularisme individualiste*” and “*incompétence radicale*,” reproducing the moral disintegration of a society (Buchstein 26). Durkheim’s remedy is telling. He does not call for a return to visible hand-

raising. Instead he proposes new sites of collective deliberation for voters, such as occupational groups, vocational chambers, and secondary associations, where “The community acts upon them, weighs upon them with all its authority, restraining egotistic impulses and setting minds on a collective spirit.” (Buchstein 27). The critique of secret voting thus folds directly into his broader diagnosis of *anomie*: the ballot’s isolating anonymity mirrors the wider breakdown of shared norms, and only institutions that re-publicize judgment through organized debate can restore social integration.

Durkheim does not reject the impersonal cohesion of mechanical solidarity, which he sees as a necessary basis for moral life. His concern lies with the breakdown of that cohesion in the individualized relations of “organic solidarity.” If liberalism trusts the signature and Durkheim fears disintegration, Jean-Paul Sartre hears the voting booth itself whisper a deeper alienation. Writing in 1973 for *Les Temps Modernes*, he launches a Marxian critique of the secret ballot based on a parallel between the workers’ political organization and their relation to the means of production.¹¹ Against that project, he describes the curtained ballot as a device that “serializes” the voter and producing a “perpetual identity crisis.”

Who am I, in the end? An Other identical with all the others, inhabited by these impotent thoughts which come into being everywhere and are not actually *thought* anywhere? Or am I myself? And who is voting? I do not recognize myself anymore. (Sartre)

The booth, he argues, trades legitimate, “immediate” power for a merely legal one and splinters the collective body that might otherwise take shape. After Durkheim’s warning that the secret ballot turns citizens into “blind, automatic” isolates, Sartre leaves us staring at the ballot’s lonely cubicle. Siegfried Kracauer, meanwhile, writing in the Weimar period, swings the lens outward,

¹¹ His position is surprising because Marx and Engels themselves consistently supported the secret ballot.

throwing the door open onto the whole gleaming lobby of commodity life. In the prelude to “The Mass Ornament,” first published in *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1927, he proposes that an epoch’s “inconspicuous surface-level expressions,” its revue stages, newsreels, and hotel architecture, expose its hidden structure more sharply than any abstract self-diagnosis (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 75). He seizes on the Tiller-Girl kick-line to expose the Fordist logic ordering modern society through rationalization. Each leg is “a mere building block and nothing more,” slotted into a star formation whose precision depends on every dancer’s replaceability (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 76). Abstracted into such exchangeability, the dancers “begin the *exodus* from lush organic splendor and the constitution of individuality toward the realm of anonymity” (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 83). At first glance the scene seems to prove the most familiar charge against anonymity: capitalism erases personality and turns bodies into anonymous, interchangeable parts. Yet for Kracauer anonymity also signals possibility. The chorus line “selects and combines” its human fragments “according to laws given by a knowledge of truth” (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 83). Put differently, its faceless synchrony not only indicts the present order, it also allows us to glimpse a rational community whose members would fit together by conscious design rather than blind repetition.

Kracauer’s earlier, 1922 essay “The Hotel Lobby,” is a miniature cultural-philosophical case study, half city sketch, half theology of everyday life. In the spirit of peripatetic wanderings, Benjamin but also Kierkegaard, it follows a flâneur’s drift from a Sunday service into a grand hotel, using the two interiors to test how modern space organizes and disorganizes social bonds. The essay’s quiet plot is simply to watch the crowd leave “the house of God,” step across the street, and see what is lost in translation. Inside the church a congregation “outgrows their names” until neighbor and stranger coincide (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 182). Anonymity,

anchored in repetition and ritual, opens a horizon of egalitarian solidarity. A block away the lobby repeats the namelessness without the frame. Guests in a hotel lobby, “remnants of individuals,” like Schiller’s non-entity drifting under continuous electric light (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 183). The same anonymity that knits worshippers into “a limit-case “we” of those who have dispossessed themselves of themselves” now atomizes them inside what Kracauer, in a pointedly Benjaminian flourish, calls a “negative church,” the hotel lobby where Ratio decorates its own emptiness and the individual “files by as an ungraspable flat ghost” (Kracauer, *Weimar Essays* 183). Like Adorno’s Odysseus who must become “Nobody” in order to survive and thereby repeats the very mythic logic he eludes, the lobby dweller escapes danger only through self-nullification, life bought at the price of vacancy.

Kracauer’s wager, then, is neither to abolish namelessness nor to canonize it, but to stage it in forms that can endure abstraction without collapsing into isolation. Anonymity must be given material procedures that rework the church’s anticipatory solidarity even as they resist the lobby’s drift toward vacancy. Treating anonymity as a performative condition thus sets the problem the next section pursues through the figure of the modern chorus.

Anonymity of the Chorus

We still lack a theory of the chorus that shakes off the long shadow of German Idealism and treats choral form as a material practice, not an allegory of Geist or idealized spectatorship. That long shadow stretches not only through critical theory, but also through operatic staging and performance philosophy, where the chorus repeatedly functions as a placeholder for unity or transcendence or as a simplistic idea of a collective practice anchored in bodies. The German Idealist tradition inaugurated a decisive turn in modern thinking on the tragic chorus by

dislodging Aristotle's "integrationist" model and installing choral autonomy as an abstract mediator. As Joshua Billings has shown, this shift, consolidated by Schiller and the Schlegel brothers, reimagines the chorus as a formal abstraction mediating between particularity and universality, individuality and collectivity. "The chorus," Billings writes, "became the aesthetic instance within tragedy, the element that raised it above the particular concerns and conflicts of the protagonists into the higher realm of the ideal" (Billings 140). For August Wilhelm Schlegel, the chorus is an "idealized spectator," valuable not for its role within the plot but for its capacity to elevate suffering into contemplative distance. Schiller famously describes the chorus as a "living wall which tragedy draws up around itself, in order to cut itself off purely from the real world and to protect its ideal basis, its poetic freedom." These formulations preserve the chorus only by severing it from its corporeal, collective origin.

Schlegel's idealized spectator also linked poetic authority to nationalist sentiment and universalized affect, transforming the chorus into a mere "personified reflection of the action." Yet, "the more ideal the chorus in the imagination, the less satisfying the real chorus onstage is likely to be" (Goldhill, "Our German Eyes" 41) Goldhill shows how even modernist critics sympathetic to the tragic, including Peter Szondi, whose work I discuss in Chapter 2, either ignored or eliminated the chorus altogether, continuing to treat it as a formal problem rather than a social formation.

Wagner culminates the Idealist legacy by keeping the chorus's abstract authority while eliminating its body. His starting diagnosis, as he thunders in *Opera and Drama*, is that the modern opera chorus adds nothing to the drama, which really centers on the heroes. To cure that hollowness he relocates the chorus altogether. Fed by Schopenhauer's claim that music voices the world more directly than words, he lowers the musicians into Bayreuth's covered pit, the

celebrated “mystic abyss.” There the orchestra becomes what Dreyfus calls the “choral orchestra:” an unseen collective that prophesies, comments and binds the stage without ever showing a single body (Dreyfus 228). Leitmotifs do the old choral work, but as oracular flashes rather than sung strophes. Their task, Wagner writes, is to act as *Gefühls-wegweiser*, guides to feeling (Dreyfus 237). The staging perfects the Idealist dream that Goldhill tracks: national spirit can speak, Volk-in-voice, while the “messy specificity” of real singers is kept out of sight. Taken together, Wagner’s diagnosis, his orchestral “solution,” and their after-effects set the stakes for what follows. First, because Bayreuth realizes Wagner’s dream of a disembodied chorus, a voice without visible collective, this dissertation offers a material rejoinder by tracing how anonymous, embodied voices keep resurfacing where theory tries to disembody them. Second, once the ensemble is banished from view, thinking chorally must shift from pursuing a literal group of singers to tracking the relational procedures that produce the figure of the chorus. Isadora Duncan signaled the shift in a series of essays collected posthumously as *The Art of the Dance*, remarking that “Richard Wagner re-found the drama, but he mistook the role of the Chorus; or at least he transferred it to the characters” (Duncan 93). We must therefore look elsewhere, even to the characters themselves, to find the chorus. While Duncan still offers unison speaking and singing as one pivotal transformation of character into chorus, she broadens the concept, writing of her own practice, “I have tried always to be the have been the Chorus...I have never once dance a solo” (Duncan 96). That is, her solo body registers the absent collective and turns Modern Dance into a fresh medium for choral logic. Third, even as Wagner inspired the chorality of Nietzsche and Duncan, he also initiated an “anti-choral discourse,” a counterpart to the anti-theatrical tradition Martin Puchner describes; by erasing the masses and elevating heroic individuality, this discourse fuses aesthetic form with a politics suspicious of equality,

anonymity, and collective change. Because this anti-choral logic intensifies in the decades after Wagner's peak influence, high to late Modernism defines this study's horizon. During these decades emerging media both reinforce and expose the impulse to efface collective presence.

What remains unresolved is how the collective reappears as a structure that organizes material appearance through shifting attachments and positions, and without that structure we risk mistaking the erasure of bodies for the transcendence of form. That evacuation leaves behind a representational vacuum: if the stage can no longer picture the many except by erasing them, where do we locate a logic for collective action at all? Fredric Jameson opens *The Political Unconscious* through Althusser's theorization of "a history without a *telos* or a subject," which he translates to meaning without "closure" or "characters" (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 13). Narrative agents, for Jameson, are no longer sovereign psyches but temporary positions in a social grammar, the leftover actants of Vladimir Propp and A. J. Greimas that must be re-read as class functions. Yet this formal insight immediately opens a vacuum: if bourgeois "character" can no longer anchor collective agency, what new figure can? If the book itself elucidates the three levels which locate characters as effects of an expressive totality, demonstrating how capacious Marxist thought can be, he ends the book with an equally shocking question. "What is wanted here—and it is one of the most urgent tasks for Marxist theory today—is a whole new logic of collective dynamics, with categories that escape the taint of some mere application of terms drawn from individual experience (in that sense, even the concept of praxis remains a suspect one)" (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 284). *The Political Unconscious* was first published in 1981 and I think the prescience and exactingness of the question make it just as relevant and difficult to answer today. It is precisely that new logic, the shift from individuated agents to "collective dynamics" that my research into the anonymity of the chorus hopes to open.

Rosa Luxemburg offers the clearest nineteenth-century blueprint for what Jameson would later call the still-missing “logic of collective dynamics,” showing how those missing relations can be produced in action rather than theorized in the abstract. In *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906), she insists that the Russian general strikes of 1905 cannot be reduced to either “economic” wage disputes or “political” struggles over state reform. Each moment of the conflict contains both dimensions, because proletarian self-emancipation, unlike party-led reform or union negotiation, unfolds as a practice that fuses them in action. Luxemburg refuses that split by emphasizing the unplanned coordination through which revolution begins: the instant “the masses themselves appear upon the political battlefield” (Luxemburg 160). Gayatri Spivak clarifies what is at stake in this moment of appearance in her 2013 essay “General Strike.” She argues that a strike becomes revolutionary when workers undergo an “epistemological change,” a shift in understanding that reveals them to themselves as “the agent of production” and therefore the agent of its stoppage (Spivak, “General Strike” 9). She then tracks this act of self-recognition through a series of “reterritorializations,” where the structure of collective agency mutates while the epistemic claim endures. She finds in Luxemburg the first such reterritorialization: an episodic anarchist tactic becomes a coordinated “mass strike” inside Social Democracy. Luxemburg thereby shows that the strike’s epistemic core, workers’ collective self-recognition, can move through party channels and press universal political demands. Yet Luxemburg’s examples remain bound to dense, urban industries, and their very specificity exposes the limits of a model that presumes a concentrated factory workforce. Du Bois, for Spivak, widens the field. Through his account of enslaved agricultural laborers during Reconstruction, Spivak demonstrates that the general strike’s epistemic pivot can emerge where every classical Marxist precondition (wage labor, urban density, trade-union infrastructure, party

leadership) is absent. In both cases, she concludes, revolutionary agency is defined by the form of self-recognition rather than by sociological category.

Yet the textual grain of *The Mass Strike* already gestures beyond this epistemic frame. Luxemburg's shifting use of the word "masses" signals an act of "exnomination:" she points to a "revolutionary subject" that slips beyond the class consciousness of a named and organized working class (Spivak, "General Strike" 13). This unnamng asks us to consider a political appearance grounded not in epistemic recognition but in performative forms of appearance. The masses do not transparently represent themselves, even when they "themselves appear" on the battlefield. Luxemburg herself keeps calling that shift a rise in "consciousness," yet the powerful concluding invocation of the chorus exceeds that vocabulary. On the final page of *The Mass Strike* she writes, "the masses will be the actual chorus (*der handelnde Chorus*) and the directing bodies will merely act the "speaking parts" (*die sprechenden Personen*)" (Luxemburg 181). A speaking character steps forward on behalf of others, while a chorus appears through continuously shifting attachments among its members. The chorus, therefore, is not a decorative metaphor for plurality but rather a figure of collective presence unbound from individuation. It articulates a mode of appearance that dislocates the very terms of recognition on which the epistemic model depends. Within that expanded horizon Luxemburg's "actual chorus" obliges us to seek a theatrical frame adequate to its anonymous force.

Luxemburg's chorus advances a politics of appearance that takes shape prior and in addition to self-recognition. A mass strike draws spectators into participation and shifts the line between stage and audience, carving out the mediating space of the orchestra. To nail this point, her speech finishes in the theater as she turns to Schiller's line from *Mary Stuart*, "And what it is, that should it dare to appear" (*Und was sie ist, das wage sie zu scheinen*), a line Bernstein had

earlier addressed to SPD leaders, urging them to show their “true” reformist essence. For Bernstein, the line expresses a liberal faith in the political coherence of identity and that the party should present itself as what it already is. “Dare to appear” affirms the courage to let being coincide with image, substance with form (Bernstein, chap.3 part d). Luxemburg cites the sentence for its split structure: on one side “what she is,” on the other the risk “to appear.” The two halves never meet. Luxemburg preserves that rift, detaching appearance from essence. The phrase becomes, in her hands, not a revelation of the party’s true identity but a performative wager on what political collectivity might become. That unoccupied interval is where the actual chorus performs as an ensemble that cannot be captured by a prior identity. Rehearsed on the streets of 1905, when four hundred disconnected walkouts suddenly read as one, this choral scene taught Luxemburg that political force need not be carried by leaders or consolidated in party form. Luxemburg’s final imperative to “dare to appear” is silently addressed to an unnamed multitude. The officials are left as a secondary cast who can only voice what the chorus already enacts. Read through this choral lens, *The Mass Strike* shows that class formation hinges not on epistemic self-discovery but on performative acts that rearrange the terms of appearance, so that spectators become participant, and political power condenses in shared, anonymous attachments.

Chapter Organization

Across three chapters, I follow both the procedures that produce anonymity and the implications of that performed anonymity. Just as the misrecognition of the Jewish barber of Hynkel of Hitler of Chaplin unexpectedly solicits attachments not grounded in identification, but in proximity, metonymy, catachresis, and shared modes of displacement. These anonymous

performances continually ask us to read even singular subjects as if they were plural, not because they metaphorically symbolize or stand in for a group, but because they convene one. This opening analysis of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, then, does not stand apart as a theoretical preamble, but models the method of analysis that the chapters sustain.

Each chapter reexamines a key critical formation traditionally tethered to the power of naming—performativity, interpellation, and the proletariat—and reframes it through the lens of anonymity. The first chapter reconsiders J. L. Austin's theory of the speech act through Bronislava Nijinska and Igor Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, which offered the cosmopolitan Parisian spectators of its 1923 premiere a stylized "Russian peasant wedding." By mobilizing the Modernist strategy of impersonality, Nijinska and Stravinsky employ anonymity as a central dramaturgical device, presenting ritualized roles within the wedding ceremony rather than individualized characters. Contrary to Austin's claim that a performative depends on a single first-person utterance, the couple's vow in *Les Noces* gains its force from the anonymous impersonality of their roles. If anonymity first appeared in this typifying register, I argue that by the ballet's conclusion it transforms into a second more radical form that also generates a new understanding of the performative.

Shifting our attention from Austin's paradigmatic performative utterance, "I do," to the ritual actions of the villagers who stage the ceremony, the work teaches us how performative force operates beyond, and in directions other than the "intended" act itself. No longer simply in service of felicitously marrying the bride and groom, the wedding becomes an emergent performative structure enacted collectively by the peasants. The bride and groom withdraw upstage into a painted bedroom whose story-book perspective evokes the fairytale décor of nineteenth-century Romantic ballet, standing in direct contrast to the spare modernist austerity of

the first three tableaux. The curtain then closes behind the peasants, who continue dancing downstage, face to face with the audience.

The couple's retreat into fantasy and this spatial inversion both points up the audience's desire to identify with the bridal couple and physically aligns them with the lingering chorus. Bonnie Honig, elaborating on a neglected moment in Austin, writes of an unpredictable "charging bull" in which a sudden and disruptive arrival compels spontaneous reorganizations of social and spatial arrangements. She treats the bull as a figure for non-sovereign performativity, an event whose sheer appearance compels everyone present to rearrange themselves without any spoken command or institutional warrant. In *Les Noces*, the peasants who remain downstage after the couple's withdrawal act in this same register. Their unexpected persistence forces the audience to recalibrate its own position, materializing a collective agency that arises alongside yet untethered from the sanctioned performative. The peasants' lingering presence thus demonstrates how anonymity not only saturates the sovereign performative, the "I do," through the adoption of impersonal roles, but also performs a "non-sovereign performative," through the anonymous group that performs the ritual itself. In this case, the chorus forms a new collective with the audience.

From its earliest reception history, *Les Noces* was consistently framed in primitivist terms, anchoring the peasants within conceptual frameworks of reinforced exoticist and racialized hierarchies. Critics have often read the ballet as a critique of gendered power dynamics and patriarchal structures. Yet these analyses typically leave the ballet's reliance on primitivist tropes unexamined, implicitly reproducing racialized frameworks in their efforts to critique gender and class norms. Reading the painted bedroom into that primitivist schema, I contend that the bride and groom's retreat reactivates the epistemic fantasy that Anne Anlin Cheng identifies

at the core of racialized representation: the desire to peel away impersonality to reveal a hidden racial or cultural truth. Yet the ballet refuses this logic of revelation. Instead of offering an eroticized or ethnographic unveiling, the work forces its audience into a wayward collective with the peasant chorus which remains downstage directly facing them. This final gesture opposes the racialized logic of its early critical reception, producing what Theodor Adorno terms a non-identical remainder, a bodily presence that resists and surpasses conceptual capture.

In other words, if the peasants were anonymous throughout the ballet because of the Modernist strategy of impersonality and the typifying primitivist tropes, these give way to another, radical form of anonymity at the end, in which they convene a material collective that surpasses the concept. This anonymity no longer comfortably serves primitivist logics of racial essentialism but becomes the performative condition through which the peasants assert a collective presence that materially surpasses conceptual reduction. At the premiere, the Parisian audience, who had readily positioned itself in opposition to a racialized peasantry imagined as fundamentally other, suddenly found itself materially aligned and spatially continuous with this very group. In doing so, the final chorus resists conceptual capture, which remains irreducibly anonymous. Thus, by turning on the very impulse toward racial recognition and categorization, the performance stages a material excess, a collective bodily presence that exceeds the conceptual frames imposed upon it.

The second chapter re-examines Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation by placing it in dialogue with two modernist works that treat theatrical space itself as an active agent of subject-formation: Maurice Maeterlinck's 1890 one-act drama, *The Blind*, and the 1920 German expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, directed by Robert Wiene. Both works reveal a scenic mechanism in which bodies fuse with the very ground that frames them. The logic which

strings together bodies and place as an agential capacity was already sketched in Lope de Vega's choral tragedy *Fuenteovejuna*, where the villagers evade prosecution for killing an oppressive commander by testifying that "Fuente Ovejuna" did it, thus letting the name of the place cloak the anonymous collective. In each of these works, performer and setting interpenetrate, realizing the double Greek sense of *choros* as both the dancing group and the dancing-place. When that fusion occurs, the scene acquires a choral quality through which ideological hailing operates anonymously, without the stabilizing reference of a personal name. Interpellation is thereby reconfigured as a spatial choreography of placement and address: the subject is fastened to ideological positions because the scene itself has already arranged the conditions under which recruitment can take place.

Maeterlinck's Symbolist drama, *The Blind*, stages twelve sightless figures amid an increasingly animate land and soundscape. The audience sees what the characters cannot, the corpse of the Priest who should have guided them, but that visual advantage yields does not yield thematic or narrative mastery. Spectators, like the blind, must orient themselves by rustling leaves, snow, and wind that never resolve into direction. In the final tableau, one of the blind addresses the sounds and asks, "Who are you?" A Beckett-style reading, perhaps based on the influence this work exerted on *Waiting for Godot*, might treat the line as proof of futility, yet the question works otherwise here. It hails whatever has made ground and leaves quiver, a presence that seems to be animation of the place itself. The addressee could be a rescuer, the forest, even the audience, but in every case it is felt only through the alignment of bodies, floorboards, and echo. That call crystallizes the chorus that the drama has been constructing all along. The chorus is not twelve voices speaking in unison, it is an anonymous collective produced at the contact zone of performer, place, and spectator, a "you" that hangs in the dark and draws the spectator in

with it. *The Blind* shows that the chorus is a material configuration of gathered bodies in a specific place, not an abstract emblem of universal humanity as early Symbolist rhetoric once hoped.

The argument then pivots to Wiene's *Caligari*, whose Expressionist sets literalize the fusion of figure and ground through jagged painted shadows that cut across costumes, faces, and architectural planes. Midway through the film the iconic phrase "You must become Caligari!" appears as floating text embedded in the jagged Expressionist scenery and linking modernist visual logic to the regimentation of the conscripted body. Its anonymous address, issued from no mouth and received by a nameless doctor, collapses the distinction between command and environment, between authority and aesthetic form. Visually, the floating command echoes the World-War-I recruitment posters, Uncle Sam's "I Want YOU," that conscript the viewer through a blank backdrop and a single imperative.¹² By absorbing that militarized image into its Expressionist décor, *Caligari* demonstrates how anonymous imperatives migrate from state propaganda into everyday visual culture, turning the spectator's body into potential infantry and binding national identity to a choreography of obedience.

Perhaps surprisingly, this structure parallels the anonymous address and reception of Althusser's original street scene of interpellation, a connection that has thus far gone unrecognized. I then show how this scene allegorizes a broader structure of recruitment: one that

¹² Hannah Arendt observes that "action without a name, a *who* attached to it, is meaningless," a loss dramatized by the monuments to the Unknown Soldier, which try to supply after the fact the singular agent the Great War had devoured (Arendt, *Human Condition* 180–81). Yet the logic of Wiene's floating imperative suggests that anonymity is not the tragic residue of mass warfare but the very precondition of ideological recruitment. The nameless doctor and the nameless sleepwalker he recruits to do his evil bidding can transform into "Caligari" and "Cesare" precisely because their "impersonations" are already inhabited by the "impersonal." As Arendt concedes in passing, "nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word" (179). Recasting her line, we might say that "no one knows who is revealed when he is disclosed through deeds or word," because the subject that appears is itself being performed through anonymity. In this sense the conscript's blank identity is not an unfortunate after-effect of modern war, it is the aesthetic condition of military interpellation itself.

aestheticizes German national identity, militarized obedience, and ideological formation through the very anonymity of the subject. Drawing out the implications of anonymous subjectivization, I follow Spivak's call to theorize class not as a coherent subject but as a discontinuous predication, unevenly distributed across race, labor, and global difference.

The third chapter turns to the anonymity of the "proletariat" through the iconic final sequence of Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. As Cedric Robinson pointed out in 1983, "Perhaps the most obvious of the ideological constructs that appear in the work of Marx and Engels (and most of the Marxists who have followed them) are the notions of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject, and the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie" (43). Robinson's warning sets the task for this chapter: before we can speak of a revolutionary class, we have to ask how the revolutionary subject is made visible, named, and thereby fixed in place. Robinson demonstrates how the very universality that orthodox Marxism assigned to the working class emerged from a European scene in which class difference is already under- and over-written by gender, race and national hierarchies, a visibility distributed unevenly across bodies.

Celebrated for its stark portrait of hardship yet refusing to present a ready-made tableau of proletarian struggle, *Bicycle Thieves* unsettles the very optic Robinson critiques, exposing how class might give way to unnamed forms of collective attachment. In the iconic final scene, as the father and son, Antonio and Bruno, recede into a crowd moving away from the camera, the film interrupts the visual and narrative mechanisms that had seemed to promise political recognition and resists the "always-already" consolidation of subjectivity. The scene does not signal moral collapse or the dissolution of individuality, as many critics have argued, but it does void the identificatory mechanisms of individual and collective legibility. Drawing on Raymond

Williams's call to reclaim "the masses" as a viable political formation, the chapter argues that this retreat refuses to stabilize class as an aesthetic form and stages a crisis in its readability.¹³

That refusal gains further charge once we recall how the "non-professional" actor had been racialized by fascist "biotypology," a pseudo-scientific system that mapped laboring bodies onto an ideal social hierarchy. I argue that the "authenticity" of the untrained performer not only read as "real" but became a surface for projecting (and discerning) fantasies of racial labor. Konstantin Stanislavski had already outlined the dilemma: a genuine peasant placed on stage cannot convincingly represent herself, because her presence collapses the distance that acting needs to sustain between role and reality.¹⁴ *Bicycle Thieves* restages that dilemma for the screen. The worker-actor carries the weight of lived labor into the frame, yet the camera simultaneously withdraws the promise of legible class type: gestures and features once taken as evidence of "the real" turn opaque and the racial foundation of class visibility erodes. The crowd scene therefore does more than anonymize a single character, it demonstrates the impossibility of naming a coherent political subject within the available representational logics.

The chapter concludes that the film reimagines universality through a material, collective anonymity, a choral formation whose political force arises from the perpetual deferral of its name, a "race that is not one." In doing so, it resists the "always-already" consolidation of subjectivity by offering a "never-yet" collective open to new modes of political life.

By drawing out anonymity's formal, aesthetic, and political dimensions, this project seeks to offer both a materialist theory of performance and a reframing of subject formation that

¹³ Bazin notices that Ricci's appeal lies in a "grace of expression and of gesture" that once defined Chaplin. The Tramp and Neorealism could not be more dissimilar, but both draw our attention to the body and its stylings, and the "social imaginary," the way those gestures seem the effects of a larger, impossibly large, economic and political machinery. In other words, they both appear as class subjects, in the strict sense.

¹⁴ Ilinca Todoruț has recently revisited Stanislavski's peasant-casting anecdote to argue that the "neutral" acting body is a disciplinary fiction. Her analysis confirms that acting training suppresses visible differences by normalizing middle-class habit, even though the racial and class co-ordinates remain largely implicit in her analysis.

does not rely on naming, presence, identity, or discursive legibility. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates in performance studies, critical theory, and political thought by showing how anonymity operates not at the margins of representation, but at its very core.

Chapter 1: Anonymity of the Performative: *Les Noces* (1923)

When J.L Austin first presented his theory of “performatives” in *How to Do Things with Words*, he sought to rehabilitate a bit of grammatical “nonsense” that neither described a state of affairs nor stated a fact truly or falsely.¹⁵ He distinguished these “performative utterances” from other statements by their “force” rather than their “meaning.” Performatives “do” rather than make sense or refer. Nor were they fully dependent on the conscious intention of a speaker, whose lack of sincerity does not void a performative when the word is bond. Austin thus begins his text by moving away from the consciousness and intention of an individual speaker and towards the extra-linguistic system and context into which the utterance enters. His midcentury structural analysis of language took aim at “ordinary,” “normal” usage. In order to explore the varied terrain of everyday life, he famously excluded misunderstandings, unintentional utterances and those “said by an actor on a stage, introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy” (Austin 22). A deep irony in Austin’s text is that his portrayal of the “conventions” and “rituals” necessary in order for performatives to function felicitously begins to approach exactly some of his own proscribed conventions. In other words, he asks readers to think about the rituals and theatricality of life in order to understand “normal” performatives, but to not consider certain “parasitic” rituals that are “obviously” distinct from normal, serious life. Without stating the difference between the normal rituals and parasitic rituals, Austin silently appeals to common sense.¹⁶

¹⁵ While Austin reports that he began developing the ideas in the text as early as 1939, *How to Do Things with Words* was first delivered as the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955, then published in 1962.

¹⁶ On the question of “normal” versus “parasitic” utterances, see Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Derrida critiques Austin’s exclusions by arguing that the so-called “hollow” or “void” utterances expose an inherent iterability that cannot be neatly contained by ordinary usage. Austin discusses potential “misfires” and “infelicities” in *How to Do Things with Words*, particularly in Lectures II and IV, where he acknowledges utterances that fail or are “void” due to circumstances surrounding the speaker or the context. Derrida builds on these notions to deconstruct the boundary

These exclusions, however, work to reinstate the consciousness and intentionality of the speaker as subject that Austin reasoned away from. They do so practically by continually narrowing which utterances Austin admits into his analysis and structurally by secretly presuming a single, self-possessed actor as the subject of every action. Despite Austin's awareness that the performative cannot be constructed by purely linguistic means within the statement itself, nor by the intentionality of the speaker in the moment of utterance, he still presumes a fulsome presence, a "person" as doer of the deed.

Actions *can only* be performed by persons, and *obviously* in our cases the utterer *must be* the performer: hence our justifiable feeling—which we wrongly cast into purely grammatical mould—in favour of the 'first person,' who *must* come in, being mentioning or referred to (Austin 60) (emphasis added).

By "purely grammatical mold," Austin means that the grammatical person, mood, and tense of a sentence do not accurately indicate its performative force. Indeed, even behind seemingly "impersonal" constructions, such as those in the third person, he finds a "person" to be the "utterance-origin" (Austin 60) (emphasis in original). By asserting the present, speaking subject as origin, Austin denies any figure who speaks before, along with, or in place of the supposed actor. Further, the physical presence of the speaker establishes an identity behind the pronoun "I," and if the speaker is not physically present it is replaced by "his personal name" or appended signature (Austin 60). Ultimately, because the name can substitute for either the performer's physical presence or any grammatical mold, Austin's performing subject is decidedly named. We

between successful and parasitic speech. While Derrida's analysis centers on structural break and repetition, my argument focuses on Austin's uncertain grounding of "presence" as he reintroduces a fully named individual despite having bracketed out conscious intention.

might say that, while thoughts, feelings, and intentions cannot be definitively attributed to the speaker, the performative demands a named individual as utterance-origin.

With and against Austin, this chapter extends his initial reasoning a bit farther, a move which partially upends his conclusion: rather than reassert the named person-subject who must perform even through the third person, I find nearly the opposite, that an anonymous third person performs alongside, potentially in place of, the named first person speaker. In other words, the felicitous functioning of the performative actually demands a contingency of the name which anonymizes the performing subject.

To do so, and to clarify the aesthetic and political stakes of this theoretical intervention, I turn to *Les Noces*, the most celebrated ballet by choreographer Bronislava Nijinska and the composition Igor Stravinsky considered his greatest achievement, which premiered in Paris in 1923 under Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Against Austin's insistence on the named, individual speaker-subject as the necessary origin of performativity, I argue that anonymity, initially appearing in both the music and choreography through the Modernist device of "impersonality," reappears in a second, more radical form by the ballet's conclusion. While in the context of the ballet's staged wedding impersonality effectively displaces performative agency from individual characters to ritualized roles, the radical anonymity of the concluding tableau enables a distinct form of collective embodiment. This form exceeds individual identification and emerges precisely at the intersection between ritualized form and choreographic enactment. The dancing chorus, which appears initially as mere background to the sanctioned ritual, unfolds as an anonymous collective subject whose presence defies the conceptual frames of the wedding ritual itself.

I ultimately turn to the work of Theodor Adorno to argue that *Les Noces* performs anonymity through an enactment irreducible to existing theoretical frameworks. Indeed, this enactment resists naming, because to name it would collapse the anonymous opening it creates and reduce a radically contingent performative space to an identifiable category of knowledge. Thus, *Les Noces* does not simply critique Austin's limitation of performativity to individual, named utterances; rather, it materially enacts an anonymous performative force whose critical efficacy resides precisely in its resistance to the sanctioned performative and to conceptual identification.

This reading of anonymity and performative force in *Les Noces* necessitates an approach to the work's reception that foregrounds both form and contingency: rather than anchor this chapter in a single moment of reception, I treat the ballet's formal structures and history as generating a shifting field of spectatorship. My approach assumes that the work remains aesthetically coherent even as its meaning is refracted through different stagings and contexts. I do not collapse these multiple receptions into a single interpretive frame, nor do I treat the work as infinitely unstable. Instead, I am interested in theorizing what possibilities may be opened through the work's performative structures and logics, fully aware that any particular performance is contingent on its conditions of staging, mediation, and reception, as well as the temporal, spatial, and cultural frameworks that shape its appearance and legibility. Even the anonymity afforded by impersonality can be suppressed or redirected when staging choices emphasize expressive interiority, allowing individual characters to appear as the locus of meaning rather than as functions of a formal, collective grammar. The questions raised here about legibility, collectivity, and the instability of the observer's position continue to shape contemporary stagings and viewings of the ballet.

A ballet in 4 tableaux, *Les Noces* presents a decidedly anonymous “Russian peasant wedding” (Stravinsky and Craft 114). Like Maeterlinck’s *The Blind*, which I treat in Chapter 2, the story is more concerned with the movement of bodies than with events. The bride and groom themselves hardly dance. In the first scene, “Consecration of the Bride,” the Bride poses like a Byzantine icon, long and stern, coldly spiritual.¹⁷ As her bridesmaids dance around her parting her two impossibly long eight-foot tresses of hair, the bride moves quietly between positions like the ritual’s absent center. The scene concludes with the work’s most memorable image: the bridesmaids stack their heads horizontally on top of one another, ear to ear, their bodies forming a pyramid. The bride arrives to complete the image, placing her head on top. At the groom’s house in the second scene, he too dances little compared with his groomsmen. Within this highly structured and social space of abstract, architectural formations, the groom’s stylized movements, like the bride’s, are iconic and statuesque as he “mimes the ceremonies of a popular wedding,” as dance and early film critic Emile Vuillermoz put it shortly after the premiere. In the short third scene, the eight groomsmen swarm the bride’s house to bring her, her parents, and eight bridesmaids back to the groom’s. In the final scene, as the townsfolk dance downstage, the bride, groom, and their parents sit on a raised platform upstage, apparently in front of the bride and groom’s new home. Other than slowly and subtly punctuating moments in the ritual by standing, bowing, and gesturing symbolically, they are still. In the work’s final moments, the groom leads the bride off into a bedroom upstage and the dancing corps of peasants downstage solemnly create the pyramid from the end of the first act, but this time with a new “chosen one” at the apex.

¹⁷ Irina Nijinska, the choreographer’s daughter, said in an interview with Robert Johnson that the bride and groom had to be tall, preferably the tallest on the stage (R. Johnson 158).

As Stravinsky put it, “individual roles do not exist in *Les Noces*, but only solo voices that impersonate now one type of character and now another...Even the proper names in the text...belong to no one in particular” (Stravinsky and Craft 115). Because the four solo voices—soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass—do not correspond to specific roles, those roles cannot be recognized by ear. Even if we understand the Russian text, rich as it is with regional dialect and cultural resonances, those voices are not direct expressions of a “person;” they are rather anonymized through the transmission of reported speech, breaking the illusion of continuity between the real world outside and the mimetic world on stage. The discordance of voices and roles pushes us to hear the words as echoes, perhaps, of some person somewhere, but in the present uttered by no one in particular, potentially by anyone.¹⁸

In the libretto we do find the name “Nastasya Timofeyevna,” but Stravinsky assures us that all proper names were only chosen for their sonority and typicality (Stravinsky and Craft 115). We do not see an individual named “Nastasya,” but a bride as likely to be called Nastasya as any other name that conforms to two regimes: the aesthetic demands of Stravinsky’s work and the typical, as it appears enmeshed in or even produced by the extra-linguistic context of the work. This is not a wedding of a specific bride and groom, but an anonymous wedding of the roles themselves. As Stravinsky calls them, they are “impersonal” or “non-personal” types (Stravinsky and Craft 117–18). By foregrounding the functioning of ritual within a community rather than the personal attachment between individuals, *Les Noces* asks us to see the

¹⁸ In a related mode, though with a distinct and more pointed political agenda, we can see how Bertolt Brecht arrived at his famed Alienation effect by refracting similar ideas through his apprehension (and misapprehension) of Chinese Theater. Describing how an actor in Chinese theater portrays excitement, he writes “But this is like a ritual, there is nothing eruptive about it. It is quite clearly somebody else’s repetition of the incident” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 93). Brecht’s use of anonymity, which here appears through the overlap of “ritual” and “repetition,” culminates in voicing the gesture of the unnamed “somebody else.” It also appears in the “social” character of the *gestus* and the infusion of “type” in the portrayal of character, and it clarifies how anonymity quietly became central to his theorization of historicity and the political force of performance. I discuss Brecht further in Chapter 2.

“impersonal” as an exigency of the performative itself. To put it ironically, in order to do things with words, the subject must be “*in a peculiar way hollow:*” recognized not as an individual but as a role, not in its particularity but in its typicality, not by their name but by their anonymity (Austin 22) (emphasis in original).

Stravinsky’s use of impersonality in *Les Noces* speaks to his nascent aesthetic commitment to objectivity, formal discipline, and emotional detachment—key features of neoclassicism that would guide the next phase of his output. During the ten year period in which he was working on *Les Noces*, from 1913 until its premiere in 1923, Taruskin notes that Stravinsky’s “impersonality” was partly cultivated by French critical reception, which praised his works as exemplars of “purity, sobriety, objectivity, grace, impersonal precision” in direct opposition to the emotive excesses associated with Wagnerian Romanticism (Taruskin, *The Danger of Music* 387).¹⁹ Taruskin notes with some surprise that Jacques Rivière’s famous review of *Rite of Spring* already attributes these qualities to a ballet squarely in Stravinsky’s primitivist phase, long before they became Stravinsky’s “esthetic manifestos of the 1920s and 1930s” (Taruskin, *The Danger of Music* 388).²⁰

This musical stance aligns closely with broader modernist strategies across the arts that sought to position the artwork as autonomous, its meaning generated not from the individual creator’s subjective emotions but from impersonal formal structures. If Stravinsky’s treatment of voice in *Les Noces* stages an anonymity in which no role belongs to anyone in particular,

¹⁹ As we will see Stravinsky’s *Les Noces* thus proffers two identifications in one: Stravinsky as a Russian in exile searching for a Slavic, non-western European identity, and the French separating themselves from the Germans.

²⁰ For the Paris premiere, the four pianos called for by the score were placed onstage rather than in the pit, foregrounding the music’s presence as a choreographic structure in its own right. I argue that this spatial alignment between music and dance collapses any simple division between score and staging, rendering the music “corporeal” and the dancing “depersonal,” a formulation that retools Adorno’s claim that Stravinsky’s compositional abstraction flattens subjectivity and strips music of interior life. In staging the music’s production within the visual field of the audience, the ballet unsettles the illusion of a self-contained theatrical world and intensifies the formal impersonality that defines both its sound and movement.

modernist impersonality in general shifts expression away from individual presence and into formalized structures. T. S. Eliot's concept of poetic impersonality, famously articulated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," located meaning outside the poet's own emotions, embedding it instead in tradition and form (Eliot). In her remarkable study of dance and literary Modernism, Susan Jones argues that figures such as Nijinska and her brother, Vaslav Nijinsky, approached impersonality through choreographic abstraction in direct conversation with modernist literary forms. "Nijinsky's emphasis on 'impersonality' and on the dancer as medium of an abstract, formal aesthetic sounds remarkably close to literary theories of impersonality emerging in the work of Mallarmé, Yeats, and Eliot" (S. Jones 10). His choreography for *Afternoon of a faun* (1912) and *Rite of Spring* (1913) rejected emotion, structuring movement through angularity and stillness. Mark Franko describes this broader shift as "theatrical impersonality," in which "aesthetic modernism instituted a split between emotion and expression" to foreground the body's formal properties (Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* x). Rather than treating movement as an extension of psychological depth, this mode of impersonality presents it as an autonomous system.

However, the use of "types," which Stravinsky links directly to impersonality, continues to be as politically dangerous as it is inescapable. Indeed, the collusion between impersonality and both primitivism and authoritarian politics haunts my plying of how anonymous performances occur through impersonality. Taruskin, for example, argues compellingly that neoclassicism's interwar promotion of impersonality and objectivity was also an ideological choice often aligned with authoritarian, anti-egalitarian, or reactionary politics of its time (Taruskin, *The Danger of Music*, chap. "Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology"). To quickly trace a version of this argument, the "type" draws our attention away from a particular object and

towards the general category that represents it (or even, if we follow Peirce's conception of the type, that "determines" it).²¹ And just as the general category swallows and renames the particular, we search the ballet in vain for an expression of a particular subjectivity. Even the politically benign role of "the bride" covers the individual in a way that precludes her own subjective stance. In other words, under the weight of the concept, the individual is stripped of subjectivity and made an object.²² Adorno was perhaps the most vehement critic of Stravinsky's divestment of subjectivity, manifested in a compositional approach that flattens musical individuality through seemingly objective structures endowed with mythic permanence. By reducing musical material to depersonalized, quasi-mechanical procedures, his work effaces individual agency, subordinating the particular to an illusory universal that appears outside history.²³ Susan Buck-Morss's analysis of Adorno's negative dialectics locates a parallel danger in the reification of conceptual categories, since any claim to unchanging identity occludes possibilities for critical questioning and social transformation. As she puts it, "The whole point of his (Adorno's) relentless insistence on negativity was to resist repeating in thought the structures of domination and reification that existed in society" (Buck-Morss 189).²⁴

²¹ The Type "does not exist; it only determines things that do exist" (Peirce, bk.4.537). Peirce's journey from "scholastic realism" to "objective idealism" reflects a nuanced engagement with the relationship between ideas and matter, one that does not comfortably place "determination" on the side of either reality or concepts. As Short puts it in *Charles Peirce and Modern Science*, "Peirce came eventually to hold that *what an individual thing is*, is what it would be *thought* to be, were it known and, hence, that material things, while existing independently of being thought of, are not independent of the nature of thought in general" (Short 69) (italics in original). The tantalizing "were it known" that links the existence of things in reality with how they might be thought suggests his complex negotiation of realism and nominalism. For Peirce, thought will eventually approach reality if time allows.

²² In the pragmatic tradition we can say that the type objectifies the token. "In order that a Type may be used, it has to be embodied in a Token which shall be a sign of the Type, and thereby of the object the Type signifies."

²³ Arguably the entirety of Adorno's essay "Stravinsky and the Restoration" stages a critique of what he calls, in the book's introduction, the "liquidation of the subject in the objective order" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 25).

²⁴ Interestingly, this moment in Buck-Morss's argument actually warns of the potential failure embedded within Adorno's negative dialectics. Drawing a parallel to the systematization of Schönberg's twelve-tone technique, which Adorno, in his earlier, more optimistic writings, had explicitly positioned as the liberatory counterpoint to Stravinsky's neoclassicism, Buck-Morss cautions that Adorno's relentless insistence on negativity might unintentionally mirror Schönberg's shift from an initially liberatory atonality into rigid formalism, thereby transforming critical openness into dogmatic rigidity. "When the principle of twelve-tone technique became "total," the dynamics of the new music was "brought to a standstill." But when the method of negative dialectics became

For Adorno, however, conceptual identification is neither avoidable nor purely negative: it is a necessary component of thought, even though it simultaneously risks violence against the particularity of its objects. “We can see through the identity principle, but we cannot think without identifying” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 149). Perhaps the striking paradox of the “type” is that it appears to identify even as it homogenizes, it appears to name as it anonymizes. For Adorno, as long as we stay within the logic of “identity,” the equation of a concept with a thing, any name, no matter how restricted to a particular object, functions like the type. Thus, the task cannot be to abandon conceptualization altogether but to reveal precisely how conceptual categories inevitably fall short of, and thereby paradoxically illuminate, the specificity of the objects they seek to define. “Definition,” he writes, “also approaches that which the object itself is as nonidentical: in placing its mark on the object, definition seeks to be marked by the object. Nonidentity is the secret telos of identification” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 149). In other words, even as the concept or type seems to erase or anonymize the object it names, it simultaneously, and crucially, discloses the object's irreducible particularity. In my vocabulary here, identification discloses the aspect of the object that always resists its full conceptual capture through anonymity. Following Adorno, the anonymous wedding staged in *Les Noces* is

total, philosophy threatened to come to a standstill as well, and the New Left of the 1960s not unjustly criticized Adorno for taking Critical Theory into a dead end” (Buck-Morss 190).

This concern with philosophical paralysis through systematization informs Adorno's complex notion of “non-participation” (*nicht-mitmachen*). While non-participation represents Adorno's strategic resistance to the prevailing structures of reified thought and oppressive social relations, it also risks self-enclosure, blocking active engagement with the world. As Buck-Morss clarifies in discussing Adorno's aesthetics: “The alienation of music, then, was the mark of its nonparticipation in the bourgeois status quo,” and then goes on to quote Adorno himself, “Just as theory transcends the present consciousness of the masses, so music must do likewise.” (Buck-Morss 37).

Consequently, as I argue toward the end of this chapter, an effective response to this tension emerges through the performative: a form of participation enacted precisely through nonparticipation. Where Adorno envisions the critical force of theory of aesthetics through thought and reflection, a move toward theory embodied as performance offers a different possibility, engaging philosophical practice as an enacted, performative “testing” of nonidentity.

not simply a ritual emptied of specificity; it reveals anonymity itself as the critical site at which representational stability is unsettled, precisely because the anonymity enacted exceeds the conceptual limits the work itself imposes.

However, one will not find the quintessential Austinian speech act “I do” anywhere in this wedding. Although Stravinsky insists that *Les Noces* is “perhaps even primarily” a product of the Russian Church, the work conspicuously omits the culminating ritual in which the priest blesses the union and sanctifies the marriage. Stravinsky integrates the sounds of liturgy and bells throughout the work, extracting key moments and sounds from the Russian “wedding play” but omitted the culminating act: the sacred crowning ceremony that typically occurs in the church (Mazo 116). As Richard Taruskin describes the traditional moment, here left un-staged, “the priest bids the couple kiss in the presence of the assembled company, and they are wed” (Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* 1328). The selection of episodes thus constructs a wedding ritual that is at once deeply traditional and fundamentally incomplete.²⁵ The absence of this climactic moment marks a decisive break from the traditional structure of the ritual.

By withholding this climactic utterance, Austin’s “normal” site of the speech act, *Les Noces* reorients attention towards the folk, towards the collective, dispersing what might otherwise be a singular performative moment across a multiplicity of voices and choreographic

²⁵ According to Richard Taruskin, Stravinsky drew on anthologies compiled by Petr Kireevsky, Dmitry Rasumnik Tereshchenko, Pyotr Sakharov, and Aleksandr Afanasyev, which included a broad spectrum of peasant wedding texts, children’s rhymes, and other oral traditions (Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* 1135). By immersing himself in these sources rather than drawing on the more polished melodies associated with earlier nationalist composers, most notably “The Five” (Alexander Borodin, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mily Balakirev), Stravinsky sought a more foundational Russian musical identity. Taruskin connects this choice with an intellectual movement among Russian émigrés who, inspired by Eurasianist ideas, promoted an explicitly Slavic ethos as an alternative to European, and above all German, influences. Stravinsky’s interest in these rustic materials, especially for works like *Les Noces*, thus marked a decisive shift away from the “flower” of Romanticized folk songs, heading instead into the “mud,” or the perceived bedrock of Russian culture, beyond the “exotic” veneer of earlier repertory (Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* 1135–36).

actions. The libretto's repeated pleas for "blessing" and the "granting of blessing" function as invocations of parental or divine sanction, displacing performative agency onto external authorities rather than the Bride and Groom themselves. Because these pleas do not affirm individual will, they do not culminate in the singular moment of marriage but instead redirect our focus toward the surrounding collective, whose presence and participation sustain the event. The community, however, does not merely ratify the union of the couple: its presence, actions, and utterances accumulate into a different kind of enactment, one which surprisingly takes precedence in the ballet's final tableau. Choreographically, Nijinska does not organize movement around individuated characters but submerges them into a mass, structuring action so that "the action of the separate characters would be expressed, not by each one individually but, rather, by the action of the whole ensemble" (Nijinska 59). The ballet's mode of choreographic organization thus aligns with its treatment of performativity: just as no single figure carries the weight of individual expression, no single utterance carries the weight of performative force. Instead, the ballet displaces agency into the collective, where, I argue, another kind of performative emerges, one which also hinges on a second kind of anonymity.

This second anonymity materializes in the final tableau, as the bride and groom disappear into a painted conjugal interior. The villagers remain behind. Their lingering presence, stripped of clear narrative purpose yet materially present on stage, initiates a performative dimension unaccounted for by Austin's authoritative framework. To clarify the stakes of this collective anonymity, I turn to Bonnie Honig's recent retrieval of the "charging bull" that runs across the pages of Austin's *How to do things with Words*. In her reading of Austin, Honig treats the bull as a "wayward" performative agent that "resists enclosure" (Honig). This animal gathers or disperses people not through official frameworks or state recognition but through its

unpredictable energy. By contrast, earlier readings of Austin often centered the marriage vow, the “I do,” as the paradigmatic speech act, one that sanctifies a sovereign speaker whose words “count” within a recognized authority structure. Honig argues that Austin had already made space for this “non-sovereign” performative, allowing for unsanctioned utterances as performatives. Alongside the imposed “person” who performs the action, the bull exposes how collective, often unruly forces also shape the scene of action. Rather than confirm the sovereignty of a speaking subject, the bull’s unruliness illustrates how language can gather or disperse a crowd irrespective of centralized authority. While Austin’s original wedding scene and its accompanying “I do” might seem to enshrine a normative order endorsed by the state and upheld by cultural conventions, Honig’s focus on the charging bull foregrounds performativity as a field of dynamic, collective engagements that defy neat causalities and may fold spectators into unanticipated roles.

This shift from linguistic performativity toward embodied, material enactments has been theorized centrally by feminist and queer scholars such as Shoshana Felman and Eve Sedgwick, who contend that performativity cannot be understood apart from the body’s vulnerability and affective exposure. Honig notes that Felman initiated this theoretical realignment, arguing that Butler and Sedgwick’s critical engagements with Austinian speech acts pivoted on this turn from discursive to embodied performativity. By shifting attention away from the presumed sovereign linguistic subject, these feminist and queer critiques transformed performativity into a concept capable of capturing the body’s relational exposure. This insight is crucial to my own reading of *Les Noces*, where performativity emerges through embodied collective enactments resistant to conceptual “enclosure.”²⁶

²⁶ In the final pages of *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, Felman proposes a “new type of materialism,” “a materialism of the speaking body,” whose performative acts produce concrete effects in reality (Felman 109). She

I argue that *Les Noces* impels the audience to confront a similar “wayward” collective, embodied by the peasants who remain onstage while the newlyweds retreat into a further layer of theatrical fiction. The staged wedding of *Les Noces* is inseparable from the performance itself, such that the represented ritual (the wedding) blurs with the ritual of performance (the ballet cantata) to the point that what is being enacted through the ritual and by what authority radically changes. Rather than replicate the sense of closure associated with the nuptial vow, the ballet ends with an unresolved ritual produced by the collision of the staged wedding and the ballet and the performance as a ritual itself. The conjugal couple vanishes into a painted set, an overt sign of Romantic-era illusion, leaving the audience “stuck” in a ritual that offers no stable point of identification. In this final moment, the peasants approximate Honig’s bull: they neither claim nor rely on official authorization, and they exert a “magnetic” force on the spectators (Honig). That force disrupts the audience’s desire to follow the bride and groom into an ostensibly private conjugal domain.

In reading against Taruskin’s oblique association of Stravinsky’s neoclassicism with authoritarian aesthetics and dance scholar Sally Banes’s explicit assertion that in *Les Noces* “the power and the inexorable movement of the community has obliterated—literally, upstaged—the

draws an analogy between Austin and Marx: both illuminate a tension between force and meaning, or between “saying” and “doing,” but while Marx situates materiality in labor’s productive capacity, Felman locates it in the eventful embodiment of speech itself (Felman 107). This perspective displaces what she sees as Marx’s strictly contradiction-based logic, emphasizing a “logic of scandal” in which “infelicities,” misfires, and failures reconfigure history. Felman’s argument converges in key ways with the negative dimension of Adorno’s materialism, where a remainder, or “excess,” eludes stable conceptual capture. Her “infelicities” likewise resist closure by generating productive effects precisely at the site of failure or breakdown. Unlike Adorno’s negative dialectics, however, which remain invested in the resistant object’s capacity to perpetually frustrate the totalizing force of concepts, Felman’s “infelicities” mobilize the scandalous materiality of language as a productive site of disruption.

While I find myself closer to Adorno, albeit pulling Adorno both toward Marx on one side and, at the end of the chapter, toward Fred Moten on the other, my own argument aligns with this sense of irreducible particularity in performance, recognizing that any conceptual framework inevitably falls short of what transpires in embodied practice. Moten’s claim that such conceptual insufficiency constitutes the necessary incompleteness of theorization underscores this point. The “non-identity” in Adorno, the “infelicity” in Felman, and the “failure” Moten identifies all designate forms of material or performative excess that cannot be fully subsumed.

individuality of the bride and groom,” my analysis recuperates the seemingly coercive anonymity as a productive site of resistance (Banes 115). Where Banes perceives only “the implacable pounding trajectory of social and biological compulsion,” my interpretation positions the anonymous collective not as the mere embodiment of economic necessity or patriarchal oppression but as a “wayward” force capable of generating emergent, unsanctioned modes of being. Yet the structural overdetermination of oppression in *Les Noces* demands that we not disregard Banes entirely. Indeed, her reading accurately captures how patriarchal arrangements and economic imperatives set the collective into motion, prompting a deeper interrogation of how these constraints shape and are reshaped by the performative potentials of anonymity.

Further, although Banes explicitly names *Les Noces*'s primitivist framing, her subsequent analysis of gender in *Les Noces* omits it, thereby replicating the exoticizing logic she initially isolates. This omission permits a structural slippage in which the collective becomes legible only through its coercive function, while the peasant setting, already stylized through primitivist codes, is left unanalyzed. As a result, her reading inadvertently sustains the very ethnographic imaginary it might otherwise seek to critique. In other words, *Les Noces* does not represent all weddings or all brides everywhere; it situates its ritual within a stylized depiction of Russian peasant life, drawing on ethnographic material that Stravinsky meticulously researched and then reworked into a tightly ordered formal structure. Western spectators and critics thereby read its foregrounding of types and collective action over individual expression through an exoticizing lens that cast the work as evidence of oppressive peasant traditions. Nancy Van Norman Baer, an American theater and dance curator particularly interested in the Russian avantgarde, thus concluded that *Les Noces* was “a primitive ritual where both bride and groom are trapped by fate and repressive social custom” (Banes 108). H.G. Wells' reaction to a 1926 production in

London echoes this framing but in a positive light: “The ballet is a rendering in sound and vision of the peasant soul, in its gravity, in its simple-minded intricacy” (S. Jones 118).

If Wells’s review inflected the ballet’s stylized ritual with admiration, others cast it in more overtly racializing terms. Reviewers in both Paris and New York referred to *Les Noces* as “Negro music,” “Turkish music,” or a “semi-pagan ritual,” descriptions that collapse cultural distinctions into a generalized primitivism (Ferguson 402, 393, 453). This impulse to identify the ballet’s rhythmic force and choreographic anonymity with “savagery” or “barbarism” recurred across early reviews, in which the abstraction of the work’s structure only sharpened the audience’s appetite for ethnographic identification. In *Le Temps*, responding to the Paris premiere, Henry Malherbe described the flattened, anonymous group as “flat black dancers” crawling out of the musical score, their bodies “spread out in a row—like on the parallel of a staff.” He then remarked that “M. Ansermet conducts the score in the manner of a great conductor who, to better mark the rhythms, dances himself, at the head of the whirling clan, surrounded by two grand pianos prostrated by all their dark masses, like adoring slaves of Africa” (Ferguson 449). These metaphors and misattributions suggest a reception in which the ballet’s visual and choreographic abstraction became legible only through a logic of racial substitution—an interpretive economy in which anonymity invited a spectacle of cultural and racial othering. In this way, as I return to in the conclusion, *Les Noces* became a screen onto which early critics projected fantasies of premodern otherness, treating its impersonality as anthropological spectacle.²⁷

²⁷ My citations of early reviews of *Les Noces* draw from Drue Alexandra Ferguson’s invaluable 1995 dissertation, *Les Noces: A Microhistory of the Paris 1923 Production* (Duke University), which collects a wide range of press responses from both French and English sources. The quotations referenced here include: Henry Malherbe, “Feuilleton du Temps du 27 Juin 1923. Chronique Musicale. Aux Ballets Russes: *Noces*, scènes chorégraphiques russes avec chant et musique composées par M. Igor Strawinsky,” *Le Temps*, 27 June 1923; Gustave Bret, “Spectacles. La Musique. Ballets Russes: *Noces*, de Strawinsky,” *L’Intransigeant*, 16 June 1923; and André Levinson, “Ballets Russes: *Les Noces*,” in an unidentified publication.

Among the most perceptive and telling reviews, Emile Vuillermoz, an early writer on film, described *Les Noces* as unfolding “on a stage without scenery, transformed into a vast cinematographic screen” (Ferguson 414). The dancers, he wrote, appeared as “a simplified humanity, black and white, as if born from a projector” (Ferguson 414). Although the costumes were in fact brown and off-white, the misreading of them as black and white reveals how the performance’s visual austerity became overcoded by cinematic and ethnographic expectations. The monochrome palette, flat lighting, and ritualized gesture were not perceived as modernist abstraction but as signs of ethnographic distance: flattened, projected, and racialized. As Ferguson points out and meticulously documents, many other reviews echoed this cinematic misrecognition (Ferguson 145). Malherbe remarked that Nijinska seemed inspired by “the hasty and trembling films of the first period of film-making,” and likened the dancers to “characters of half-light, oscillating regularly on a smooth, flat background” (Ferguson 448). The effect was not a removal of illusion but its substitution: anonymity became a cinematic surface, readable only through typification. Here, the ballet’s anti-illusionism paradoxically sharpened its legibility as a form of ethnographic spectacle, inviting spectators to view abstraction not as form, but as difference.

If for Adorno, and for the Frankfurt School in general, the subjective masquerading as the objective glorifies conformity and forgives the perpetrators, here one also observes how the exoticization of reified objectivity becomes an anthropological vantage point that abstracts the ritual from its sociohistorical grounding. Such a vantage point recasts the anonymous bride and groom as tokens of an immutable folk identity, inviting either condemnation or romanticization of a nationally and culturally distant other.²⁸ Similarly, Russian expatriate critic André Levinson

²⁸ I explore “peasant” as a class and racially coded category more fully in Chapter 3.

wrote, “The semi-pagan ritual, reflecting the unchanging peasant lifestyle, represents the solemn and austere reality of the Russian heart” (Ferguson 453). The “unchanging” pagan-peasant, torn from reality and relegated to the margins of history, thus remains symbolically at the center of the nation as the “Russian heart.” The musical and choreographic precision that renders subjectivity obsolete constructs a displaced self-as-other and is read as an authentic expression of Russia’s “primitive” cultural essence.

Accordingly, if we are going to read the conceptual frameworks through which Nijinska and Stravinsky advance Modernist aesthetics, we must acknowledge how primitivist representation structures and constrains these thematic critiques. Even while dicta such as Anne Anlin Cheng’s contention that Primitivism and Modernism are “intertwined, at times even identical, phenomena,” many modernist scholars continue to either bracket primitivism as a historical background or stylistic layer, thereby replicating its racialized assumptions (Cheng 4). Each of the scholarly engagements with *Les Noces* that I treat in this chapter risks reducing the work’s complexity by isolating primitivism as a separate or superficial feature. Instead, I argue that primitivist constructions actively participate in the ballet’s choreographic and performative gestures.²⁹ This chapter is thus also concerned with the racializing work done through

²⁹ In her 1987 work *The Poetics of Impersonality* Maud Ellmann already pointed to the potential for the impersonal to usher in racist and fascist politics, suggesting that the apparent neutrality and self-erasure central to modernist impersonality conceal deep ideological contradictions. For Ellmann, impersonality cannot be understood merely as an aesthetic ideal that successfully suppresses personality. Instead, it emerges as a dialectical tension between sustained efforts at self-erasure and the inevitable textual re-emergence of selfhood. Ellmann thus establishes impersonality as fundamentally a mode of political and philosophical ambivalence.

Ellmann explicitly frames this tension as politically charged and complicit with reactionary agendas, arguing that impersonality arose not simply as an aesthetic but as a reactionary rejection of liberal individualism. “Although its politics became explicit only in the 1930s, the doctrine of impersonality was born conservative. It began as an attack against the individualism that Eliot and Pound had both rejected. For this reason it remained complicit with its opposite, and with the past it was deputed to forget” (Ellmann 198). In their vehement opposition to the perceived excesses of Romantic subjectivity, Eliot and Pound, the primary authors she critiques, inadvertently preserved the very individualist premises they aimed to abolish.

Ellmann is clearly too prescriptive and too sweeping in her judgment here, but I find the ambivalence of impersonality helpful, as well as the dialectic between personal and impersonal. Perhaps more importantly for my purposes here, Ellmann further cautions that modernist impersonality may inadvertently enable critics to obscure the

anonymity, which functions as a site where primitivist codes and normative typifications converge. By centering the mechanisms of primitivism in the work's performative gesture, I build on studies such as Cheng's *Second Skin* to press beyond a reading that compartmentalizes race, gender, and formalism. The critical question is not whether primitivism is present, but how it operates across and within the categories critics tend to isolate.

I take my cue again here from Honig, who incorporates into her analysis of the performative Hortense Spillers' contention that the normative marriage vow extends beyond straight couples to enforce a state-licensed form of kinship that has systematically excluded Black families. In drawing on her account of the fraught ties between marriage, race, and kinship, Honig follows Spillers in noting that "the idealized "I do" reproduces daily a racially privileged normative kinship that pathologizes alternatives" (Honig). Spillers's examination of how Black kinship was historically pathologized for deviating from a state-sanctioned conjugal norm broadens the discussion of performativity well beyond questions of who speaks and what text they deliver. Her argument suggests that when any ritual invokes anonymity, there is also an opening for racial meaning to be inscribed onto bodies that are imagined as unmarked, but are in

ideological stances embedded within texts, "To some extent, critics have used the doctrine of impersonality to rescue modernism from its racism and homophobia: to purify the poems of their authors' politics, and hence to insulate aesthetics from history. For it is when the poems are most "personal," when the author is inscribed most visibly within the text, that the "scandal" of their history re-emerges. However, the closer one examines the theory of impersonality, the more its ideological objectives reappear; and it becomes impossible to separate its politics from its poetics" (Ellmann 198–99). Ellmann's critique here is twofold. First, she argues that critics often deploy impersonality strategically, in order to dissociate poetic texts from the politics and biases of their authors. This dissociation, she suggests, seeks to "insulate aesthetics from history," implying a problematic effort to preserve an imagined purity or autonomy of poetic expression. Second, Ellmann insists upon the impossibility of such insulation: precisely when the poems appear most "personal," they expose the author's ideological prejudices clearly. Yet this vulnerability also extends to their impersonality, since the doctrine itself is ideologically motivated and structured. Thus, rather than creating a politically neutral or ahistorical aesthetic domain, impersonality directly participates in modernism's ideological tensions, including its fraught intersections with racism, authoritarianism, and anti-liberal thought. I think the overlap, or even identity of Modernism and primitivism, throws the ideological and political work of impersonality further into relief.

She dramatically concludes the book by asserting that "The innocence of the aesthetic domain perishes in Eliot and Pound," arguing that the purported neutrality of modernist impersonality has been ideologically compromised from its inception (Ellmann 199).

fact always already situated within what Spillers calls “the hieroglyphics of the flesh:” a discursive and economic system that inscribes the body under the guise of erasure.³⁰ Once bodily presence enters the equation, the “I do” is not merely an institutional formula; it also secures a racialized and gendered division between those able to enact recognized rituals and those forced into alternative or unsanctioned ones.

Spillers’s critique thus reflects how a performative act can shore up forms of collectivity in the very instant it enforces difference. When onstage or offstage assemblies come to recognize their role in producing that difference, the performative reveals itself as anything but neutral: it inaugurates power structures precisely when participants assume their vantage point remains safely outside the ritual’s sway. The normative power embedded in the vow, then, both includes

³⁰ Is Hortense Spillers elaborates in “Peter’s Pans: Eating in the Diaspora,” “the “body,” insofar as it is an analytical construct, does not exist in person at all” (Spillers 21). She argues that what we often take for the empirical or visible body is already a site of layered discursive investment, “a context” rather than a substance, and that the marks of race, gender, and sexuality do not begin at the level of skin but operate through what she calls in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” “the hieroglyphics of the flesh.” These are not merely the physical residues of violence (branding, whipping, etc.), but a long-standing semiotic system that constructs difference as a function of power. Her point is that racialized personhood is produced through ritualized and historical forms of meaning-making, forms that often present themselves through the apparent self-evidence of empiricism.

This logic of inscription finds another articulation in Spillers’s analysis of anonymity in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” where the concern shifts from the marking of the body to the classificatory erasures of the archive. Spillers articulates three closely related instances of “anonymity” that cumulatively demonstrate how the ledger-based accounting of enslaved persons transforms distinct individuals into an undifferentiated mass. First, she remarks that the “cultural subject” of enslavement appears “historically as anonymity/anomie” in the writings of European adventurers and planters, thereby tracing how documents from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century uniformly exclude genealogical or familial particularities for the enslaved (Spillers 216). Second, she observes a “sameness of anonymous portrayal” across male and female captives in records that omit the nuances of gendered experience and instead collapse all captives under quantitative headings, such as “Slaves” or “Negroes,” in plantation ledgers and legal archives (Spillers 216). Third, she notes the stark contrast between the enslaver’s named identity and the enslaved person’s omission from any naming practice (“the blank space where his proper name would fit”), underscoring that anonymity is not merely an absence of personal details but a systematic refusal to grant legal and social recognition (Spillers 221). These interwoven usages underscore that anonymity functions as a structural imposition rather than a simple lack of biographical data.

Saidiya Hartman’s work, *Venus in Two Acts* and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, extends Spillers’ analysis by regarding anonymity as a potential site for “critical fabulation,” in which the erasures in the archive open imaginative pathways for reanimating partial or suppressed histories. Rather than restoring “justice” by recovering names, Hartman shows how the refusal to name can itself redeem personhood, not by “making visible” in any straightforward manner but by developing the anonymous as anonymous, almost as though apprehending the still-unseen through a new sensory register. In so doing, Hartman shifts anonymity from a purely debilitating imposition to a rehabilitative possibility, insisting that inhabiting the gaps of the archive allows multiple, even competing, narratives of the marginalized to coexist.

and disavows, offering a striking example of how performativity merges with racial and gender hierarchies under the guise of proper or felicitous usage. Spillers's work nudges Honig's reading of Austin to remain mindful that "crowds" and "encounters" are always raced, gendered, and historically embedded. Honig's use of the bull as symbol of performative unpredictability still applies, but with Spillers in view we also see how that unpredictability unfolds in worlds where racial exclusions dictate who gets to gather or must flee.

Reading Spillers's critique of racialized kinship into the final gesture of *Les Noces* reveals how confusion of positionality complicates the ostensibly neutral aesthetic of Modernist abstraction by undermining the supposed impartiality of the observer's gaze. I argue that while *Les Noces* participates in the primitivization of the peasant—a gesture that simultaneously effects a self-primitivization of the Ballets Russes' non-European Russian/Slavic identity, differentiating itself from Western European modernity—the ballet also enacts a critical moment wherein the "primitive" actively implicates the "modern" observer. In this moment, spectators who position themselves as modern, distant, and refined witnesses to an ostensibly barbaric peasant tradition instead find their neutrality drawn into an unstable racialized field. While I focus primarily on the ballet's 1923 premiere and its immediate reception in Paris and London, I also treat *Les Noces* as a work whose performative logics persist across time. These questions of positionality and legibility continue to shape the experience of the ballet in contemporary repertory.

At the ballet's conclusion, the chorus "interpellates" the spectators as integral participants in their communal ritual, thereby dismantling the operation of otherness that previously structured the separation between spectator and performer, primitive and modern.³¹ *Les Noces* thus makes explicit a performative dynamic already latent in primitivist reception: the

³¹ I develop the vocabulary of "interpellation" as the subject's integration into a chorus in Chapters 2 and 3.

destabilization of the spectator's external positionality opens an unexpected performative dimension, one premised on the performative force of anonymity.

1.1

In the ballet's opening lines the soprano abruptly, stridently "wails a wail" (Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra 1326*).³² Margarita Mazo describes the particular intonation as "lamenting," not exactly "singing," because of its distinctly folk derived short glissandi, its "gliding pitch" and "vocalized breathing" (Mazo 126).³³

"Tress my tress, O thou fair tress of my hair,

O my little tress.

My mother brush'd thee, mother brush'd thee at evening,

Mother brush'd my tress.

O woe is me, O alas poor me." (Stravinsky, *Libretto* 19)

The bride and groom are synecdochally represented throughout by their hair, one by tresses and the other curls.³⁴ The apostrophe of these opening lines, addressed to the singular tress of girlhood now split after marriage into two long braids, draws our attention to the absence

³² Throughout this chapter, I draw on several filmed productions of *Les Noces*, including the Royal Ballet's 2016 performance and the Oakland Ballet's 1981 staging (Royal Ballet) (Oakland Ballet). While my broader argument attends to the work's formal and historical logics, these recordings necessarily shape my readings of movement, spatial arrangement, and musicality. The Royal Ballet's version, a staple of the company's repertory and revived regularly until 2012, was staged by Nijinska herself. The Oakland production, set by Nijinska's daughter, Irina, is notable for blending the Russian libretto with scattered moments of English translation, an intervention that alters the tone and reception of the work substantially. This linguistic shift opens a new horizon of legibility yet also raises further questions about how *Les Noces* performs its collectivity and abstraction in different cultural registers.

³³ We can also consider the distinction between "singing" and "music" that Stravinsky makes in his subtitle for the work: *Russian choreographic scenes with singing and music* (Mazo 109) and (Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* 1246).

³⁴ Citing Stravinsky's various manuscripts and notes during the work's long gestation period, Taruskin persuasively argues that these synecdoches were immediately central to Stravinsky's earliest understandings of the text.

of the addressee (Mazo 130). Thus mourned, the absent tress is eulogized through the genre of the *plach*. At the same time, the direct address of the apostrophe invites a response, or at least opens the possibility that the inanimate, or departed object will respond, already suspending the barrier between animate subject and inert object. The apostrophic address thus reverses the pervading use of metonymy throughout the work, placing the tress at the junction of two tropes: it metonymically represents the bride but also animates the object that the Bride summons to speak. The apostrophe is thus a kind of *prosopopeia*, the conferral of a mask or face (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 75–76). Put directly, the ballet that, I argue, ends by creating a space for the performance of the object (the peasants) begins by addressing the object that acts as a surrogate for the (peasant) protagonist.

The duplicity of animating the object (which indeed captures the performative thrust of the work as a whole) as it attaches the individual to the community (the chorus) slyly permeates Stravinsky's reflection, quoted above, that "individual roles do not exist in *Les Noces*, but only solo voices that impersonate now one type of character and now another" (Stravinsky and Craft 115). His use of "impersonate" subtly indicates the performance of anonymity. If each voice corresponded to an individual role, one might imagine that the soprano "plays" the Bride or even "is" the Bride. Yet Stravinsky insists we "only" have voices that "impersonate," a formulation pointing to the contingency of that representation. This contingency rests on the fact that these voices impersonate "types" rather than fully fleshed-out individuals. Although the libretto uses the name "Nastasya Timofeyevna" to refer to the bride, the audience never arrives at a unique "Nastasya" and remains in the conceptual domain of "the bride." "Impersonate" thus sits provocatively alongside Stravinsky's use of "impersonal": the first "im-" prefix signals going "into" an identity, whereas the second "im-" prefix signifies the negation of personal identity.

The impersonal emerges through a form of impersonation that suggests a movement both into and out of character. We can thus say that the (impersonal, non-person) Bride anthropomorphizes the tress as an object which then figuratively enables her to act (by being impersonated, i.e. made into a person). While Adorno reads nearly this same duality in Beckett's *Endgame* as the enactment of a materialist negativity that pushes subjectivity to its point of absolute dissolution, I ply that same dialectic for its latent performative force.³⁵

Few opening vocal lines are as emotionally bracing. And yet, as evocative as these opening lines may sound, this wail does not directly express the Bride's inner feelings. "The bride weeps in the first scene not necessarily because of real sorrow at her prospective loss of virginity, but because, ritualistically, she *must* weep" (Stravinsky and Craft 116). In other words, the impersonal does not occur solely at the level of composition or choreographically, but in the first instance, so to speak, at the level of the ritual in reality. Stravinsky's modernist principle of impersonality is thus difficult to separate from the impersonality already present in the rituals of his source material. The "cliches and quotations of typical wedding sayings" from which Stravinsky culled the libretto were already quotations, formalized parts of the ritual to begin with. The Russian folk wedding is in fact often referred to as a kind of theater, full of roles that

³⁵ "They are empty *personae*, truly mere masks through whom sound merely passes. Their phoniness is the result of the disenchantment of spirit as mythology. In order to underbid history and thereby perhaps survive it, *Endgame* takes up a position at the nadir of what the construction of the subject-object laid claim to at the zenith of philosophy: pure identity becomes the identity of what has been annihilated, the identity of subject and object in a state of complete alienation" (Adorno, *Notes to Literature* 246). In Adorno's words, impersonation becomes "phoniness" and impersonal becomes "empty personae...mere masks." This combination marks the subjectivity's terminal disenchantment: as the mediation between self and world collapses, the subject is revealed as but a conduit of history's wreckage. When Adorno says that *Endgame* takes up its position "at the nadir," he means that where philosophy once sought an ideal reconciliation of subject and object, *Endgame* presents identity as fully consumed by alienation, where subject and object no longer mediate each other but instead meet in their mutual annihilation.

If impersonation and impersonality in *Endgame* signal the complete collapse of subjectivity into negation, I read *Les Noces* towards the possibility that their collusion might function as a condition of performative renewal, where anonymity reorganize the terms loss and annihilation. Whereas *Endgame* reveals the impossibility of performance in a world where subjectivity has fully disintegrated, *Les Noces* mobilizes a negativity that structures enactment.

must be filled and acted out (Mazo 116) (Reeder and Comegno 33). “The Bride” in an actual wedding in reality is already impersonating/impersonal.

When Stravinsky claims that “ritualistically, she *must* weep,” he parallels and diverges from Austin’s imperative that “Actions can only be performed by *persons*, and obviously in our cases the utterer *must be* the performer (italics in original in Stravinsky, italics added in Austin).” Parallels, in that both capture the imperative of ritual, revealing its coercive force; diverges in that Stravinsky is pointing squarely to the impersonating center of the impersonal, the fact that the fulfillment of the role is divorced from consciousness/intentionality of the person, while Austin is attempting to assert the presence of an active person in an otherwise anti-humanist structure. Reading these two sentences together also reveals the performative coercion behind both Stravinsky and Austin’s statements. They are not simply describing a state of affairs but in fact impersonating the (interpellating) voice behind the ritual. *You must weep. You must be* the person who utters. If Austin’s argument is predicated on the exclusion of certain performances, those exclusions reappear at the end of the argument as a coercive statement of who you must become in order to perform. The “ritualistic and non-personal” relationship between performers and performance butts against the recognition of personhood that emerges from it (Stravinsky and Craft 117). “Actions can only be performed by persons,” is no longer a statement of origin but of production: whoever performs felicitously becomes a person. Although Austin’s use of “person” highlights the perplexing self-evidence of the role of performer, this performative reading of Austin reveals the ability to perform as a kind of materialist predication of the subject.³⁶ At the same time, it reveals the impersonal heart of personhood. In other words, the

³⁶ The phrase “materialist predication of the subject” is from Spivak’s essay “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” but as mentioned in a prior footnote, Felman also draws the analogy between labor and performativity in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*. Spivak’s essay updates, so to speak, the material inscription of industrial labor and commodity production in the age of financialization. “Predication” describes an active logic whereby the subject

ability to perform constitutes the subject as a person but simultaneously requires that the person be impersonated.

Meanwhile, the performative behind Stravinsky's "she must weep" reveals another ritual: the performance of *Les Noces* in the present. I do not simply mean that the composer or choreographer controls what happens on stage, although that is often a part of the ritual. Instead, I mean that Stravinsky admits his own form of art as a kind of ritual and channels the imperative that stretches across the represented ritual into the one performed. The imperative "she must weep," while referring to the bride's role in the wedding, also speaks to the performers and the audience in the present; the ritual compels them, too. The ballet thereby enacts a performative relay in which the "presented" ritual (the wedding) and the representational ritual (the ballet performance) cannot be cleanly separated. The weeping is no longer exclusively attributable to a character within the diegesis; it becomes a demand made on the ballet itself and on the historical moment of its staging. This double imperative blurs the wedding ritual with this other ritual such that we may not necessarily or readily discern between the two.

What emerges is not simply a fusion of staged event and performative present, but a structural ambiguity wherein each ritual inflects the other. The wedding's coercive formalism, its performative demand that the bride must weep, leaks from the historical reality into the presentation of the wedding and into the formal structure of the ballet, shaping its aesthetic logic. At the same time, the ballet rearticulates the wedding as already aesthetic, already shaped by the terms of its own legibility as performance. The spectators, confronted by this doubling, do not

is brought into being within capitalist circuits, from wage labor to the speculative expansions of finance. A "materialist predication of the subject" draws attention to how subjectivity is produced, organized, and made to function within a global capitalist system that mediates the subject's conditions of possibility. In reapproaching this parallel between performance and labor I still find myself closer to Spivak: we are neither dealing with a new materialism nor does the misfired performance displace the logic of contradiction.

remain external observers; they are drawn into the ritual as participants, subjected to a choreography of spectatorship that implicates them in the structure it presents. As I go on to argue, the final performative moment when the bride and groom disappear into a painted interior and the villagers remain ultimately capitalizes on this dramaturgical progression: it marks a shift from stylized abstraction to mimetic enclosure. The sudden reappearance of illusionistic décor, absent until this final moment, reactivates the representational conventions of Romantic ballet at the precise instant the narrative dissolves. In doing so, it reframes the wedding not as culmination but as a vanishing point, displacing narrative resolution with a collective enactment that can no longer be disaggregated into presented and representing rituals.

Unlike the singers who do not play specific roles, on stage we do indeed find single performers impersonating the Bride, Groom, and their parents. Stravinsky goes on to clarify, however, that “the choreography was expressed in blocks and masses; individual personalities did not, could not, emerge” (Stravinsky and Craft 117). The integration of characters into the ensemble submerges these archetypes into an anonymous mass. Despite being recognizable, the Bride and Groom remain partially impersonal through their attachment to the group. These choreographic “blocks and masses” create a human landscape: their design of structures and pyramids suggests more the construction of place and space rather than formations of people or elaborations of character.³⁷

In the ballet’s opening moments, the Bride kneels, her torso and forehead pressed against the floor, her arms crossed above her head as if in lamentation or repentance. Two groups of four women flank the prostrate Bride symmetrically on either side. The outermost woman on each side stands erect, facing forward, feet in sixth position, arms in a high open fifth, holding the

³⁷ As I argue in Chapter 2, the blending and transmutation of bodies and background surprisingly work to produce the anonymous figure of the chorus.

Bride's impossibly long braids of hair. The second and third two women stand in tense, usually turned-in second positions. While their torsos incline increasingly towards the Bride, their heads either face front, flat up or down, depending on the version.³⁸ Their arms in high fifth positions end in fists. The innermost women kneel in profile, bowing their heads towards the bride. The formation frames the Bride with a symmetry that might resemble a Romantic-era pose if it enlivened and softened her pose. Instead, the lines descend towards the Bride, weighing her down; their bent, rigid torsos and turned-in feet warp the softening epaulement of the prior era into a taut, bi-dimensional plane, so that any three-dimensional spacing of the pose is nearly obliterated by their flat frontal and profile facing. Their angular body positions and bidimensional shapes conjure Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and *The Rite*, asking to be read both as a continued aesthetic development of modernist ballet and thematically in the context of this startlingly somber wedding.

The distinction between characters and corps is blurred. The intertwined bodies of the bridesmaids, connected further by the Bride's long braids, nearly "form an entity," as Nijinska describes the groomsmen and groom in the 2nd act (Nijinska 59). With the second phrase ("My mother brushed thee") they move in counterpoint, rippling one by one as if in stop action, unfolding as a single body. As the bride raises her head, the eight Bridesmaids slide down into a wide formation on the floor; as the Bride lowers her head to her opening position, they too return to their opening, standing, pose. The continual, simultaneous exchange of high and low positions between the Bride and the chorus occurs time and again throughout this first scene, emphasizing

³⁸ Gontcharova's sketch of this first tableau shows the two outermost women looking down and the third woman looking up, her body thus perilously contorted backwards to maintain the "stacking" formation above the Bride (Nijinska). The 1984 Oakland Ballet version, set by Nijinska's daughter, Irina, and based on Nijinska's own 1923 staging at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, maintains the verticality and facings of Gontarova's sketches (Oakland Ballet). Meanwhile, in a 2001 recording of *The Royal Ballet*, where Nijinska staged the work herself in 1966, all three standing women face forward, their bodies curved sideways over the Bride (Royal Ballet).

their unity. Both their successive As the Bride rises, she presses her right fist against her chest, echoing the pose of her parents, further uniting all the bodies on stage.

While creating these mimetic relationships, they also form more “abstract architectural” shapes, as Garafola calls them (Garafola, *La Nijinska* xvii). In an interview with Fernand Divoire conducted shortly after the premiere of *Les Noces* in 1923, Garafola paraphrases Nijinska saying that “The mass must not be a collection of individuals, but must form one thing endowed with *one life*” (Garafola, *La Nijinska* 146). This imperative pervades the choreography, where the wedding participants operate as modules within a structured whole, thereby refusing the individuating logic of theatrical mimesis.

Although Nijinska did not issue a theoretical statement about *Les Noces* at the time, Garafola convincingly situates the work as the culmination of Nijinska’s years of theoretical and choreographic development in revolutionary Kiev, where she established her School of Movement and articulated a program of abstraction, anti-narrativity, and collective form in both practice and writing. Throughout her diaries and her 1918–20 treatise *On Movement and the School of Movement*, Nijinska rejected “librettism”—her neologism for not merely storytelling but the entire theatrical apparatus that reinforces mimetic character-driven expression (Garafola, “Amazon” 141, 150) (Garafola, *An Amazon* 141, 150). Her turn to abstraction stemmed from a rigorous theorization of gesture as autonomous material, aligned with the non-representational aims of the visual avant-garde (Garafola, “Amazon” 122, 140).

At stake in *Les Noces*, then, is a continuous tension between the mimetic/symbolic and the abstract, which thematically mirrors the dialectic of individual and collective. This dialectic remains materially present in the spatial organization of the body on stage. In her earlier work *Demons* (1920), for example, Nijinska staged five women moving in intertwined forms to

produce what she described as a single monstrous organism, and Garafola notes how Nijinska transferred this principle of gestural collectivization directly into *Les Noces*, where the corps de ballet acts as a single breathing unit, not a background to principal roles but the generative ground from which the ritual form emerges (Garafola, *La Nijinska* 140–41). These choreographic logics refuse the hierarchy of soloist over ensemble and dismantle character individuality in favor of a depersonalized mass whose power lies precisely in its structural anonymity.

While there can be no question that the Bride is the central figure on stage, we might say that she is only partially, contingently so. Both the materiality and ideality of the bride is choreographically registered by the entire group: they physically hold onto one another and onto the bride's hair, creating shapes and formations that resemble a single living being. The group's formations often feature but a single emotionless face, the other women's heads buried in the mass of their taut and huddled bodies. The result is oddly insect-like, as Nijinska described the formations of *Demons*, mentioned above. As a physical creation of "the bride" the result is somewhat monstrous, somehow non-human. The idea of "bride," meanwhile, is assembled not by one woman impersonating the bride alone, but by the entire group. To the extent that all the women on stage unite to materially and ideally create the bride, there is no distinction between characters and chorus, bride and bridesmaid.

With the first text assigned to the Bridesmaids, the singing chorus reiterates the bride's lament with a strong syllabication that emphasizes the now forceful, driving rhythm. Reminiscent of the jarring rhythms of *Rite of Spring*, the music creates urgency by upsetting the 6/8 meter with a strong accent the 5th beat of the 2nd measure, effectively preempting the natural conclusion of a 12-count phrase. Tucked symmetrically into these two measures is the bride's name, chosen precisely for its typicality and sonority (Stravinsky, *Les Noces* Score rehearsal 2).

I comb, I will comb

Anastasia's tress.

I comb, I will comb

[Anastasia] Timofeyevna's blonde [tress]. (Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* 1346)

The two groups of four women, meanwhile, form a flat line with the bride at the center. Stepping onto pointe for the first time, they bourrée back and forth across the stage.³⁹ They respond to Stravinsky's "interrupting" accents with sharp dégegés, that divide the movement across the stage into odd 5 then 6 count phrases. Still holding the bride's long braids aloft, their rhythmic steps on pointe abstractly braid her hair. As Garafola observes, the downward accent of the foot into the floor revises ballet's traditional lexicon. If conventional uses of pointe work create the illusion of lightness and floating, deeply complicit in constructions of feminine beauty, Garafola argues that "the movement's percussiveness conveys pain and violence as well," and goes on to connect the stabbing action with the bride's wedding night loss of virginity (Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* 127). Although Garafola does not recognize that this allegory is already present in the traditional folk songs, her astute reading nonetheless reveals how the choreography embodies that figurative step.⁴⁰

In addition to this potent reading of gender and sexuality, with which other interpretive findings must ultimately be articulated, the use of pointe introduces a generic and stylistic

³⁹ In the Oakland Ballet version, the outermost women raise their arms to a high fifth, retaining the symmetry of all prior formations in the work so far. In the Royal Ballet, the formation is slightly asymmetrical, the direction they travel.

⁴⁰ Banes, meanwhile, writing well before Garafola, does register this. "Nijinska did not invent the symbolism of the braiding as representing the loss of virginity, for it is already present in the ritual... The turning of the single braid of the maiden into the two braids of the married woman, as a metaphor for sexual violence, is underscored by the ritual greeting the bride traditionally gives her fiancé on the wedding day when she calls him "a destroyer and ravager" and begs her girlfriends to protect her from him (Banes 112–13).

tension. Like her adaptation of the classical ballet lexicon in general, this repurposing of pointe work initiates a move toward the neoclassicism that would be a hallmark of her later work. Within the evolution of the Ballet Russes, *Les Noces* sits squarely between the so-called Russian orientalist and French neoclassical period, helping usher in that new phase. Yet while the idea of pointe for “peasant” dancers might seem contradictory, it actually extends earlier Romantic impulses to fuse so-called “authentic” folk expression with ballet’s codified vocabulary, a fusion that nineteenth-century commentators had already recognized as paradoxical—especially at the Paris Opéra, with its prolific use of “national” or “character” dances (Arkin and Smith). At the same time, following Nijinska’s recollections, the notion of a “Russian ballet” on pointe left Diaghilev in shock (Nijinska 59). Diaghilev’s surprise reflects both the move away from pointe shoes during the company’s Russian period, perhaps primarily due to the influence of Michel Fokine, as well as the typical “character” representation of peasants in classical ballets. By both of these criteria he would have supposed *Les Noces* to be in boots and character shoes. Such expectations stem from an entrenched tradition in which exotic or folkloric material was classified as character dance, and therefore consigned to specific footwear, steps, and costumes. Such expectations drew from a long-standing distinction in ballet pedagogy: character steps, associated with boots and regional styles, were considered ethnographic; pointe work, associated with verticality and stylized grace, belonged to classical decorum. At the Imperial Ballet School, character dance had been formalized by Alexander Shiryayev and remained structurally distinct from classical technique in both repertory and training. This generic twist had consequences, however, in that it refused to assimilate the ballet’s visual aesthetic and choreography into the same exoticist framework as its story and Stravinsky’s music.

After a short reprise, the bridesmaids nearly interrupt the bride's lament to console her (Stravinsky, *Les Noces (Svadebka): Russian Choreographic Scenes with Singing and Music for Voices, Four Pianos and Percussion* rehearsal 9). The rhythm picks up momentarily into a vigorous and danceable 2/4 as they divide into two groups. The first group's light and airy, folk-derived steps and the music's suddenly even downbeats contrast both with the restrained classicism of the opening scenes and with the second group's more elastic use of similar material across a 3/4 meter (Stravinsky, *Les Noces (Svadebka): Russian Choreographic Scenes with Singing and Music for Voices, Four Pianos and Percussion* rehearsal 10). If the bridesmaids have thus far blurred the line between "bridesmaid" and "bride," by expanding the work's movement vocabulary to include these character steps they now appear as part of a larger community.

The second tableau reconfigures the formal vocabulary established in the bridal scene through a contrasting spatial dynamic. The still, downward-facing configurations of the opening are replaced with lateral movement, diagonals, and rhythmic propulsion; where the bride lies down and kneels the groom stands. Yet the underlying choreographic logic remains consistent. Here, angularity and repetition structure the movement of the groomsmen, whose blunt directional shifts and rhythmic stamping echo the architectural constraint of the bridesmaids while redirecting it along a horizontal axis. The Groom's own movement remains compressed and monumental; like the Bride, he functions more as a locus of spatial arrangement than as a dancing subject. Nijinska's choreography refuses theatrical individuation even as she draws upon the conventional motifs of folk dance: the ensemble's crouched jumps, fist-driven gestures, and stylized stamping recall codified elements of Russian character vocabulary, but without any apparent aim at regionalist citation.

The stylized pounding of the groomsmen and their low, tightly coiled pivots do not signify peasant virility as expressive character but function as choreographic devices that elaborate the angular, impersonal grammar already established by the bridesmaids. These movements, shaped by Nijinska in continuity with the choreographic principles she developed alongside her brother in *The Rite of Spring*, repurpose the motifs of turned-in feet, percussive weight, and bodily stasis to reiterate the abstraction of gesture. Yet whereas *Rite* stages mythic sacrifice within a prehistorical frame, *Les Noces* binds its ritual logic to the formal structures of academic “character steps” and to ethnographic material reframed as ethnic inheritance. As much as the folkloric in Nijinska’s hands appears to index authenticity, it is also a means of structuring impersonality through historically marked embodiment. The choreography thereby also suspends its mimetic function, treating folk reference “classically,” so to speak, as a continued vocabulary of formal constraint.

Against this aesthetic and structural impersonality, Banes identifies a ritual of patriarchal coercion. Citing Asafyev’s description of the second tableau as “the invocation and excitation of the male procreative force,” reads the final movement as “orgiastic”(Banes 115). For her, the ballet articulates a ritualized submission of the bride, whose fate is set in motion by rigid communal imperatives. Stylized motifs of braiding, stamping, and lamentation do not express interiority but signify her subjection to familial and religious protocols that culminate in a coerced transfer into the groom’s household. Banes concludes that *Les Noces* stages the obliteration of personal agency by the inexorable movement of the group (Banes 115).

First, we can note that even as she situates the ballet in continuity with the Ballets Russes’ primitivist repertoire, she displaces its primitivist tropes onto a social critique of patriarchal repression, thereby disarticulating primitivism from its aesthetic and racializing

operations. Second, her attention to the forces that overwhelm personal desire situates *Les Noces* in continuity with the Ballets Russes' ongoing fascination with primitivism, yet she insists that its darker, less celebratory portrayal of peasant life reflects "the weighty social forces that impinge on individuals in a traditional culture" rather than mere exotic flourish (Banes 108). Between 1912 and 1923, she notes, women's social and political status in Russia shifted dramatically. Marriage laws changed, the feminist movement gained ground, and the Bolsheviks sought to remake peasant society. In this context, Banes argues, the ballet's bride becomes emblematic of patriarchal subjugation—often, she notes, a bride would be "chosen for her ability as worker" (Banes 110). "It was against this social landscape," she writes, "that *Les Noces* was created," implying that the work's depiction of coerced marriage registers broader historical realities (Banes 109).

Yet this gesture toward historicity misplaces the site of critique. Rather than treating the ballet's formal impersonality as itself a mode of historical thought, Banes reads that impersonality as the aesthetic surface beneath which lies a socially realist diagnosis. In doing so, she effectively repositions the peasantry as the object of critique, thereby reinscribing the exoticizing framework the ballet formally unsettles. What emerges in her reading is not the dialectic between the impersonal and impersonation, but the replacement of impersonality with personified oppression. The ritual is treated as a reflection of patriarchal tradition rather than a structural device that materializes coercion as an impersonal logic, one no longer reducible to the intentions or beliefs of its participants. Banes thus reasserts a liberal framework in which agency remains tethered to named subjectivity. Her critique flattens the ballet's dialectical play between impersonality and impersonation into a binary between individual and collective, misreading formal abstraction as ideological erasure.

By contrast, Garafola fully embeds *Les Noces* within the Ballets Russes' primitivist aesthetics, aligning its gender politics with its departure from imperial repertory norms and its entrance into abstraction. For her, Nijinska's choreography enacts a feminist critique not only through its representation of the bride's subjugation but through its privileging of collective form over aristocratic decorum. Yet Garafola's analysis, while attentive to the ballet's choreographic collectivism, does not substantially interrogate how the work constructs "the peasant" as a typified, potentially racialized figure. The work's folkloric vocabulary is treated as a feminist resource, not as a site where aesthetic abstraction and cultural hierarchy intersect. Her analysis, then, absorbs the ballet's primitivist structures into its gender politics, leaving their racializing function unexamined. While compelling, her feminist account does not address the extent to which typification functions as a racializing structure as well as a formal one. The peasant body, abstracted and de-individualized, circulates within the ballet's gender critique while also bearing the marks of primitivist coding that remain unacknowledged in her reading.⁴¹

In both cases, the critical gesture turns away from the impersonal logics that structure *Les Noces*—whether by treating impersonality as a symptom of domination (Banes) or by translating it into a vehicle for feminist modernism (Garafola). Yet what the ballet stages is not merely a ritual of oppression or a critique of patriarchy but a formal system in which typification, abstraction, and collectivity are themselves the conditions of performative possibility. Rather than oppose the Bride to the Groom or the individual to the group, the choreography articulates both within a single architectural field. The groomsmen do not counter the bridesmaids; they

⁴¹ Garafola tellingly treats *Les Noces* as the outcome of distinct aesthetic trajectories—Stravinsky's authoritarian musical structure and Nijinska's choreographic collectivism. This division enables her to foreground feminist agency in the ballet while sidestepping its complicity in primitivist representation. By isolating Nijinska's contribution as formally and ideologically separate from Stravinsky's, Garafola preserves the choreographic abstraction from the racializing force of the score (Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* 127).

extend the same angular, constructivist logic. The wedding becomes kinetic structure, not narrative expression.

To understand how Nijinska's deployment of folk material troubles that typification, one must read the ballet's choreographic language not simply as a site of gendered ritual power but also as a formal negotiation of primitivism. The Groom does not oppose the Bride, he inhabits the same angular, architectural logic that renders gender asymmetry as a function of spatial and choreographic structure rather than character or narrative role. As *Les Noces* elaborates the choreographic principles of *The Rite*, so the peasant wedding ritual, stripped of narrative interiority, becomes a kinetic architecture in which impersonality is neither a mask for character nor a negation of presence but a mode of collective embodiment. The folkloric, in this context, marks a gendered and cultural difference that produces not expressive subjects but a typified ensemble. The result is a communal form that is at once othered through its primitivist frame and patriarchally ordered in its structuring of succession.

And yet, Nijinska's folk-derived vocabulary does not simply reproduce primitivist spectacle. Her choreography draws equally on classical and character techniques, refusing the formal separation that historically aligned character dance with exoticism and pointe work with classical femininity. The use of parallel foot positions, flat frontal orientation, and bidimensional shapes allows her to collapse these conventions into a modernist grammar of movement. Nijinska's choreography unsettles not only audience expectations but the institutional codification of folk dance within ballet training as an ethnographic shorthand distinct in technique, costume, and repertory from classical ballet. By fusing pointe with folk steps, abstraction with ethnographic citation, Nijinska refuses to stabilize the representational axis of

the “primitive.” The result is not a reconciliation of modern and traditional, but a disturbance of both.

Susan Jones’s account of *Les Noces* approaches Nijinska’s formalism not through feminist critique or sociological historicization, but through literary modernism’s experiments with impersonality. For Jones, Nijinska’s abstraction resonates with the “modernist sublime,” a mode of composition that displaces expression from individual interiority into tightly patterned aesthetic form. She notes that the ballet “shared with British modernists a skeptical mode that led to deconstruction of conventional generic register, unity of mood, questioning of linear narrative, and an emphasis on two-dimensional geometric design to underpin its dynamic structures and to emphasize a poetics of impersonality” (S. Jones 126). In this framing, the corps de ballet, operating as a mass of rhythmic precision, becomes the site of this impersonal poetics. Their near-identical gestures and clenched fists, she suggests, represent a search for a “still point” within motion, a paradoxical moment of formal clarity that echoes literary modernism’s austerity. Jones thereby positions Nijinska’s choreography within a broader aesthetic commitment to formal impersonality as a mode of modernist truth-making.

Yet this reading, while valuable, risks reinstating a conceptual tension that impersonality was meant to unsettle. In grounding *Les Noces* in a vision of formal clarity or sublimity, Jones preserves the fantasy, common to modernist aesthetics, that impersonality grants access to a purified expressive field, untethered from sentiment or distortion. But as Cheng has argued, such gestures toward formal detachment often re-inscribe fantasies of authenticity, especially when impersonality is staged through racialized or typified bodies (Cheng). Nijinska’s abstraction, no less than Stravinsky’s musical stylization, operates within a framework in which the folk is rendered legible precisely through the withdrawal of subjective interiority. Rather than unveil a

de-sentimentalized truth, impersonality may function as the aesthetic mechanism through which the folk subject is stabilized and consumed. In other words, instead of revealing a refined, dispassionate reality (as modernism claims), impersonality may operate as the very tool that renders the peasant figure legible through typified form, stabilizing it as aesthetic material to be consumed and circulated within a modernist aesthetic economy

It is helpful here to recall how thoroughly “character dance” became entrenched in both the French Romantic and Russian Imperial traditions. The Romantic period in Paris saw a swell of fascination with danced representations of peoples outside France. These “character dances,” Spanish, Italian, Slavic, Arabian, etc., were often embedded within the classical narrative ballets of the time, or else performed alongside classical works. Toward the end of the 19th century in Russia, Marius Petipa ushered in the so-called Golden Era of classical ballet. Beyond including the now familiar exotic settings and character dances popular in the Romantic ballets of Paris, his assistant Alexander Shiryayev began teaching the first formal classes of “character dance” at the Imperial Theatrical School (later the Vaganova Academy) in St. Petersburg in 1891. Nijinska attended the Imperial Ballet School from 1900 to 1908 and indeed included character dance as a necessary “practical subject” for the training of a new kind of dance artist in her 1918 manifesto (Garafola, “Amazon” 119).⁴²

The key difference, for my purposes, is that as folk dance became codified within the broader framework of classical ballet (both on stage and in the curriculum), the result was not primitivist in the same sense that modernists imagined. Rather, as Anthony Shay argues in his

⁴² Russian composers of the 19th century were likewise drawn to the wedding songs of folk ritual, and staged versions entered popular entertainment by 1869 (Mazo 111) (Mazo 111). While much remains unchanged between the 18th and 20th centuries, each era’s approach to primitivism puts it in service of distinct aesthetic ideals. If the Romantic period, the notion of a “noble savage” promised to bring the so-called civilized spectator closer to the sublime, whereas in the modernist period the metropole’s fascination with the artistic forms of the “other” was meant to stimulate the creation of new, formally daring work. Stravinsky’s music of this period exemplifies the latter agenda.

analysis of staged folk performance, the entrenchment of folk idioms within ballet's formal apparatus often transformed those idioms into theatricalized expressions of national character, stylized through choreographic conventions that distanced them from their original social function. He goes on to assert that once folk dances are filtered through a system of academies and state-endorsed repertoires, they risk becoming ornamental spectacles of otherness, even or especially when choreographers claim to honor an authentic tradition (Shay xx). Their vocabulary, as Susan Au observes, quoted in Shay, was routinely reduced to a narrow set of signifiers until they functioned "to the point of stereotype." The presumed authenticity of these representations rested on the dubious belief that choreographers could "distill the national or regional traits of an ethnic or national group into a choreographed dance," thereby naturalizing both ethnic difference and the authority of the artist-observer (Shay xx). The result, Shay contends, was not an archival preservation of folk practice but its transformation into symbolic shorthand, structured by external observation and choreographic control. Choreographers presumed they could intuit or extract the essential character of a given people and render it theatrically, thus reinforcing their own authorial position while rendering the folk an object of aesthetic consumption (Shay xx–xxi).⁴³ *Les Noces* grapples with that legacy, redeploying folk-derived motifs within a neoclassical (or proto-modernist) language and thus refusing to remain purely in the domain of either Romantic "exotic curiosity" or aloof "high art." By integrating pointe and character steps into the same abstract, choreographic grammar, Nijinska mounts a complex negotiation that does not fully escape the primitivist framework but nonetheless

⁴³ I will just note that, as usual, the alternative Shay provides to the stereotype is a turn towards transparency and individuality. As he puts it "We do not encounter them (the folk) as themselves nor through their actual dances, but largely through the mediation of classical ballet in which they appear as interchangeable stock figures with no individuality like Giselle's village friends" (Shay xxii). In other words, the problem is that the stereotype erases individuality. This alternative, however, distorts the problem of misrepresentation and exoticization by deploying the ideology of individualism. This chapter is interested in the productive, though not necessarily constructive work done by the type.

challenges its historical separation of the peasant body from the exalted, vertical plane of classical technique. Her staging thereby refracts the representational conventions that once fixed the folk dancer as an ethnographic curiosity, offering instead a form whose abstraction troubles the spectator's confidence in what, or whom, they see.

The ballet's depiction of peasant tradition was received not only as an aesthetic statement but as a cultural provocation within the discourse surrounding the Ballets Russes. In Paris, the company's success hinged on a fundamental tension: while it was celebrated for its dynamism and artistic innovation, it was also framed in opposition to French ballet's self-image of refinement, measure, and aesthetic unity. As Ilyana Karthas has argued, the company strategically positioned itself between an exoticized Russianness that appealed to Western audiences' fascination with peasant folk tradition, and a modernist impulse that aligned with Parisian avant-garde sensibilities. Karthas underscores that *Les noces* epitomizes this blending of "Russianness" with a taste for avant-garde experimentation, illustrating both the Ballets Russes' modernist ambitions and the ongoing marketability of "primitive" peasant themes to elite French spectators.

This anxiety surfaced even more explicitly in critiques that framed the Ballets Russes as a force of cultural disruption. Critic Pierre Lalo, despite his fascination with the company's artistic vitality, later condemned its production of *Afternoon of a Faun* (1912) as a sign of "real barbarism, under the false appearance of a delicate art" (Karthas 190). The ballet's supposed discordance and lack of unity, he argued, reflected "the stigma of the barbarian," positioning Russian ballet not only as aesthetically flawed but as an agent of cultural degeneration, a threat to the "delicate art" of French classicism. For Karthas, this language of refinement and excess, civilization and barbarism, reflects the republican-era struggle to reconcile admiration for bold

new art with fears of foreign influence, revealing how supposedly apolitical, aesthetic concerns over formalism intersected with deeper questions of national identity. Following Karthas, we might conjecture that *Les Noces* ultimately works more to shore up a modern French, or even European identity than to portray the realities of the Russian peasantry or reveal their “souls.”

It is thus no surprise that, despite the perennial fascination with both *Les Noces* and *Le Sacre*, both works are either admired from a distance or else modified to contemporary tastes. The former is rarely played by symphonies or ballet companies (other than the Royal Ballet), while the latter is critically/thematically sanitized through concert performances and rarely revived as a ballet. As Taruskin argues, a number of key agents, not least Stravinsky himself, sought to distance *Le Sacre* both from its origins in the sacrifice of a victim and from Nijinsky’s brutal ballet (Taruskin, “Resisting The Rite”). Taruskin points out that even Millicent Hodson’s esteemed reconstruction of his choreography offered a humanist point of entry by having the Chosen One attempt to escape during the “Danse sacrale.” Taruskin reviews Hodson’s sources for making that decision, including Marie Rambert’s notes on a rehearsal score and comments made by Nijinska. While I am personally swayed by Taruskin’s reasoning, if nothing else the very ambiguity of the evidence indicates a postwar desire to assuage the barbarity of the ritual. Despite the fact that the work developed from a libretto, Stravinsky contended in an often-cited interview from 1920 that he wrote “an architectonic work, not an anecdotal one. And it was a mistake to treat it anecdotally, which goes against the whole thrust of the piece” (Taruskin, “Resisting The Rite” 294). In other words, he pulled the work from his “barbaric,” auto-exoticizing Russian phase into his later neoclassicism. *Les Noces*, meanwhile sits on the cusp of both periods.

In the wake of the pianola recordings released in 1991, playing *Le Sacre* with perfect accuracy and speed has become the paragon of the contemporary performer, but also the epitome of Stravinsky's objectivist aesthetic. For Taruskin, this new "athletic" mode of execution, that in its success conveys "elation and euphoria," unwittingly crystallizes Stravinsky's impersonal, mechanical ideal. Wedding the language of Rivière and Levinson's early reviews with Adorno's analysis of *Le Sacre* in *Philosophy of New Music*, Taruskin writes that "The dark biological ballet of 1913, the icy comedy of primeval hysteria, has been decisively resisted, rejected, repressed in favor of "positive" good vibrations" (Taruskin, "Resisting The Rite" 302). Revising Adorno's damning criticism that *Le Sacre* could not be played in the Third Reich "of countless sacrifice," Taruskin draws our attention to the psychosis of a society in which the music has become eminently performable. Taruskin's diagnosis of *Le Sacre*'s progression from Modernist primitivism to Postmodern pastiche seems to validate Adorno's often strained psychoanalytic assessment of Stravinsky. That is, the work is stripped of all content and the performers strip themselves of all subjectivity, reducing the objective, historical sources of material to mere pastiche. As Frederic Jameson offers, building implicitly on Adorno, "Stravinsky is the true precursor of postmodern cultural production" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 17).

For Adorno, Stravinsky's earlier, primitivist compositions aestheticize the transformation of subjectivity into a ritualistic gesture emptied of interiority. *Petrushka*, he argues, is an ostensibly "intentionless" work that "takes the side not of the mishandled hero but rather of those who ridicule him," so that "subjectivity takes on the character of a sacrifice" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 109). Even at the level of character, Adorno's analysis Stravinsky's use of the clown in *Petrushka* suggests a kind of typology: the protagonist's suffering does not emerge from an inner dialectic but is merely staged as an impersonal spectacle, absorbed into the

collective scorn of those who ridicule him.⁴⁴ *The Rite of Spring* epitomizes this liquidation of the individual: the Chosen One's final solo is nothing more than a collective circle dance "bereft of any dialectic of universal and particular" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 119). She dances herself to death as though fulfilling an inescapable, primitive fate, one which Adorno associates with authoritarian tendencies in both culture and politics. If primitivism is thus already complicit in objectification, *Les Noces*, often considered a Neoclassical work and known for its Modernist techniques) makes this objectification absolute: the mechanization of voices, and indeed the use of "types," formalize ritual into an aesthetic of abstraction. Following Adorno, Stravinsky's cantata would thereby elicit audience responses that oscillate between sadistic pleasure in witnessing subjugation and masochistic identification with collective power, reinforcing a regressive social order.⁴⁵

Adorno's critique of *Rite of Spring* offers a powerful precedent for understanding how abstraction can reify domination. In that work, he argues, the Chosen One's death is not a scene of tragic individuality but a ritualized performance "bereft of any dialectic between universal and particular" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 119). She dances herself to death not out of subjective will but in fulfillment of a mechanical fate, an aesthetic of ritualized subjugation that Adorno links to authoritarian cultural tendencies. If primitivism is already complicit in such

⁴⁴ Adorno contrasts *Petrushka* with Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, in which the tragic clown does not become an impersonal type but remains bound to "solitary subjectivity" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 109). Whereas *Petrushka* is absorbed into a collective logic of ridicule and sacrifice, *Pierrot* enacts a withdrawal from empirical reality such that his journey culminates in an "imaginary plane" of estranged subjectivity. *Pierrot*'s alienation thus retains, for Adorno, an expressive pathos, however fractured. Stravinsky's depersonalized clown (*Petrushka*), meanwhile, reemerges not as an interiorized subject but as a lifeless remnant of his own negation, a figure who survives his demise only to become an instrument of collective mockery.

⁴⁵ I explore how Adorno and the Frankfurt school participated in an "anti-anonymous discourse" through these ideas. Ultimately, however, this chapter considers how Adorno turns towards the anonymous through the role of non-identity in his negative dialectics. The distance between these two kinds of anonymity, between the type and the nonidentity of an object with itself, reflects why I still consider Adorno an "anti-anonymous" thinker and why he himself might consider himself as such.

forms of objectification, *Les Noces*, often seen as formally neoclassical and modernist in its restraint, intensifies this dynamic through its abstraction. Stravinsky's cantata mechanizes voices, reifies characters as types, and transforms ritual into a structure of impersonality. For Adorno, this would generate audience responses oscillating between sadistic pleasure and masochistic identification, reinforcing a regressive social order.

Stravinsky's own terminology, particularly the complicity he offers between "impersonal" and "impersonation," offers an instructive counterpoint to this logic of division. These terms do not signal a stable opposition between collectivity and individuality but instead mark a structure in which anonymity and figuration continuously inflect one another. Yet critics have often read such ambiguity as unresolved fracture. Adorno's own analysis of *Le Sacre* identifies a formal split between corporeality and depersonalization, and this division has persisted in critical readings of *Les Noces*.⁴⁶ Many have regarded *Les Noces* as a work fractured between impersonal ritual and individuated character, between mechanical abstraction and expressive embodiment, between choreographer and composer, and between feminist critique and primitivist complicity. Yet, as I argue, such binaries not only obscure the ballet's dialectical

⁴⁶ "The alienation of music from the subject and at the same time its relatedness to corporeal sensations has its pathogenic analog in the delusional corporeal sensations of those who perceive their own bodies as effectively alien. The split in the Stravinskian artwork between ballet and objectivistic music may document a corporeal feeling that is pathically heightened and at the same time alienated from the subject. The corporeal feeling of the ego would then be projected on a medium that is actually ego-dystonic, the dancers, while the music, an ego-syntonic sphere dominated by the ego, would be alienated from and opposed to the subject as an entity in itself" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 130). In other words, Adorno sees *The Rite of Spring* as structured by a fundamental contradiction between music and dance. The dancers, whose bodies are visible and expressive, come to represent the subject's alienated physical sensations, felt intensely yet estranged from selfhood. Meanwhile, the music unfolds with a kind of formal detachment, appearing indifferent to the body on stage rather than reinforcing its movement. For Adorno, this split is psychological as well as formal: the ballet externalizes a fractured experience of embodiment under modern conditions. He is not wrong: *The Rite* does present a vision of the body as fragmented and out of sync with its aesthetic environment. But this is not the whole story. Adorno ultimately limits the body to the place of the object acted upon by aesthetic and historical structures. What I suggest he overlooks, and what I return to at the end of this chapter through his solitary reference to "performance" in *Negative Dialectics*, is the extent to which his own work allows us to glimpse how bodies participate in shaping the very conditions that seem to constrain them.

structure but repeat the very logic of typification that the ballet itself renders unstable. The historical critical tendency to divide *Les Noces* is thus not simply descriptive but symptomatic. What appears as conceptual or formal impasse may instead reflect a deeper performative logic, one in which identity and impersonality, particularity and type, generate tensions that do not resolve but continuously reintroduce themselves in altered forms. These contradictions recur not necessarily as stasis but as a formal engine of performative force.

Sally Banes divides the work by mapping abstraction onto domination: the chorus becomes an emblem of coercive collectivity, and impersonality is treated as a loss of subjectivity. Garafola offers a counter-reading that divides authorship: she casts Nijinska's choreography as a feminist counterforce to Stravinsky's primitivist score, separating the ballet into discrete aesthetic domains. Those readings encode an interpretive tendency to divide *Les Noces* into opposing forces: music and movement, feminist critique and primitivist spectacle, impersonality and agency. Whether they oppose abstraction to oppression (Garafola) or reduce abstraction to domination (Banes), both approaches reinforce a critical logic that the work itself persistently disrupts. Even Taruskin, who resists the collage-reading of *Les Noces* and famously likens its structure to Joyce's *Ulysses*, maintains a division between the impersonal and the procreative. He proposes a "dual significance" in which ritual corresponds to impersonality and procreation to identifiable character, and he emphasizes that the bride and groom "retain the given name and patronymics by which they are introduced on their first appearance in the text." This textual evidence, for him, preserves a stable thread of individuation. His schema echoes Boris Asafiev's earlier gendered categories—threnodial and procreative—which Stravinsky himself rejected. Yet Taruskin's model, like that of Banes and Garafola, reinstates a critical

structure built on oppositional binaries: impersonality and identification, collectivity and individuality, abstraction and human expression.

These recurring divisions are not just formal or thematic; they rehearse broader conditions of intelligibility. The logic by which certain bodies or gestures become recognizable as expressive, reflects the performative force of normativity. While much of performance theory has examined how individual agency is structured by social scripts, *Les Noces* suggests a more complex staging in which anonymity, impersonality, and repetition produce aesthetic forms that do not merely reflect norms but actively redistribute their force. This is the register in which performativity enters my reading, as a collective and contingent field in which typification is enacted, suspended, or displaced.

My own reading, by contrast, proposes that *Les Noces* does not suffer from internal fracture, nor is it held together by synthesis. Rather, it performs a dialectical contradiction in which impersonality and impersonation, anonymity and typification, abstraction and embodiment, are not thematic opposites but structural reciprocals. The work stages, not a stable opposition between individual and collective, but the instability of that very distinction. What appears as incoherence or division between character and chorus, ritual and individuality becomes the formal method by which *Les Noces* produces its performative power. The ballet does not overcome these contradictions; it performs them, and in doing so, allows anonymity to emerge as a site not of erasure but of aesthetic and political potential. This dynamic, in which contradiction is not resolved but staged as a structural logic, reaches its fullest articulation in the ballet's final tableau.

1.2

The realistic set of the Ballets Russes's 1911 ballet *Le Spectre de la Rose*, choreographed by Michel Fokine, depicted the interior of a young girl's bourgeois home, furnished in an 1830s Biedermeier style of light blues and greys. Her dress was white, ethereal, and modest. As the music played softly, the young girl returned home from a ball carrying a rose. She held the rose to her nose, inhaling its scent, and recollected her evening of dancing. Settling into a comfortable chair, she fell asleep, letting the rose slip from her fingers. No sooner did the rose fall than Nijinsky soared through the window in a head-to-toe red-pink body stocking sown over with flowers. Flowers covered his headdress as well. The shock of color and movement corresponded to the abrupt shift in the music, which suddenly moved into a fast waltz. Nijinsky's entrance was intrusive in its electric force, breaking the sanctuary of muted tones and seemingly virginal dreams. The choreography cannot be known for certain. As Fokine wrote, it was "almost an improvisation." The young girl, half-dreaming, danced with the spectre, who rarely placed his hands on her waist. Instead, he supported her under the arms, enabling her to glide as if he were not there at all. She seemed to conjure his presence in her boudoir through her own reverie. At one juncture she appeared to wake up, yet the dance continued. Finally, she returned to her chair, asleep, and with a flying leap the spectre jeté out the window.

While *Rite of Spring* opened to riotous receptions in 1913, *Le Spectre* was a runaway success that elevated Nijinsky to cultural-icon status. His name became permanently wedded to the role, and he performed it incessantly until his retirement. Subsequent performances by other dancers have often been dismissed as a light-hearted crowd pleaser of a bygone era. Yet that view is problematic, not least because the ballet has rarely enjoyed the same acclaim since 1917, when Nijinsky left the stage. That is, it cannot be a crowd-pleaser because it has not pleased the

crowds. As Hanna Järvinen observes, “*Le Spectre de la Rose* depended so wholly on the artistry of the original stars (Nijinsky and Karsavina) and the original production values that no one since has been able to present them without appearing ridiculous” (Järvinen 4). Among the interrelated reasons for its precarious legacy is the spectre’s (and Nijinsky’s) sexually charged ambiguity. “He seemed,” as Garafola contends, “a living incarnation of the third sex,” both fully masculine and curiously feminine, an androgynous magnetism that nearly every description of the ballet has noted (Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes* 33).

Beyond this sexual enigmatics, the leap through and back out of the window remains pivotal. No leap has been more discussed or more enduringly mythologized. For over a century, it has epitomized a pinnacle of ballet virtuosity, even though Nijinsky used similarly dramatic leaps in many roles. Something about this moment and this exit, its “impossibility,” arrested audiences. Viewing images of the set in the wake of Nijinsky’s performance means staring impatiently into the dark void beyond the window, which acts, as Victor Hugo might say, “as a species of silent character.” From that darkness, Nijinsky emerged, laying bare the 1830s veneer and subverting the very conventions of realist staging. His entrance collapsed the representational structure underpinning the ballet. If representational art rests on the absence of the thing it evokes, *Le Spectre* made the absent suddenly palpable: realism was undone, illusion became concrete, and the fantastic material. The final jeté through the window was seared into collective memory because it crystallized that collapse; the window stood for a threshold between two perceptual orders. Nijinsky’s leap condensed the drift from one register to another.

The space outside the window thereby conjured something more than narrative scenery. It offered a perplexing horizon of possibility, a fleeting zone of intensified potential that exceeded the bourgeois interior. Rather than serve merely as a departure point, that void

introduced an ephemeral yet potent promise: the spectre's appearance from beyond the frame expanded the girl's dream into a realm not wholly governed by social decorum. In José Esteban Muñoz's terms, the intrusion of a utopian impulse arrived only to vanish, leaving an unresolvable trace that hovered in the gap between waking life and nocturnal fantasy. The leap back through the window thus underscored a force of longing that could not be contained by the demure confines of the onstage boudoir, intimating a deeper reservoir of desire and imaginative freedom. By framing the window as a portal rather than a mere boundary, *Le Spectre* located its most vital energies in the tension between here and elsewhere, vigilance and reverie, representational propriety and the spectacular eruption of the not-yet.

Les Noces inverts the dramaturgical arc of *Le Spectre de la Rose*, where we begin in a realist domestic interior that quickly cedes to the spectre's fantastic incursion. In Fokine's earlier work, audiences remain within Romantic-era realism even after the rose spirit vaults back through the window, preserving an illusory realm that can be revisited and indulged. Nijinska's ballet, by contrast, begins on the far side of that dividing line: the "abstraction" of the wedding ritual functions as a reality in its own right, and any prospective escape leads not outward toward realism but deeper into an overtly artificial fiction. When the bride and groom vanish into the painted marriage chamber, the scenario forfeits the reality of abstraction for the claustrophobic fantasy of a patriarchal interior. If Spectre's dream logic permitted a return to everyday consciousness, *Les Noces* closes off that possibility, binding spectators to a collective whose dance continues without resolution or outside witness. The point is not that agency is stripped from the individual, but that such agency was always a fantasy. Unlike in *Le Sacre*, where Adorno suggests that viewers identify with the murderous collective, *Les Noces* draws the audience into a collectivity from which they cannot safely distinguish themselves.

The bride and groom's disappearance shifts our attention from the constructed event of the wedding to the transformed presence of the villagers. If Banes contends that "the power and the inexorable movement of the community has obliterated—literally, upstaged—the individuality of the bride and groom," I would counter that the marriage is revealed to be a backdrop for the emergence of a different structure of performance (Banes 115). The bride's forced departure does not exhaust the ballet's performative force; it reorients that force toward the villagers, whose presence begins to exceed the narrative frame. As the bride and groom vanish into the illusionistic interior, the curtain closes behind the villagers rather than in front of them. This subtle inversion collapses the space of representation and positions the peasant chorus in a liminal zone more akin to the Greek orchestra: a space of mediation between fiction and reality, stage and audience. What remains is not simply a "primitive" mass, but a collective presence that begins to operate like what Bonnie Honig calls the "charging bull"—an unpredictable, non-sovereign force that resists containment in narrative or social form. Their continued presence no longer confirms their typification as peasants. It transforms their anonymity into a shared performative structure, one that implicates the spectator by proximity rather than empathic identification. The audience, instead of watching from afar, is unnamed into the ongoing ritual along with the now anonymous chorus, no longer "peasants:" the contingent, historically located event of the performance. The final tableau stages an unsanctioned collective performative that aligns the spectator with an anonymous community no longer bound to named roles.

The painted bedroom, unlike the abstract wedding ritual that precedes it, reactivates the fantasy of unveiling the "real" peasant subject, of glimpsing the erotic or affective truth behind choreographic typification. Yet as Cheng shows in her analysis of racialized performance, this

desire to penetrate anonymity is not external to objectification, it is what sustains it. The illusionist interior becomes the condensation of an epistemic fantasy: the wish to peel away impersonality and access a raw, gendered or cultural essence. *Les Noces* refuses this logic. It offers no revelation through typification, only the aesthetic and political force of the collective's impersonality. The villagers' anonymity does not invite decoding but disorients the very impulse to recognize or retrieve the individual. By suspending the epistemic function of the type, *Les Noces* displaces meaning with force. It stages a mode of aesthetic experience grounded not in knowledge but in interruption, an embodied anonymity that resists erotic closure and defers ethnographic legibility to an anonymous, unenclosed inclusion.

This dynamic suggests that the real performative power unfolds not in the bride and groom's apparently triumphant "I do," but among those who remain outside the sanctioned conjugal enclosure. Rather than a contained and celebratory finale, *Les Noces* closes on a collective whose anonymous ritual refuses a neat exit into fantasy. One might argue that this collective, much like Honig's bull, reveals a "free waywardness" that neither the dramaturgy of the ballet nor the audience's expectations can fully tame. By displacing the central couple into a painted bedroom, where any realism they embody only heightens the artifice, the ballet highlights the villagers' enduring presence as the site of a more open-ended enactment. In effect, the peasants complete a different kind of "wedding," one that weds the spectators themselves to the continuing ritual. They do so by blurring the boundary between stage and auditorium, thereby performing a speech act that neither announces its authority in the manner of "I do" nor entirely dissolves into abstraction. Instead, like a charging bull, they gather watchers into a ceremony whose racial, cultural, and corporeal underpinnings invite a deeper reckoning with how collective rites can both unite and unsettle.

If the anonymity of impersonality enabled the displacement of agency from named individuals to ritualized types, it also permitted the villagers, initially confined to their role as generic representatives of communal sanction, to enact a second, distinct anonymity. By the work's final moments, the typified collective, the "peasants" composed of the bride and groom's respective wedding parties and townspeople, which appeared to simply create the context for the speech act, produces its own kind of performative effect. The ballet thus seems to engender "two identical events," to borrow analytic philosopher John Searle's phrase, one in which the bodies and voices are firmly in character, and another in which they are not.⁴⁷ This "other scene" of the

⁴⁷ For Searle, the difference between the two separate events is that one is produced intentionally and the other unintentionally. He arrives at this suggestion through a reading of Oedipus, a name which, perhaps more than any other, is defined by the unintentionality of his actions. In the "intentional" event, Oedipus simply marries Jocasta; in the "unintentional" event, he tragically marries his mother (Searle 101). Interestingly, even as he simultaneously performs two actions that result in two separate events, "Oedipus" acts under the same name and identity. In other words, Searle maintains Oedipus as a single, continuous person despite the divergence in meaning. Yet from the other side of the event, from Jocasta's perspective, this continuity no longer holds. When Oedipus marries "his mother," she is no longer "Jocasta" but an anonymous maternal figure. Searle could, of course, clarify Jocasta's position as anonymous mother or other by referring to her point of view, as he does in his Jones/Sally thought experiment (Searle 66–69). The problem, though, is that Jocasta's perspective would reverse the distribution of knowledge: her two events would render a continuous "Jocasta" and an anonymous "son" whom she did not intend to marry. The epistemological mechanism that creates Searle's anonymous object is quite familiar: whenever you do not know a person, they are anonymous. If the unknown aspect defines your relationship to them, such as a particular woman being your mother, then the name you previously used to describe that person is nullified. In other words, if we frame anonymity simply as a question of knowledge, we risk containing its effects within the logic of the known and unknown.

Because Searle relegates the anonymous to the object, the epistemic void of the nullified name—Jocasta—has no bearing on the actor's, that is, Oedipus's, subjectivity. But while Searle focuses on the intentional and unintentional distinction, the dispersion of named subject and anonymous object enters his example and begins to structure the event. Perhaps unintentionally, subjectivity in Searle's example becomes exclusively tethered to a name. In this framework, there can be no question of an anonymous performance, nor the performance of an anonymous object. Ironically, considering the name he has chosen, the basic Freudian problematic of the unconscious has no place in Searle's model of intentionality. As we know, the potential of intention always hides within the unintentional. For Freud, it is not the object but the subject that becomes duplicitous through the unintentional: the Freudian subject is continually becoming anonymous, while the object is becoming nominated. Freudian analysis awakens the subject not by internal self-recognition but by recognizing the wished-for objects and hidden identifications that populate it. The curse of Oedipus is, for Freud, a childhood wish common to all boys. The unintentionality of the act is incidental compared to the unconscious structure that makes the act possible.

Even accepting Searle's anonymous object, the duplicity of that object opens the possibility of a kind of Searlean Oedipus Complex, one in which the event produced by an intentional action is continually shadowed by the unintentional event it also performs. Returning Searle's thought experiment to Stravinsky's terms, the duplicitous object is both impersonal and impersonated. Oedipus cannot marry the impersonal mother unless she is impersonated by Jocasta.

Martha Graham's 1947 ballet *Night Journey* offers a striking inversion of this problem, staging the myth from Jocasta's perspective. In Graham's version, Jocasta is not merely the object of Oedipus's mistake but a figure

performative unfolds in and through the collective and exceeds the represented wedding: it is not a representation of a marriage but a performative field where the assembled voices and bodies become the event. In Searle's terms, one might say that the absent crowning leaves the nuptial event as "propositional content" without explicit illocutionary force, ultimately revealing, I argue, how that content itself, embodied collectively, can generate an alternative performative force.⁴⁸

In other words, this final scene ultimately adds a new performative dimension to Austin's formula: this final scene generates, through its dramaturgical and performative structures, a second, "wayward" performative that occurs through a second form of anonymity.⁴⁹ While initially the villagers appear only as "peasants," fulfilling their impersonal, generic role within the wedding ritual, their lingering presence onstage after the protagonists' exit exceeds the

of erotic memory and maternal anguish, whose interiority refuses to be reduced to her misnaming. In Isadora Duncan's duet version of Oedipus, there was no Jocasta at all: her brother was Oedipus and she was the Chorus.

⁴⁸ If, following Searle, the "propositional content" of a marriage consists of a representational structure that can be isolated from the illocutionary force by which the marriage is performatively enacted, then *Les Noces* presents a scenario in which the propositional content remains explicitly articulated but the corresponding illocutionary act (the authoritative pronouncement, "I now pronounce you married") is conspicuously withheld. By staging the marriage as a ritual without this decisive act of officiation, the ballet foregrounds propositional content as something potentially capable of generating its own performative efficacy. The peasants, initially appearing as context for this suspended pronouncement, collectively mobilize and enact a performative force, thereby actualizing a performance outside the authority of the marriage ceremony itself. Thus, reversing Searle's prioritization of force over content, *Les Noces* demonstrates how propositional content, represented in communal forms rather than individualized speech, can itself exert performative force, ushering in an anonymous enactment beyond the authority of the named officiant or even the power inhered inscribed in its sanctioned context.

⁴⁹ Austin jokingly excludes horses from the category of "appropriate" performers, using them to illustrate how certain beings are not proper subjects of performative speech. A horse cannot say "I do," nor can one be appointed to office (Austin 34–35). At first glance, this is a comical limit case, but it reveals how performativity depends on a tightly guarded boundary between those who can act within normative frameworks and those who cannot. In this context, Austin's passing reference to Euripides' *Hippolytus* becomes especially suggestive. The hero's line, "my tongue swore, but my mind/heart (φρήν) did not," stages the very disjunction between outward act and inner intention that Austin seeks to regulate. Yet Hippolytus, unlike Austin's examples, does not simply misfire. He is dragged to death by the horses he cannot command. The death enacts what his name already prophesies, "the one undone by horses," signaling a return of the very force that always marked him as other. As Phaedra exclaims, he is "the son of the horse-loving Amazon;" his identity is already shaped by the excess of the animal and the foreign (Euripides 581). His Amazonian lineage situates him at the edge of Athenian normativity, racially and culturally other, the product of a union with a feminized warrior "outside" the polis. His death thus draws together several motifs: the misalignment of word and will, the exclusion of the racialized or feminized subject from full agency, and the violent return of bodily force where normative speech no longer applies.

concept of “peasant,” a term that served to objectify and contain them by identifying them as a group. In other words, they are no longer fully captured by the conceptual framework imposed upon them. These figures, no longer confined by the representational framework that rendered them “peasants,” become what Adorno theorizes as a remainder, a “non-identical” excess of objects irreducible to the categories or names that define them.

Adorno explicitly aligns this dialectical process of identification and excess with social exchange and objectification: “The subjective preconception of the material production process in society—basically different from its theoretical constitution—is the unresolved part, the part unreconciled with the subjects” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 10). Here, Adorno suggests that social life, structured by processes such as economic exchange and conceptual categorization, resists total reconciliation and explanation through existing systems. This non-identical remainder, moreover, is not merely conceptual or aesthetic; following Adorno, it is precisely aligned with “use value,” the qualitative particularity of objects that remains irreducible to exchange and exceeds conceptual abstraction: “the use value...is not exhausted in barter between producer and consumer” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 11). In other words, while economic and conceptual exchange try to make different things appear equivalent, Adorno insists that something qualitatively and materially unique always remains beyond their grasp.

This second anonymity which emerges at the end of *Les Noces*, the anonymity that exceeds conceptual and material identification, reveals an unexpected force of impersonality, what Fred Moten might call, thinking around Adorno, the “resistance of the object,” capable of unsettling the structures that attempt to capture or confine it.⁵⁰ In my reading of *Les Noces*,

⁵⁰ In his seminal work *In the Break*, Moten engages Adorno's negative dialectics overtly in a footnote via Asha Varadharajan by affirming Adorno's insistence that the resistant object refuses conceptual subsumption by the subject's identity-forming processes. Yet, Moten diverges critically by challenging Varadharajan's proposal to “disentangle” epistemology from the violence of appropriation; instead, he maintains that emancipatory critique is

following Adorno, anonymity emerges dialectically: the conceptual processes that reduce subjects to abstract categories simultaneously yield a surplus anonymity, a remainder whose refusal of identity marks a critical opening. “Dialectics,” as Adorno succinctly states, is thus “the consistent sense of nonidentity” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 5).

This unexpected anonymity in *Les Noces*, emerging precisely at the imbrication of representation and ritual enactment, thus becomes crucial to my larger argument about performativity and the instability of identity within representational practices. Adorno’s assertion that “the test of the turn to nonidentity is its *performance*” implies that the dialectical critique of identity cannot remain purely conceptual but must actively enact its recognition of the inadequacy of conceptual abstractions (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 154)(emphasis added). In my own analysis of *Les Noces*, I deliberately mobilize this polysemy of “performance” to align Adorno’s materialist insistence on concrete enactment with the ballet’s embodied refusal to fully resolve its representational contradictions. The emergent, anonymous collective at the ballet’s conclusion thus performs the very contradiction of anonymity itself: these figures resist conceptual naming precisely because their anonymity marks the irreducible remainder that exceeds the representational frameworks intended to capture and define them. Their irreducibility cannot be named, it can only be performed. In other words, what this chapter hopes to show is that the performance which tests nonidentity is a necessarily anonymous performance.

produced precisely through the entanglement of violence, improvisation, and performance (Moten 256). Unlike Adorno’s negative which insists on the primacy of the object as conceptual remainder, Moten emphasizes a generative performativity in Blackness: “an active force articulated through “the affirmative force of ruthless negation, the out and rooted critical lyricism of screams, prayers, curses, gestures, steps (to and away)” (Moten 255). My reading of *Les Noces* approaches Moten’s own “long, frenzied tumult of a nonexclusionary essay” insofar as it locates performative anonymity as actively generative of new social forms and collective identities through embodied enactment. This shared insistence on performance as the material realization of critique and on anonymity as a “nonexclusionary,” irreducibly performative force draws my reading of Adorno and *Les Noces* towards Moten.

Chapter 2: Anonymity of Interpellation: *The Blind* (1890) and *Dr. Caligari* (1920)

Proposing something of a counter to John Searle's "primitive" tribe in which everyone and everything bears a unique name, the eponymous protagonists in Maurice Maeterlinck's atmospheric one-act drama, *The Blind*, written in 1890, are all anonymous. No proper names appear in the text at all, and the 12 blind characters are only individuated within the bounds of their collective name, "the Blind." The roles are named in relation to their blindness, and the blind use descriptors to refer to one another.⁵¹ For Maeterlinck, this namelessness participates in a broader strategy to erase "character," the "exterior identifying sign" that particularizes and restricts its "humanity" (Maeterlinck, *A Maeterlinck Reader* 315). In place of the named character, he posits an anonymous figure untethered from identity: the "Stranger," or a "third character," through whom the play moves beyond the individual and toward a universal

Then, in 2008, for the first time in its performance history, Jack McNamara's production of *The Blind* at the off-West End's Arcola Theatre featured a cast of all blind and visually impaired performers. By literalizing the metaphor of blindness, the production radically realigned the political valence of the blind characters as a social group. As a review of the production in *The Guardian* put it, "Maeterlinck's intention in creating his unseeing protagonists was to point up the blindness of the audience" (Gardner). For the reviewer, however, the literal blindness of "the blind" prevented the play from incorporating the audience as part of that group. When she writes, "It is we who are stumbling around in the dark," she means an audience, a

⁵¹ In the *dramatis personae*, speech prefixes, and stage directions, their names appear either as descriptive attributes in relation to their blindness (The Oldest Blind Woman, A Young Blind Woman, etc.), or by an assigned number (The Fifth Blind Man, The Sixth Blind Man, etc.). The only character otherwise distinguished is The Blind Mad Woman, who is not assigned any spoken lines and, like Jane in *Caligari*, may be a "woman in white."

“we,” that is definitively separate from the blind performers. In Maeterlinck’s terms, the blind no longer functioned as a symbol of the human and instead became a literal representation of the visually impaired as a social group. A figure that once appeared to signify a universal condition now reappeared as a marked identity, and with it, the terms of that universality shifted. For Maeterlinck, the blind characters’ pertinence to a group as a social category does not stand between the particular and the universal, the individual character and all humanity. And yet, McNamara’s production reveals that there was in fact an unacknowledged, material continuity between the audience and the performers which enabled that passage to “the human:” the sightedness of both. Where for Maeterlinck the non-individuated blind characters functioned as a symbol of humanity, here, the very metaphor which previously facilitated the passage to the universal suddenly obstructed it.

Further, we are ever more aware of how the hegemonic imposition of identities constructs, debilitates, and potentially violates the subject. As Judith Butler points out in their seminal *The Psychic Life of Power*, when one is hailed by a social category, “To be hailed as a ‘woman’ or ‘Jew’ or ‘queer’ or ‘Black’... may be heard or interpreted as an affirmation or an insult, depending on the context in which the hailing occurs” (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 96). The power of naming, then, does not lie in the term alone but in the conditions under which it circulates and the subject positions it installs. Even when one appears to answer the call of a name, that answer may register a form of loss. “What is at stake,” Butler continues, “is whether the temporary totalization performed by the name is politically enabling or paralyzing” (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 96). The risk, however, is not simply that the name imposes a false or reductive identity, but that the subject depends on it. As Butler goes on to assert, “called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have a certain inevitable attachment to

my existence... I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially” (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 104). Naming is not just a mechanism of power; it is a condition of legibility, and one that passionately binds the subject to the very discourse that calls them into being.

On a surface level, Maeterlinck’s turn to the group name “the Blind” appears to share with Butler a suspicion of the individuating force of proper names. But as Butler shows, even the name of a social group can produce a totalizing frame that binds the subject to injury. In McNamara’s production, that risk becomes visible. Casting blind performers in the roles of “the blind” transforms what once signaled a passage to the universal into a specification of identity. The name no longer gestures toward “the human,” but marks a difference that cannot be disavowed. What had previously enabled identification between stage and audience now reconfigures that relation as separation. The figure of the blind only appeared universal when performed through a point of difference, when sighted actors stood in for the category. McNamara’s production reveals that what seemed abstract was sustained by an unacknowledged material continuity. Once that continuity breaks, the name “blind” no longer functions metaphorically as the blindness of the audience; it acts metonymically, reimposing a subject tethered to social location. In Butler’s terms, the name both interrupts broader attachment and sustains the subject in its specificity. What McNamara’s production discloses, however, is that this attachment was already active. Even when the name seemed to float, it remained tethered to material relation. The subject was not freed by anonymity but formed within it. In Butler’s configuration, naming is the very condition of social being and leaves no room for anonymous formation. In Maeterlinck, by contrast, anonymity does not merely abstract toward universality.

It is constructed through the representation of the other. The chorus, as Maeterlinck stages it, signals a structure of relation that both precedes and exceeds the name.

Anonymity, then, is not a negation of personhood but a mode of performative composition. It emerges through the contingent alignment of bodies, scenes, and speech, and binds the spectator not through identity but through shared participation in a choral relation. In this sense, anonymity enables a different mode of collective subjectivization, one that reorganizes the conditions under which attachment becomes possible.

If, for Butler, “attachment” names the psychic and political tethering of the subject to the terms by which it becomes recognizable, this chapter asks how that attachment might operate through anonymity rather than identity. Where the character hails the spectator through narrative identification, the chorus binds the spectator to the scene as part of a plural formation. This attachment emerges not through recognition, but through contiguity. It does not assign a name; it locates a position. The chorus, I suggest, produces a form of social being sustained not by individual coherence, but by the impersonal convergence of performer and spectator within a shared structure.

This chapter follows that convergence across two works: Maeterlinck’s *The Blind* and Robert Wiene’s German Expressionist film *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920). In their very different genres and registers, they do this by exploring, and ultimately changing, a conception of the anonymous, one that is best understood as the anonymity of the chorus. In each case, an anonymous figure begins to mediate between performer and spectator—not through direct address or symbolic abstraction, but through a visual and choreographic ambiguity that unsettles the singular specificity of character and invites a choral plurality. Cesare, the somnambulist in *Caligari*, is unmistakably a character: named, plotted, psychologized. And yet, as Siegfried

Kracauer once wrote, he is also “the common man who, under the pressure of compulsory military service, is drilled to kill and to be killed” (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 65). The scale of that assertion sits oddly beside Cesare’s specific narrative role, but it captures something that the film does not name directly: a figure whose presence exceeds itself. He appears as one, but not alone. He is addressed to the viewer, but not as a character to be known. In that excess, the question of the chorus begins to reemerge.

Unlike the dancing chorus that, as I argue in Chapter 1, emerges at the end of *Les Noces* through a group, choreographic formation, this chapter begins to locate the chorus in more diffuse figures, including those that do not initially appear plural at all. The chorus, here, is not an ontologically stable group who sing, dance, narrate, or witness. It is dynamic and relational, produced when a performing body stands not only for itself but in place of a group. Singing, dancing, narrating, and witnessing may each contribute to this process, but none alone constitutes it. Whether enacted by one or many, the chorus operates when the singular gives way to a structure of plurality. Cesare’s movement across the Expressionist set, for example, does not eliminate his individuality, but displaces it into the visual and spatial logic of the frame. And yet, when he appears onscreen, moving in slow arcs that echo the jagged contours of the Expressionist set, his body does not register as singular. His motion blends with the geometry of the background; his presence extends beyond his frame. In such moments, the chorus expands beyond itself: an indefinite, anonymous plurality that implicates the audience not through character identification but through positional contiguity.

If Cesare introduces the chorus as a question of “figuration,” a point I go on to develop through Paul de Mann as a performed mediation of truth’s dependence on rhetoric, both *The Blind* and *Caligari* develop that question through their treatment of bodies and background.

More than merely providing a setting for the unfolding of a plot, the landscapes of *The Blind* and *Caligari* are alive and active. Each has already been critically highlighted, albeit in very different ways. Elinor Fuchs argues that *The Blind* is the first example of what Gertrude Stein calls a “landscape play,” where the place itself conveys more meaning than the individual characters. For Stein, as for Fuchs, the landscape play ushers in a new, democratic spectatorial practice, in which the audience chooses where to look and why. *Caligari*, meanwhile, famously features a brashly Expressionist set, sparking fierce debate over the tension between the Modernist aesthetic of the set and the artistic direction as a whole. While the acting style is generally considered naturalistic, two characters stand out. As Siegfried Kracauer puts it, Dr. Caligari appears as if created by the same “draftsman’s imagination” as the set, and Cesare moves as if “exuded” by the walls around him (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 69). This two-fold movement of the body entering the scene as if drawn from it, and the space responding as if animated by the body, complicates a rigid category of character. Cesare’s gestures no longer belong only to him; they appear routed through the set, and what seemed a body now begins to appear as a relation between body and place.⁵²

⁵² The Greek *choros* (χορός) names both the chorus and the place of dancing, linking performer and ground in a metonymic relation. This double signification of both the dancing body and the space it occupies does not merely conflate subject and setting but establishes a conceptual structure in which presence and place are produced in contiguity. In the context of tragedy, *choros* refers not only to the chorus as a performing group, but also to the *orchestra*, the spatial middle between stage and audience, fiction and reality. This middle, both literal and structural, tends to disappear under the pressure of binary logics: between audience and performer, character and scene, interior and exterior. When this spatial and conceptual middle is effaced, the chorus risks being misrecognized as a discrete body rather than as the form that mediates bodies and space. Renaud Gagné and Marianne Govers Hopman have proposed the term “choral mediation” to describe this recursive function, in which the chorus suspends categorical oppositions and constructs provisional linkages across genre, rhythm, movement, voice, and theatrical architecture (Gagné et al.). The genealogy of *choros* remains vexed; as Luigi Arata notes, citing Philoxenus, the original usage appears to designate place before it names the group. The ambiguity is already present in Homer: in the *Iliad* (18.590–607), the *choros* on Achilles’ shield refers at once to the site of performance and to the dancing figures who animate it (Arata). This conflation, or contiguity, lays the groundwork for the metonymic logic I pursue throughout this chapter, in which the chorus emerges not as a stable collectivity, but as a mode of relation between bodies and the spaces they animate. On this point, *choros* resonates suggestively with the etymologically unrelated but structurally adjacent term *khōra* (χώρα), as reworked by Plato, Derrida, and others.

In this chapter, I argue that the chorus does not only represent a group but actively produces a relation between performers and audience. Building on Brecht's formal innovations and Althusser's theory of interpellation, I show how chorality operates less as a symbolic figure of collectivity than as a material structure of address. In the works I analyze—Maeterlinck's *The Blind* and Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*—that address is not tied to identification or recognition. Instead, it functions through anonymity, spatial alignment, and perceptual displacement. The chorus does not name the audience or mirror it. It installs a position from which the audience participates without becoming visible to itself. This framework allows us to rethink interpellation not as a psychological event, nor as the formation of a stable identity, but as a shifting, impersonal choreography that links bodies, roles, and settings across theatrical and cinematic scenes. What emerges is a “materialist theory of the chorus,” one in which ideology appears not as a set of messages or meanings, but as a structure of placement and displacement: of being addressed, anonymously, as “you.”

It is in this configuration that the chorus takes on another form and to follow its implications for spectatorship requires a shift in terms. In this latter step, I both build on and depart from Fuch's interpretation of Stein's landscape play as engendering a “detached” but not “alienated” form of viewing. What emerges here is not simply detachment, but a different kind of relational force. I propose that the chorus interpellates.

My use of interpellation to describe how the chorus produces the spectator follows from this question of attachment. The term itself will arrive slightly out of order. I take my cue not from Althusser's canonical definition of interpellation in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” but from an earlier moment in which its structure begins to form—what Althusser might call a “silent term”—in his essay on theater. As Étienne Balibar notes, this essay, “The

‘Piccolo Teatro’: Bertolazzi and Brecht,” unexpectedly serves as the “geometrical and theoretical center” of *For Marx* (Balibar, “Althusser’s Dramaturgy” 3). Althusser never names the chorus, but what he describes is a distinctly choral structure: a scene in which the spectator is produced not through identification with an individual character, but through spatial and temporal relations.

Althusser begins his essay by analyzing Giorgio Strehler’s Brechtian staging of Bertolazzi’s *El nost Milan*, then turns to the ideological implications of Brechtian form. In his account, the production is organized around a stark temporal division. One temporality, described as “empty time,” is occupied by large groups of thirty to forty people: “anonymous and interchangeable beings” whose lives unfold across long passages in which “nothing resembling History can happen” (Althusser, *For Marx* 135–36). This is “Milan from below” (Althusser, *For Marx* 132). The second temporality, “dramatic time,” or the “full time” of tragedy, erupts briefly at the end of each act, introducing named characters and a series of melodramatic events: seduction, theft, murder, abandonment. Althusser argues that the separation between these temporalities does not serve the melodrama but opens it to critique. The slow, repetitive time of the crowd becomes what he calls their “existence,” a mode of life “grounded in” or “determined by the material conditions of class *economic exploitation*,” but in this case that do not register within the dramatic plot (Althusser, *Reproduction* 127). Dramatic time appears legible only in contrast to this existence, which conditions and exposes its ideological function. The theatrical structure does not reduce the crowd to atmosphere; rather, it foregrounds the contradiction of a historical class locked in an ahistorical temporality. These figures do not stand for themselves, nor for others, but as a relation. In this structure, the chorus begins to blend with the background.

Althusser describes the staging of the three acts as a progression. In the first, set among the booths and attractions of a fair, the crowd's energy is loose enough that something might still happen. In the second, which takes place in a cafeteria for the poor (a kind of Brechtian counterimage to Zavattini and De Sica's *Umberto D.*), expectation dissipates. The lumpenproletarian crowd, not working by day, slowly eats. They speak in no fixed direction, disregard theatrical blocking, and seem suspended in time. Althusser remarks: "eating, pausing in their meal, eating again. At these times, the gestures themselves reveal all their meaning" (Althusser, *For Marx* 136–37). His attention is drawn to the performers' bodies, especially their relation to space: spoons arrested mid-air, weight distributed across walls and tables. "I can think of no comparable representation in spatial structure, in the distribution of men and places," he writes (Althusser, *For Marx* 137). When the diners finally exit, Althusser describes a perceptual shift: they "had taken the whole décor with them... the very space of walls and tables, the logic and meaning of these locations" seemed to vanish. The third act unfolds in a women's shelter, where older women sit, speak, or remain silent. Like a chorus, they "blend with the walls" (*incorporées au mur*) (Althusser, *For Marx* 132), until eventually "the old women are part of the walls" (*les vieilles femmes font partie des murs*) (Althusser, *For Marx* 135). Althusser never uses the word "chorus," but his language of incorporation, absorption, spatial distribution describes a structural formation that resists familiar terms of attachment. This is the moment at which the ideological function of the chorus becomes legible: not as representation, but as organization, as a spatial logic. The chorus names the relation between body and background through which spectators are drawn into a collective (ideological) relation.

It is this mode of choral attachment, already operative in the staging of Bertolazzi's crowd, that motivates Althusser's dissatisfaction with the familiar opposition between

identification and alienation. Brecht's stated aim was to disrupt the traditional relationship between performer and audience by breaking the logic of narrative empathy. He defines identification as a process in which the actor "persuades" the spectator "to identify himself with him (the actor)" and "uses every energy to convert himself as completely as possible into a different type, that of the character in question" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 93). This psychological process of substitution, which maps actor to character and character to spectator, is countered by *Verfremdung*, a principle of estrangement that encourages self-observation and critical detachment. In a 1936 essay, likely the first use of the term, Brecht explains that "the performer's self-observation... prevents the spectators from losing themselves completely in the character, that is, to the point of giving up their own identity, and lends a splendid distance to the events" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 92–93). This is the framework that Benjamin would later describe as "interruptions."⁵³ For Brecht, these effects were intended to reveal the material and

⁵³ Walter Benjamin famously treats interruption as the central aesthetic principle of Brecht's epic theater. In his 1939 essay "What Is Epic Theater?" he writes that "instead of identifying with the protagonist, the audience should learn to feel astonished at the circumstances under which he functions" (Benjamin 304). The goal of interruption, in this account, is to break the flow of narrative identification and to render social conditions newly visible. Benjamin praises Brecht for displacing "action" with "representation" (*Darstellung*), not in the naturalist sense of reproduction, but as a method for discovering or defamiliarizing situations (Benjamin 304). Interruption becomes the means by which gestures are quoted, scenes rendered strange, and the spectator reoriented from emotional absorption to critical observation.

But Benjamin's emphasis on interruption also limits Brecht's theoretical reach. What he does not fully register is Brecht's concurrent effort to reconfigure the relation between spectator and performer; not to sever it, but to reshape it. Even in Benjamin's own paradigmatic example, the interruption is enacted by a figure he calls "the stranger," whose sudden appearance arrests the unfolding domestic scene. The stranger's effectiveness lies in his anonymity. Yet for Benjamin, this figure remains legible within the terms of narrative; the stranger interrupts the scene as a character. What is less remarked upon is that Brecht's *gestus* already strains against this narrative frame. As I note in Chapter 1, the gestic act is not simply an expressive gesture, but a citation of social position: someone else who could be anyone else. Its anonymity is not narrative but structural: it exceeds characterization and marks the body as socially intelligible through its repeatability. This, I argue, is where Brecht presses further than Benjamin is willing to follow.

Brecht's goal is not merely to interrupt identification but to establish a different form of attachment, one that is collective, procedural, and contingent. The audience is not alienated from the scene but repositioned within it and in relation to "action." To think the politics of such a shift requires attending not only to the interruption of narrative, but to the anonymous relations through which attachment becomes possible. In this sense, the figure of the chorus helps clarify what Benjamin glimpses but does not fully theorize: that spectatorship is not simply dislocated through interruption, but composed through shared, anonymous structures of social being.

historical conditions that underlie theatrical representation and, through that exposure, open the possibility of political recognition beyond the scene. Althusser, however, insists that the necessary distance must be structurally produced within the play, “in the dynamic of its internal structure” (Althusser, *For Marx* 147).

His turn to structure reorganizes the relationship between *Verfremdung* and identification in their positioning of the spectator. What emerges instead is a more elusive, more relational mechanism. The spectator in Brecht’s theater is not one of purely detached judgment or distanced observation: the spectator “has no claim to this absolute consciousness of self which the play cannot tolerate” (Althusser, *For Marx* 148). Deeply embedded within the ideological fabric of the play, he stands as “the brother of the characters, caught in the spontaneous myths of ideology, in its illusions and privileged forms, as much as they are” (Althusser, *For Marx* 148). To clarify this embeddedness, Althusser introduces a distinction between identification and what he terms ideological “recognition.” Recognition, distinct from and prior to psychological identification, is the spectator’s immediate yet tacit awareness of shared ideological conditions with the characters, rooted in collective historical and cultural experience. Althusser evokes recognition viscerally through an extended appeal to affect and corporeal experience: “we still eat of the same bread, we have the same rages, the same rebellions, the same madness... the same horrible blindness, the same dust in our eyes, the same earth in our mouths” (Althusser, *For Marx* 150). Unlike “psychological identification,” this recognition is neither chosen nor consciously adopted by the spectator; rather, it emerges spontaneously from a pre-existing ideological unity that binds spectator to performer even before the drama unfolds.⁵⁴ While

⁵⁴ This “psychological identification” has been read by some theorists as structurally analogous to what might be called a performative theory of naming, one often associated with the Symbolic in Lacanian terms. The background to this idea lies in mid-20th century philosophy of language, particularly in the so-called “antidescriptivist” arguments against the idea that names refer to objects by way of a set of descriptions. Saul Kripke famously argued,

Althusser's use of "recognition" has persisted, it seems to me insufficiently delineated from psychological identification. This is partly because, as we well see, it refers to such a similar psychological mechanism. More productive, it seems, is his reliance on the terms of military recruitment. As he goes on to say, the spectator is kept at a distance in order to "enlist" (*enrôler*) him into the ideological world depicted onstage, highlighting the involuntary and structural nature of this shared condition.

At the end of the essay, Althusser begins to name what this structure produces. He first describes "the production of a new consciousness in the spectator," but then, in a quiet shift, omits the term "consciousness" altogether and leaves only "the production of a new spectator" (Althusser, *For Marx* 151). This change has drawn recent attention from Étienne Balibar, who focuses on Althusser's use of the first person in the final paragraph—"Je me retourne," I turn or look back—as a gesture of interpellation. For Balibar, this turning is a moment of subjectivation: Althusser sees himself as the continuation of the performance and becomes the spectator it has produced. This reading casts interpellation as a break from ideology, or as Balibar puts it, an "interpellation out of ideology, by 'the real,' as it were" (Balibar, "Althusser's Dramaturgy" 10).

against Frege and Russell, that proper names do not designate by describing, but by a kind of historical "baptism" through which a name becomes rigidly attached to an object or person, regardless of its properties. According to Kripke, once this initial act of naming occurs, others can refer to the object simply by using the name, even if they know little or nothing about the object itself.

John Searle, in *Intentionality* and elsewhere, partially pushed back against Kripke's notion of rigidity, emphasizing instead the role of context and speaker intention in referential acts. But the deeper tension between the arbitrariness of naming and the fixity it seems to produce remains unresolved.

Žižek, Butler, and Laclau have each, in different ways, taken up this tension through the lens of political and psychoanalytic theory. What they share is the idea that naming is not merely a neutral act of reference, but a performative event with real consequences. A name can momentarily "fix" the meaning of a subject or object, even if that fixity is always precarious and subject to slippage. For Žižek, naming is the moment of insertion into the Symbolic Order: a violent capture of the Real that retroactively constitutes the subject. For Laclau, the name functions as a "nodal point" that temporarily halts the endless deferral of meaning and organizes a chain of signifiers into a political identity. For Butler, especially in *Excitable Speech* and later essays like "Theatrical Machines," naming is both enabling and injurious: it grants recognizability while exposing the subject to the very frameworks that constrain it. She insists, however, on the limits of the performative, on the ways that naming fails, misfires, or leaves room for resistance.

It is a compelling formulation, and it draws on Althusser's earlier references to "existence," which suggest a reality grounded in material conditions that precede and exceed representation. But as Judith Butler points out in her response to Balibar, this reading risks reintroducing a form of "critical consciousness" that remains too firmly outside. It assumes a subject who can occupy a position of awareness untethered from the ideological scene, even as that scene is what produces the subject.⁵⁵ This "critical dislocation" is therefore substantive, but not fully satisfying; upon leaving the theater, it is not at all clear how this spectator *cum* actor would turn that consciousness into action. I read Althusser's final paragraph differently: less as a moment of rupturing or building consciousness than a production that is, strangely (through estrangement) also an anonymous attachment to a chorus. However, unlike Butler's tethering of the subject to modes of identification, this attachment does not pass through the name or assume legibility. I read Althusser's "new spectator" not as a subject who emerges into awareness, nor as a subject returned to its place; instead, the "turn" of interpellation establishes the subject as an anonymous "figure" that performs through contiguity with the scene. The final turn is not recognition in the Hegelian sense nor the Lacanian sense of a misrecognition, nor even an affirmation of ideological positioning as such, but a metonymic movement: a folding of the figure into the scene that reorganizes the terms of appearance and performance. If this "turning" is also a form of recognition, it is one that never guarantees what follows. The "new spectator," like the chorus, is not a new consciousness, but a new recruit.

But why does it matter if interpellation is not a process of recognition or identification? Quite simply because the subject is neither recognized nor called into a position of identity. To impute subjectivity onto the historically contingent modality of identity is to search for

⁵⁵ This quick debate, along with responses to Balibar's essay by Bruce Robbins, Warren Montag, Adi Ophir, Banu Bargu, and Xiao Liu, composed a special issue of *differences* in 2015 (Vol 26, No. 5).

materialism in consciousness. Gayatri Spivak argues that this category error persists in many “continuist” readings of Marx that attempt to locate the subject in stable relations of labor, community, or class belonging. Spivak’s reading of a “discontinuous” Marx challenges that stability by reframing the subject not as a bearer of traits or identifications, but as the predicate of labor-power: a structural capacity defined not by what the subject is, but by what it can do, its potential to produce surplus-value. “Labor-power is not labor,” just as “consciousness is not thought” (Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value” 73). Rather, it is the site at which the subject is superadequate to itself, able to generate more than what is necessary to sustain it and more value than the cost of labor. As such, it names a relation of structural overdetermination rather than coherence. Value, for Spivak, is not an ontological ground but a textual chain of Value, Money, Capital. Nor are these links stable referents: they are relations produced through processes of substitution and deferral. The subject enters this chain not as a self-identical figure, but as the unstable locus through which value appears, circulates, and is consumed.

Spivak’s account thus dislodges any attempt to treat “class” as a stable identity or continuously legible political position. Rather than locating the subject of class struggle in the figure of the industrial worker or the bearer of labor-power as such, her argument steers us towards the differential access to (and incorporation of) that predication across gendered, racialized, and geopolitical lines. The subject is not simply called into class position but produced through unequal conditions of intelligibility, reproduction, and dispossession. As she makes clear, political organizing cannot proceed by mobilizing already-formed subjects but must interrogate the conditions under which the subject is interpellated as laboring at all, where labor-power is both a predicate and a structural exclusion. The figure of the unwaged, the feminized, or

the Third World worker is not inherently radical, nor merely symbolic; it marks limit conditions of value's appearance, one that is both materially sustaining and systematically devalued.

For the subject predicated on its capacity to produce surplus-value, its formation, interpellation, names not only the reproduction of ideology but the reproduction of value. To be "hailed" is to be incorporated (entered into a body) such that value can be extracted. This materialist predication of the subject through the possibility of value undoes the logic of interpellation as naming or individuation. If the subject appears only as an effect of value, then the ideological call cannot presume a stable recipient nor can it solely act to "fix" the subject discursively. For Spivak, "the body does not rise"⁵⁶ it does not overcome its conditions in a redemptive moment of appearance in life or analysis (Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" 92).⁵⁶ It remains embedded in reproductive labor, in uneven structures of exploitation, in what she names "a performative and operational evaluation of the body's survival and comfort" (Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" 92). Subjectivity is not granted, recognized, or affirmed. It is iterated and performed (they are not identical!). This "performative and operational evaluation" is the very ground upon which value, and therefore the subject, takes effect. The figure that emerges is neither hailed by identity nor stabilized by recognition. What is needed, then, is a theory of interpellation and of the chorus that treat the subject not as a position to be claimed but as a continually reconstituted relation of the body's labor: an enlistment into collective forms that remain materially embedded yet open, legible yet anonymous.

That is, if value is produced through these iterative performances, then interpellation, where the ideological is not disconnected from the discontinuous textuality of the value chain,

⁵⁶ The anti-theological undertone of this statement is also central in order to counter divine interpretations of interpellation and ground the movement from discourse to event, the figurative to the performative.

must be understood as a recruitment without name. The chorus, then, is not a metaphor for collectivity but a logic of attachment that distributes participation without individual inscription. To theorize anonymous interpellation is to insist that political form cannot rely on the visibility of the subject, but must account for the differential, embodied performances that underwrite its very conditions of appearance.

What Althusser's reading reveals is that *Brecht's theory of alienation is, in effect, a theory of the chorus*: a theory of how the subject is recruited through the material, collective and anonymous performance.⁵⁷ His sudden insistence on the audience's presence on the stage, and the emergence and repetition of a "we" that unites the audience and the actors, seeks a fundamental overlap between them, a modern understanding of a chorus, of an audience produced as a chorus. "Interpellation," nearly implicit in his final "turn," captures an ideological dimension that is not based on identification. It is a recognition of what we already are ("we were already ourselves in the play itself, from the beginning") whether we admit this fact or not, whether we identify with the characters or not, and it is that very continuity which interpellates, which contains the potential for producing a new chorus. There is a constitutive circularity implicit in this formulation: the spectator is already on the stage (as the chorus) and is also

⁵⁷ See Martin Revermann, "Brechtian Choralities," in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*. Revermann opens by distinguishing between what he calls "the physically choral" (a visible, singing collective) and "the conceptually choral," which refers to performances that "tap into" collective experience and exhibit "a high degree of (self-)reflexivity" (Revermann 153). Drawing on examples from *Mahagonny*, *Mother Courage*, and *The Antigone of Sophocles*, Revermann shows that Brecht frequently uses chorality to challenge identification, cultivate critical awareness, and foreground ideological implication—often without invoking a formally constituted chorus. He also emphasizes that Brecht is one of the few twentieth-century theatre artists to use choruses without any generic or historical pressure (e.g., from Greek or Noh drama), and he importantly notes Brecht's own rare but explicit statement 1936 essay "*Verfremdung* Effects in Chinese Acting" that the chorus serves to estrange the audience (Revermann 164).

My argument is indebted to Revermann's account, especially his attention to Brecht's refusal of choral coherence and his parodic inversion of ritual. At the same time, I move in a different direction. Where Revermann emphasizes how chorality supports *Verfremdung*, I suggest the inverse: *Verfremdung* creates a chorus. That is, the techniques Brecht develops to estrange the spectator ultimately organize the spectator into a choral formation through shared structural implication. The chorus, in this sense, is a dual impersonating yet impersonal arrangement, a relational logic that binds performer and audience across difference.

produced as a new spectator. Reading this circular production together with the work's structural progression, whereby the chorus of old women in the final act are fully incorporated into the walls of the setting, the spectator is nothing other than the place itself. The new spectator is circularly the place from which the performance emerges and produced by it. But if the new spectator is formed chorally, what becomes of the characters? How does this logic of collectivity transform dramatic form and how does it reframe our understanding of the figures onstage?

These questions take us directly into the problem of dramatic figuration and its relation to setting, questions that Elinor Fuchs addresses, albeit through a very different framework. In *The Death of Character*, Elinor Fuchs argues that the relationship between the characters and the setting in Maeterlinck's drama exceed the binaries of theatrical engagement, creating a new form of spectatorship: "distance, but without alienation, ...involvement, without identification" (Fuchs 106). The spectator is "involved" but "distant" as they survey the landscape, leading her to consider "the possibility of a post-anthropocentric stage" (Fuchs 107).⁵⁸ This suspended relation recalls Althusser's description of the spectator as "enlisted" in "distance," bound to the scene through shared ideological conditions yet structurally detached from the action itself. For Fuchs,

⁵⁸ This is an appealing ecocritical reading, but one that I question on two accounts. First, it potentially takes the natural setting of the works too literally. I believe her own warning against "the stultifying claim for "presence" made by some theorists" is also applicable to images of nature and natural settings (Fuchs 106). As her reading moves from a spectator phenomenologically attuned to an ecosystem to a "postmodern artist" who "longs for a vanishing natural world," nature begins to appear as self-referential and self-evidently present. But this is not always the case, as in the two plays Fuchs discusses by Suzan-Lori Parks (*Last Black Man*, *The America Play*) in which the landscape is neither innocent nor autonomous. While the spectator may indeed survey a landscape, and the bodies certainly merge with the setting to produce, I argue, choral relationships, the "natural" is always already cultural, racialized, and mediated. Parks does not at all seem to long for a pre-historical, or pre-cultural natural world that has vanished. Instead, the setting, natural or not, must be allowed to create specific relationships with the other elements in performance, and even the presence of nature must be reinscribed into the systems and techniques of mediation.

Second, Fuchs's account risks eliding the bodies that constitute the scene. Her language of "humans-blending-into-nature" suggests a fusion that *The Blind* never fully performs. The stylization and economy of movement required of the performer, and the spectatorial attention such movement demands, ensure that the body continues functioning as a body even when absorbed into the setting. The landscape gains force through the labor of the performer, and the performer's body acquires force through its patterned relation to the space around it. The resulting scene does not suspend the human but reconfigures its visual and kinetic centrality. This is the historical moment of the "body ascendant," to borrow Harold Segel's phrase, and also of the "landscape ascendant" (Segel). What *The Blind* demands is that both trajectories be read in concert.

the presentation of landscapes by modernist artists and the concomitant spectatorial technique of surveying a landscape emerge as an unexpected way of subverting the privileged position formerly held by plot and character. While Althusser's discussion has already brought forward the two points I will ultimately return to—the production of a chorus and the interpellation of the audience—Fuchs's commentary reveals the central choral procedure that this chapter explores: the entanglement of character and background produces an unexpected choral relation between the audience and performer.

In ancient tragedy, she argues, following John Jones's seminal commentary on Aristotle, "character" is simply the sum of "doings," an agent of dramatic structure. Citing 18th century commentary on Shakespeare, she notes a pivotal shift from the Aristotelian doctrine of a plot-driven drama towards a new valuation of "character."⁵⁹ Although the Aristotelian definition of character as dramatic agent persists (both historically and in Fuchs's text), the term also acquired the sense of an inward subjectivity and self-consciousness of the represented individual that would be continually elevated through the Romantic period to the present day. While for Fuchs this elevation and expansion of "character" did not begin with the ancient Greeks, she does view "character" as a culmination of a Platonic "metaphysics of presence." The Modernist revolt against "character," then, also entailed a deconstruction of the binary structures which support it.

In Fuchs's character-driven, dramatic theater, the structured plot provides a clear hierarchy of meaning and the individual, individuated character emerges from the background to unify "perspectival unity" (Fuchs 92). The spectator's attention is focused by the dramaturgical suturing of plot, character, and space. In contrast, Fuchs adapts Gertrude Stein's sense of the "play as landscape" to describe a model that democratizes the spectator's vision of the stage, so

⁵⁹ A further complication is that Aristotle was also interpreted by the Romantics as allowing for character as interiority. Jones's argument was thus to clarify Aristotle's notion of "character" by historicizing the concept.

that they choose where to look, when, and why. The first landscape play, she contends, was Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind*. Referring to its lack of character as both agents of a plot and as autonomous individuals, she contends that the setting of this first "modern landscape stage" carried

a freight of meaning exceeding that borne by the characters. If there were no dialogue uttered among the twelve blind men and women unaware that their priest sits dead among them, we would soon understand this forest setting on an island, with its rising wind, beating waves, rustling leaves, and menacing changes of light as an allegory of the human condition (Fuchs 96).

Character, for Fuchs the investment in an individuated subject, the referential sign of presence, is deemphasized as the place itself comes alive. At the same time, she ties the lack of meaning borne by the characters to the superfluity of the dialogue, as if words were the preferred form of expression of character. Peter Szondi sharpens this point, arguing that the individuality and subjectivity of the blind is effaced by an "autonomy of language," where speech is no longer tethered to a psychologized perspective or coherent point of view (Szondi 71). Although the lines are distributed across twelve speakers, they function as a single monologue. This breakdown in individual address gives rise to something else: as the Blind cease to be characters, they become "choral."⁶⁰

For both Fuchs and Szondi, "character" is determined textually, as an engine of plot and as a function of speech, a model echoed in W. B. Worthen's account of dramatic character as the product of "making speeches." This assimilation of character to discourse is also embedded in

⁶⁰ "Choral" is itself a surprising elaboration on the notion of becoming a "symbol," which was the sticking point that Stanislavski mentions when describing the difficulty in staging Maeterlinck's work. A symbol is a material representation of an abstraction and points us towards an idea(l) that cannot itself be made manifest itself within the bounds of representation. A chorus, on the other hand, remains within the language and materiality of performance.

John Jones's argument, cited by Fuchs, that modern notions of character cannot be imposed onto Attic tragedy. Jones emphasizes Aristotle's insistence on "acts" and "actions" as the basis of a dramatically distinct model, one in which character is not a prior self but something produced through repetition. The tragic mask, in this account, does not express an underlying figure but entirely substitutes for the performer. As Jones puts it, "the actor-mask is not a portrait, not a likeness; it presents, it does not re-present; it gives us King Oedipus" (J. Jones 59). The mask is not a sign of character alongside the actor; it is the whole of character. For Jones, the performer merges with the mask through the repetition of patterned actions. This model of performance leaves no space for the contingencies of acting as practice. The mask, like the name, operates as a discursive sign. Through it, the tragedian's text arrives at the audience as if unmediated by embodiment.

Classical scholarship has shown that even under linen masks and stylized, full-body costumes, performers in ancient tragedy remained recognizable. Certain actors were known by their voices, and audiences likely recognized distinctive gestures and mannerisms as well (Damen). Simon Goldhill, in the final chapter of *Reading Greek Tragedy*, argues that performance does not fully submit to the authority of the text. The elements that arise in performance—the "parasitic," the "contaminating"—cannot be excised from the character that emerges through the mask and the name (Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*). W. B. Worthen, recalling Michael Goldman's *The Actor's Freedom*, emphasizes that "character is not inscribed, a thing," but rather emerges through performance, shaped by the available repertoire of techniques (Worthen 74). This insight does two things. First, it displaces the authority of the text by foregrounding the embodied practices that form character in the moment of performance. Second, it loosens the assumption that character and chorus must be mutually exclusive or

textually fixed. Once character becomes an effect of embodied technique rather than a stable textual entity, its boundaries with chorality become structurally permeable.

What Fuchs and Szondi both approach, yet leave structurally unresolved, is the moment at which character ceases to cohere as an individual figure and begins to take on choral form. As character dissolves into distributed speech and collective presence, textual form begins to anticipate a choral logic. But neither account fully considers how that logic draws the spectator into its structure. Rather than opposing characters and chorus as fixed categories, I seek to locate the procedures, in text and performance, that produce each as relational modes of representation. If the classical *dramatis personae*, following ancient performance techniques and staging, has been too tidily divided into “characters” and “chorus,” the blind do not precisely fit into either, and in many ways are both.⁶¹ Although anonymous and collective, there is no role, “Chorus of the Blind,” nor, to my knowledge, does Maeterlinck use the word “chorus” in his writings. Like “tragic characters,” the blind speak and act separately, and their voices remain textually differentiated. At the same time, the text offers no psychological or contextual differentiation among them, and they are only minimally involved in the unfolding of the plot. The play opens with six blind men and six blind women grouped on either side of the stage, awaiting the return of a Priest, their guide through the island forest and caretaker at a local asylum. Unbeknownst to them, the Priest lies dead between the two groups. The plot, such as it is, concerns their gradual realization of his absence. Their movement from the sides of the stage toward the center is

⁶¹ For a concise account of the conventional binary, see Michael Silk: “It is a commonplace of modern criticism that the tragic chorus should be understood in terms of its contrastive relationship with the tragic characters.” The heroes are “doomed as active individuals,” whereas the chorus “survive[s] as a passive group.” Characters are “more strongly defined and more sharply placed in a personal context,” while the chorus is “less specifically defined” and “more weakly contextualized” (Silk 15). Silk further observes that, with the exception of the *Eumenides*, the chorus is never given a contingent background or situation (Silk 13). These distinctions are directly unsettled in *The Blind*, where the figures are neither fully individuated nor entirely contextless, and come to act collectively only at the structural periphery of the plot.

largely accidental. These are not active, motivated characters; they are depersonalized figures who move and speak in collective formations.

Ashley Taggart, reflecting on this climactic moment, describes the voices of the blind, upon discovering the Priest's body, as becoming "indistinguishable" from one another. They "melt into a single cry of dismay," he writes, uniting "into an almost choric expression of species pain" (Taggart, "Maeterlinck and Beckett" 105). Although Taggart reads this shift as a tragic loss of identity—an erasure of character—it is also a moment of unification. The blind begin the play in spatial and verbal dissociation, arguing and mishearing one another, as in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, after the chorus overhears the murder of Agamemnon. Over the course of the play, their voices and bodies draw closer. By the final scene, the blind have found one another and formed a group. They move toward the Priest's body together, and their collective utterance suggests the emergence of a choral form that is never named but becomes increasingly structural in their speech and staging.

At the 1891 premiere, the plot—the quest to find the Priest—was dramatically foregrounded in a way that later productions and criticism tend to obscure.⁶² Citing accounts by Paul Fort, the founder of the Théâtre d'Art, and the show's director Adolphe Rettés, František Deák describes the climactic moment when the First Blind Man finds the Priest's corpse. At this point, "a great shiver, followed by a thunder of applause, shook the theatre," suggesting that the play's dramatic action functioned more viscerally than we might expect (Deák 119). This climax emphasized the importance and individuality of the First Blind Man, who, when he discovers the body, exclaims, "There is a dead man among us!"—the play's most memorable line. The First

⁶² Taggart, for instance, writes in *Modern Drama* that "The "action" consists almost entirely of the group's discovery of the dead man, the dramatic distance traveled being purely ironic" (Taggart, "Blind Process: Maeterlinck's *The Sightless*").

Blind Man's part is longer and more assertive than the others, and so was played at the premiere by Lugné-Poe, also the assistant director. Despite Maeterlinck's stated disinterest in "character," this arc—culminating in a spoken revelation and a surge of audience response—undoubtedly emphasized the individuality of the role.

This is not to say that the play did not issue a challenge to the prevailing naturalist acting techniques of the time. When Stanislavski's Art Theater first rehearsed *The Blind* in 1904, the dramatic tones they were accustomed to felt ill-suited to the play. They eventually adopted a more poetic recitation style and placed greater emphasis on gesture and movement. In line with these choices, Stanislavski downplayed the centrality of the Priest's body—and the propulsion to find it—by moving it to an upstage corner. Instead, in ways that my analysis below will also argue for, his staging was structured around the play's potentially hopeful, choral conclusion. These divergent productions make clear that performance does not simply realize the text; it shapes the interplay between character and chorus, emphasizing or displacing each in different ways.

The 1891 production seems to have followed Maeterlinck's opening description quite closely. The performers spoke softly and reverently, their voices barely audible. Through the dim, Impressionist blue lighting, they were scarcely visible to the audience. Maeterlinck's stage directions read almost cinematically, assigning the landscape a presence that rivals the figures onstage and collapsing the distinction between character and setting. In a poetic tone, he paints the landscape without registering differences between natural and human, dissecting equally the elements of the scene and the bodies on stage. The old Priest, who lies center stage, is broken up into head and torso, face, eyes, and hair, each of which seems to perform actions independently. Not the Priest, but rather "his head and torso," lean against the trunk of a huge and cavernous oak

tree (Maeterlinck, *Pelleas and Melisanda and The Sightless* 169). Figure and setting continue to merge until we arrive at his hair, which falls over “a face that is both more illumined and more weary than all else that surrounds it in the intent silence of the gloomy forest.” The non-possessive, depersonalizing use of the indefinite article, “a face,” distances the body from the Priest, and the ambiguity of what surrounds what creates an unstable contiguity between the end of the body and the beginning of the forest. While “more illumined” may refer to the stage as a whole, “more weary” likely refers to a body. And yet the line continues beyond the figure, into the “intent silence” of the “gloomy forest,” prompting the reader to animate, if not anthropomorphize, the surrounding space, and to see the face as more weary than the forest that absorbs it. The dim lighting at the premiere, an aspect of the production many in the audience complained about, may have contributed to their excitement at the discovery of the body. The ancient forest is dark enough that the audience, like the blind, cannot clearly discern the Priest’s body, which may have blended with the background.

Periodically throughout the play, the landscape does come alive through the sound of the nearby sea, the flight of birds through the trees, rustling wind, and sudden snowfall. The play anticipates a proto-Beckettian economy of movement: the blind have “lost the habit of useless gesture,” and so “no longer turn their heads at the stifled and restless noises (aux rumeurs étouffées et inquiètes) of the island” (Maeterlinck, *Pelleas and Melisanda and The Sightless* 170). This is the only description of human movement in the opening scene, and it does not naturalize gesture. Instead, it stylizes and arrests it, staging the blind in counterpoint to the animation of the setting. To lose “the habit” of useless gesture implies that movement has become stylized, non-quotidian, and no longer subsumed into an invisible naturalism. At the same time, they do not signal waiting or mistake the forest’s sounds for the Priest’s return. Their

movement is neither expressive nor symbolic. It is disengaged from dramatic causality and becomes part of a scenic composition in which bodies and setting form a single choreographic structure. They do not emerge from the setting in order to participate in an action, but through their movement continually merge with and work to create the landscape, which is itself alive and active.

In an important lexical shift, Fuchs neither follows Taggart and Szondi in calling the Blind “choral,” nor returns to Maeterlinck’s own vocabulary and refer to these “non-characters” as symbols. Instead, following classicist John Jones, who she cites early on, she uses the word “figure.” The term marks the bodily form of the subject, drawing attention to its material presence and sensible surface, its visibility within a landscape rather than its individuality within a plot. In Jones’s usage, these qualities refer to the materiality of the actor-mask. That figure remains partially shrouded or anonymous, which opens onto a rhetorical or allegorical register. Mark Franko, reflecting on modern dance as a crisis of representation, draws on Deleuze to describe the figure as that which “resists figuration.”⁶³ Figuration, in this frame, is the

⁶³ I am in fact eliding key developments in Franko’s engagement with “figuration.” In a seminal anthology of his essays, *Choreographing Discourses*, Franko’s first sustained engagement with the concept appears in Chapter 7, “Dance and Figurability,” where he draws on Auerbach’s theory of “figura” to explore how choreography produces meaning at the threshold between embodiment and interpretation. Drawing on Hayden White’s reading of Auerbach’s tantalizing phrase “figura is something real and historical...that announces something real and historical,” Franko proposes that dance does not merely represent political or historical content but structures its appearance through a mode of figural relation (Franko, *Choreographing Discourses: A Mark Franko Reader* 111). His concept of “figurability” names the unstable work of choreography “between visibility and invisibility,” where meaning is never given directly but must be laboriously enacted or apprehended (Franko, *Choreographing Discourses: A Mark Franko Reader* 110). Rather than seeing the dancer’s body as a self-evident sign, Franko locates its political force in the tension between what can be seen and what resists being seen, and how both are conditioned by spectatorship.

This interest in the unstable legibility of the body continues in Chapter 6, “Figurae,” where Franko returns to the problem of figuration through Forsythe’s collaborations with Peter Welz and their shared engagement with Francis Bacon. What interests Franko here is the way Bacon’s paintings resist representation, the way the figures register through affect and gesture without stabilizing into coherent form. Forsythe’s movement, in this frame, becomes a mode of figuration that avoids closure, articulating what Franko elsewhere calls “the violence of sensation” without collapsing sensation into image (Franko, *Choreographing Discourses: A Mark Franko Reader* 4).

Across these chapters, figuration becomes a way to theorize how dance engages history and politics not by depicting them, but by staging the very conditions of their emergence and disappearance. As Franko notes in the

gaining of intelligibility, whether through narrative or representational form. The figure, by contrast, precedes and resists that process.

Jones's use of the term is striking because he is insisting on the full visibility of the "stage-figure." A more predictable choice might have been "agents," a closer rendering of *prattontes*, the Greek term for those who act, which would link more directly to the Aristotelian axis of *praxis* (action) and *muthos* (plot). But for Jones, "stage-figure" more fully describes the total eclipse of the actor into the mask. It is with some irony, then, that the argument is often remembered by the shorthand "no character," or "no character behind the mask." That phrase suggests a pure absence. But like "stage-figure," it symptomatically captures a more paradoxical condition: a dual presence and absence. The mask points toward the subject's participation in the plot—the agent who acts—but also signals a withdrawal, the disappearance of the character and perhaps the performer. That absence, however, is precisely the uninterpreted, the unfigured.⁶⁴

This is where the figure takes on critical force. It resists the dominant forms of theatrical figuration that would render human forms intelligible as characters—recognizable, rational, individuated. In contrast, the blind persist as figures untethered from that process. As Paul de Man puts it, the figure operates in the "divergence between grammar and referential meaning," and always leaves something to interpret (de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 270). The indeterminacy of the figure subverts the determination of meaning. As a rhetorical trope—literally a "turn"—the figure gestures toward meaning without delivering it. It marks the visible

Preface, "the notion of the figure itself stands, in a sense, for the full interdisciplinary range of concerns here between the kinesthetic, the visual, and the writing" (Franko xv). The movement of the figure here across media reflects the pertinence of Franko's observation.

⁶⁴ Considering the historical dimension of Jones's argument means understanding the tragic Oedipus as a figure that precedes the emergence of "character" as a historical and interpretive category. What Jones installs is not an early version of character but a distinct performative logic that only later becomes legible as "character." The figure, in this view, is not a primitive character but a historically prior form of embodiment and signification.

presence of a body and the deferral of its legibility. It is always partially anonymous, always gesturing beyond the bounds of representation.

The figure's resistance to what "might be called" poetic figuration—figuration as character, narrative, and psychological coherence—does not preclude other forms of intelligibility.⁶⁵ In addition to poetic or mimetic forms, there are choral forms of figuration that organize bodies in space and shape how they appear to the audience. Rather than beginning with an opposition between character and chorus, or actor and audience, we might begin by attending to the spatial and historical conditions in which chorality emerged as a structure of intelligibility. The orchestra, the architectural space central to Attic tragedy, was not simply a stage; it was a site of figural formation. Nietzsche's insistence that the tragic emerged from the choral rather than the mimetic unsettles the retrospective logic that treats mimesis as originary and primary. Where we see illusion and representation, the Greeks saw "living presence" (Nietzsche 37). This is not to suggest that ancient spectators naively misunderstood theatrical representation, but rather an alternative account of the dialectic between representation and reality. Chorality, in this sense, does not transparently enact the real, just as mimesis does not fully veil it. Both modes participate in an economy of figuration where embodiment and fiction remain entangled. The mimetic was already embedded within the choral; illusion emerged from collective presence. Thespis's first entrance did not inaugurate illusion *ex nihilo* any more than the reintroduction of a chorus on the modern stage guarantees the appearance of reality.

⁶⁵ The phrasing alludes to Paul de Man's attention to rhetorical displacement, where objects are not named directly but only "called" something, "what we call ideology," for instance. This formulation signals not only epistemic modesty but a structural uncertainty in naming itself. What is "called" a subject never fully coincides with the name it receives. This deferral opens a space for anonymity as a suspension or remainder within the process of nomination. In this chapter, such rhetorical gaps become performative: they help articulate how the chorus interpellates the spectator without naming them, producing a form of anonymous social being that exceeds both character and recognition.

We are perhaps only now rediscovering what was never quite lost: that occurrences within representation—especially those that iterate or return—constitute events. This principle reframes what theatrical fiction is understood to do. It allows us to take seriously the way representation intervenes in the world without requiring a collapse between performance and the real. In his 1803 Preface to *The Bride of Messina*, Schiller famously declared war on naturalism by reintroducing the chorus.⁶⁶ But did it need to return in ancient form in order to return at all? In what ways had it already been present? Even if the orchestra has been dismantled or metaphorically submerged, the chorus continues to function as a mode of figuration, shaping how bodies appear, move, and relate. The figures of the blind do not solely await characterization; they also await choreography and composition, and as they merge with the background, they begin to configure the *choros* as a field of figural relations.

Like the idealized chorus inherited from Schlegel and revised by Vernant, the Symbolist version of the chorus is often said to function as an “allegory of the human condition.”⁶⁷ But this universalism obscures a structural doubleness that has recently drawn renewed attention among classicists. The tragic chorus was composed of Athenian ephebes, but it most often represented enslaved, female, elderly, or foreign figures.⁶⁸ This disjunction between the performing group and the group represented was not incidental; it was a constitutive feature of the chorus as such. Maeterlinck’s own writing betrays this doubling, albeit without theorizing the chorus in these materialist terms: while a nameless Ophelia might suggest an idealized abstraction, she is in fact

⁶⁶ See the Introduction for German Idealism.

⁶⁷ Realist drama, drawing on Aristotle’s account of mimesis, predicates the universal on the particular: the individual character, shaped by plot and action, becomes the vessel for general human truth. The Symbolist chorus, by contrast, attempts to reach the universal by dissolving the particular. Where Realism universalizes the individual, Symbolism abstracts it. In this model, the individual is evacuated of contextual or psychological detail and treated instead as a symbolic type or figural presence.

⁶⁸ Helene Foley, also Gould, Goldhill, and Mastronarde.

specified as a “virgin,”⁶⁹ and the sudden choral actions of the serving women in *Pelléas and Mélisande* marks a return of class and gender as staged figural relations. Romantic theories of the chorus dissolved this tension by imagining the spectator as an idealized stand-in for “humanity,” thereby erasing the social and political specificity of the choral role. What was staged, however, was not a human condition but a figural displacement: the chorus was always both citizen and noncitizen, visible and anonymous. Rather than recovering a lost ideal, we might turn toward the material and social remainders of figural arrangement.

The individual is displaced by the plural, but this movement does not replace the bodies onstage with symbolism or abstraction. On the contrary, it is the bodies themselves that generate and sustain the forms in which they appear. David Bolt’s disability studies reading of *The Blind* helps name what is at stake in this tension by calling attention to the embodied presence of blindness. For Bolt, the play’s metaphor of “aesthetic blindness” obscures the material specificity of actual blind experience (Bolt, *Aesthetic Blindness: Symbolism, Realism, and Reality*). He notes that in literary representation, blind figures are often “nominally displaced”—referred to not by name but by type (Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness* 35).⁷⁰ “The blind man” and “the blind girl” function as identifying categories. In *The Blind*, this displacement is doubled: the symbolism collapses, because the blind onstage have already been categorically separated from the humanity they are said to signify (Bolt, *Aesthetic Blindness: Symbolism, Realism, and Reality* 101). Their anonymity is neither purely poetic nor symbolic, it names a structure in which the body resists legibility while remaining fully present. Bolt refers to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s work as he reminds us that the “human” is actually “shored up and dependent on” the

⁶⁹ “Thus, if, for example, Ophelia’s name were taken away from her or her death or her songs, how could I ever distinguish her from myriad other virgins?” (Maeterlinck, *A Maeterlinck Reader* 315).

⁷⁰ I explore this relationship further in my analysis of Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, in which the protagonist’s proper name, Sarah, is effaced by the derogatory social category Negro.

audience's sightedness. The blind are denied individual names and personal histories, constructing the human on an epistemological connection between seeing and knowing. The marked body of the blind allows the audience to "represent themselves as definitive human beings" (Garland-Thomson 8). In other words, the human is constructed to exclude the group on stage that is supposed to symbolize humanity.

To read the blind as a chorus arrives at a similar conclusion, but with an important addition. The representative layer is dependent not on the audience's sightedness, but on the continuity between audience and performers—the sightedness of the audience and the performers. The play does appear to construct "the human" in an idealizing sense, but more concretely, it stages this construct through the convergence and divergence between audience and performer. Embodied differences, in this case the presence or absence of sight, become the means through which representation is organized. What might otherwise appear as metaphor or allegory becomes a configuration of perceptual and corporeal asymmetries that anchor the drama in the present tense of performance.

Jack McNamara's pivotal 2008 production exposed this relationship by working with a cast of blind and visually impaired performers. By literalizing what had been purely metaphoric blindness, the production unsettles "fact and fiction," and remaps the performer-audience relationship. Not simply that literal blindness precludes metaphoric, or aesthetic blindness, but rather that the sighted audience is no longer implicated within the collective group of the blind. As Lyn Gardner remarked in *The Guardian*, "I am not certain this literal casting pays many dividends, because, surely, Maeterlinck's intention in creating his unseeing protagonists was to point up the blindness of the audience. It is we who are stumbling around in the dark" (Gardner).

In other words, and speaking for the audience as a whole, “we” visually sighted audience members were no longer interpellated among the blind.

The dividend that Gardner potentially misses, and the politically exciting result of McNamara’s casting, is that “we” was never stable. McNamara’s casting opens the possibility of interpellating a visually impaired audience as human. And this is in fact the point: the aesthetic category of “the human” is not universal but produced through shifting attachments and alignments. The choral frame realigns the structure of address, rendering the spectator not simply as a site of recognition, but as a conjunctural effect of performance (visibility, embodiment, and participation). Against the “living presence” of the chorus halfway between the stage and the audience, the spectator is the figural other, it is the unformed “we” of the audience who are “turned” in/as the trope.

As in the Tragic choruses, *The Blind* establishes a choral continuity between the performers onstage and the audience founded not on identity but on metonymic attachment: a shared event that registers difference without resolving it. Even while the performers represent a group that is radically separated from that same audience, contiguity operates. Moving from the blind as a symbol to the blind as a chorus redirects attention not to what they “mean” but how they function: to the perceptual, social and spatial arrangements that position and, I argue, potentially produce the audience as such. As Balibar writes, “the effect (of interpellation) remains essentially indeterminate until it becomes determined in a given conjuncture, both by the internal “logic” of the specific discourse of interpellation and by the external conditions of its insertion into the processes of reproduction of the existing order” (Balibar, “Althusser’s Dramaturgy” 14). While in my discussion of *Caligari* I will return to the internal logic of interpellation and the contingencies of its enunciation in specific discourses, my reading of *The*

Blind shows how chorality “figures” the spectator as a positional remainder, “turned” toward and into the scene without fully entering it.⁷¹

However, the play continues by thematizing the very mechanism that first enabled the emergence of the chorus: the differentiation between sighted and blind. Although David Bolt argues that sightedness is “the actual focus of the play,” the dramaturgy ultimately complicates that claim (Bolt, *Aesthetic Blindness: Symbolism, Realism, and Reality* 106). Bolt is correct to note that the theater is both “ocularcentric” and “ocularnormative,” and that *The Blind* relies on a classical equation of seeing and knowing. Yet the play does not reaffirm this hierarchy. Instead, it turns that association into a site of crisis, revealing it as a flawed epistemological model.

The play’s staging literalizes this reversal. It opens with the blind men and women arranged in two columns on either side of the stage and concludes as they converge, unknowingly, around the dead Priest at the center. Their movement, strictly delimited by Maeterlinck’s prohibition on “useless gestures,” is stylized and minimal.⁷² Rather than supporting individual characterization, this stylization emphasizes the body’s collectivity, drawing attention to the shared rhythms and withheld motions that generate a choral configuration.⁷³ From this choreographic structure we can interpret the final moments of the

⁷¹ Nietzsche’s “living presence” of the chorus—its partial location between stage and audience, between diegetic and extra-diegetic frames—implies an originary structural interstice that casts the spectator into a corresponding position: not simply the one addressed, but the one arranged by the address. The spectator becomes a metonymic remainder of the choral scene. This figuration does not name or mirror the spectator, it organizes and recruits them. The “we” to whom the chorus attaches is not given in advance but emerges from the patterned dislocation that chorality performs. To be figured chorally is to be placed in a “mobile positionality” that exerts pressure, rerouting vision and perception. The chorus does not stabilize presence; it displaces it. Chorality, in this sense, is not only a technique of collective utterance, but a mode of spatial force that reconditions spectatorship as such.

⁷² Bolt quotes former National Federation of the Blind president Kenneth Jernigan, that “what emerges on the stage is a ridiculous tableau of groping, groaning, and grasping at the air” (Bolt, *Aesthetic Blindness: Symbolism, Realism, and Reality* 100). I’m sure that Jernigan was responding to an actual, albeit misguided production of the play, but that performance should not be taken as indexical, determining other productions, or precluding other interpretations.

⁷³ I am again thinking here of Brecht’s social gestus and the social construction of identity. There is a necessary overlap between the individuation of characters and the construction of a chorus, such that the same gesture can, and often does, both individuate and collectivize.

play. All the Blind turn their attention to the sound of approaching footsteps, possibly boding the arrival of a new savior to replace the Priest. Bolt reads this as a failure: the Blind, already deprived of basic functioning, once again misrecognize their situation. They can only wait in vain and are mistaken when they believe they hear approaching footsteps.⁷⁴ Instead, the play concludes by undermining that reading, as well as the spectator's equation of seeing and knowing, by shifting the site of error to the audience.

Earlier in the play, footsteps heard offstage were confirmed visually by the entrance of a dog. At the end, however, the Blind hear footsteps that the audience cannot perceive. We are faced with a presence we cannot verify, an absent figure that the Blind register and the sighted do not.⁷⁵ While Bolt is correct that the Blind have been divided from the community of spectators, as they typically are in a tragic chorus, the failure becomes that of the sighted, not of the blind. Even the Baby, the only sighted figure on stage, cries out in the opposite direction. When the Young Blind Woman exclaims, "The footsteps have stopped right among us!," we are left estranged from our own perceptual authority. This final disjunction does not simply invert the roles of blindness and sight. It does not claim that the Blind now "see" better than the audience, or that we are merely blind to their experience. Rather, the play draws the spectator into the same circuit of reception that it stages: a structure in which perception does not confer certainty, and presence is not confirmed by vision. The play thereby incorporates its own theatrical operations into its thematic concerns, staging not only blindness as metaphor, but also "representation as

⁷⁴ While parallels abound between Beckett and Maeterlinck, this aspect of "futility" is an important difference.

⁷⁵ Reading *The Blind* alongside Maeterlinck's *The Intruder*, also written in 1890, further clarifies this final gesture. In that play, the blind Grandfather "hears" or senses an invisible intruder stand up just at the moment when his daughter dies. The Uncle, the Father, nor the Three Daughters sense the intruder. Although *The Blind* does not provide a positive affirmation of the invisible presence, as any concrete detail would undo the very purpose and meaning of the invisible presence, *The Intruder* does; the similarity between the plays encourages the interpretation that the Blind, like the Grandfather, do in fact sense something that the other characters in *The Intruder* and the audience of *The Blind* do not.

structure.” In a move that recalls what Fredric Jameson calls “a kind of mental procedure... which throws everything in an inextricable tangle one floor higher,” the play “widens its frame” to include the spectator as figure as part of its performative work (Jameson, “Metacommentary” 9). What results is a structure of shared “obscurity,” an unfiguring as the anonymous.

The Blind, who establish a humanity that they themselves are denied, who are both the continuation of the audience on stage and marked by an absolute difference from them, now sense a presence emerge from the setting. The stage directions ask for the rustling of wind through the leaves. “Do you hear the dead leaves? I think someone’s coming toward us...” says the Young Blind Woman. Their ensuing attempt to distinguish footsteps from the wind constitutes a double gesture: it signals the entrance of an invisible presence and anchors that presence in the setting itself. As the wind stirs, the leaves rustle, and snow begins to fall, the environment becomes increasingly animated. From this moment onward, the boundary between anthropomorphizing the landscape and discerning a human figure begins to blur. What begins to emerge is not a character but the impossible figure of the place itself coming to life: the realization of a choreographic relation in which the spectator is no longer outside the scene. The invisible character is in fact the Chorus, not as a group of performers, but as a relational figure—the impossible completion of a choreographic process that would dissolve the distinction between represented group and transparent performer. The play thus thematizes the impossibility of achieving the Symbolist ideal. It reveals the metaphysical inequality that the tragic chorus so often stages: the represented group that cannot represent itself. Bolt’s emphasis on literal blindness (which is warranted) reproduces Schlegel’s idealist notion of the chorus as that which escapes figuration. For Bolt, the literal forecloses the aesthetic: the revelation of real blindness unravels the metaphor of aesthetic blindness and forecloses representation. But Maeterlinck’s

blind are not simply an allegory of the human condition, which would erase their materiality. They are, rather, the symbol's supplement: figures who both write and erase the metonymic relation that constitutes the chorus. Their corporeal excess—the materiality that exceeds character, action, and language—generates a choral surplus that moves toward but cannot realize the figure of the universal human. This surplus names not presence but impossibility. The figure that would unify humanity is invisible and only manifest to those who have been denied their own visibility.

In this final movement, the blind do not become characters, nor does the Symbolist ideal crystallize in allegory (how can I not think of Jameson again here?). Rather, they become metonymically tied to the setting itself. The invisible chorus is not what stands onstage, but what results from a convergence of voice, space, and unrecognized humanity. It emerges not as representation, but as a choral remainder, where the relational logic of the scene reaches toward a figure it cannot stage. It is here that anonymity becomes operative again as the unfigured intersection of the choral and the human.

The Blind concludes not with a revelation of meaning, but with a question that makes this choral form of address explicit: “Who are you?” It is posed to a figure that cannot appear, the impossible completion of the choral field. And it anonymously gestures toward the audience. We might imagine a staging in which all the sounds that the blind perceive but the audience does not—footsteps, rustling, presence—are in fact produced from within the auditorium. The stage would thus respond to what the audience does not know it is emitting. Interpellation does not call from outside but loops through the very collective it constitutes. The chorus has been addressed by the very audience being produced. The question “Who are you?” is not a call for presence. It is an address to the figural absence within which interpellation occurs. It signals a desire for the

terms of recognition and a dislocation from them at once. The anonymous second person that sustains both.

2.1

In the 1920 silent German film, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, the interrogative “you” appears as a command, “you must become Caligari.” Importantly, the interpellation emerges from the landscape itself. To begin, the eponymous Dr. Caligari is not, in fact, named Caligari. In a flashback, an unnamed doctor in charge of an insane asylum discovers an old book recounting the story of a certain Dr. Caligari and his somnambulist accomplice, Cesare. In the book, Caligari has mastered the art of hypnotism and manipulates a sleepwalking Cesare to commit a series of murders at his behest. As the doctor’s obsession with the story intensifies, a somnambulist is admitted to his hospital. The motionless, nameless body, what Agamben might call an image of bare life, is wheeled into the doctor’s chamber.⁷⁶ The doctor maniacally fawns over the body that will become his Cesare.

That night, the doctor realizes that in order to possess Caligari’s secret, to unlock Caligari’s power for himself, he must himself become Caligari. At this moment, the film aligns the acquisition of knowledge with a transformation in subjectivity. Desire becomes command; identification becomes address. The “I” dissolves into “you”: *You must become Caligari!* The interpellative force of the phrase is ambiguous. Does it come from within the doctor’s own psyche, or from the film’s external world? The words appear both spoken and written,

⁷⁶ I am thinking specifically of how Agamben interprets the 1679 writ of *habeas corpus*, which requires not the appearance of the “free man” or the citizen, but the “body,” “by whatsoever name he may be called” (Agamben 124). What Agamben draws out here but does not dwell on is that bare life is also always an “anonymous life.” Insofar as the modern political subject is constituted through the incorporation of bare life in himself, the subject (as an “isolated *corpus*”) is also anonymous.

manipulating the affordances of silent film to suspend the hierarchy of presence and absence, internal and external, self and world. They seem simultaneously conjured by the Doctor's obsession and from the material of the set. They float free of human origin, inscribed, or "exscribed," not just into (or out of) the mind but also into (or out of) the walls, trees, and shadows that define the film's distorted space. The doctor throws himself into this scenery, chasing the words, catching at their material form. The command has no identifiable origin, only a directive force: he exits the frame, signifying the entrance of Caligari in an unseen terrain.

"Caligari" and "Cesare" are thus pseudonyms, names attached to bodies that exceed them. These names animate the body within narrative, but without resolving the fundamental non-identity of subject and signifier. The name operates only when the role is active; it is a poetic performative rather than a referential designation. In the narrative's outer frame, the bodies are once again unnamed. The asylum's director is not called Caligari, and Cesare reappears not as a murderer but as a docile figure, standing upright and gently petting a cat. The role has evaporated; the name has no function. Cesare is no longer a somnambulist under hypnosis, nor is he simply restored to himself—he is neither the nameless figure wheeled into the asylum nor the character once known as Cesare.

When the doctor enters, Francis accuses him of being Caligari and begins to rave. The attendants quickly restrain Francis in a straight-jacket and bring him to a cell, where the doctor responds with the closing lines of the film, "He takes me for the mystical Caligari. And now I know the way to his recovery (to cure him)!" While neither the frame nor the primary narrative is definitively credible, the doctor does recognize the name "Caligari," which has now become "mystical." The name is detached from any specific body and only circulates as an abstraction. Meanwhile we are never given a name for the doctor or for the patient we might be tempted to

call Cesare. The frame tale thus dramatizes the name as a formal device that enables the body's appearance as a character in the narrative, while also exposing the persistence of bodies beyond any name.

In the primary narrative, the name functions only to the extent that the characters fulfill their assigned roles, behaving as "good subjects," we might say. When Cesare does not obey Caligari's order to murder Jane, and instead abducts her, his act cannot be attributed to "Cesare," whose name indexes only the subject under Caligari's control. That deviation signals the intervention of another, unnamed subjectivity. The pseudonym "Cesare" becomes a mask placed before the body, a referential convenience that obscures the anonymity it briefly suspends. "Cesare" is bracketed by namelessness; anonymity precedes the name and resumes once its role dissolves. This procedure, however, also formalizes a kind of anonymity: the body's resistance to being fully identified by the role it plays. In addition to anonymity at the level of narrative, we witness a surplus of physical specificity that exceeds the character. Even when we recognize "Cesare" or "Caligari" as a mask, the body does not disappear into the name. Cesare's physical presence is defined by a stylized movement vocabulary that distinguishes him from other figures and integrates him with the Expressionist set.

In one of the film's most iconic images, "Cesare" stalks through the streets to Jane's bedroom. Stepping into the light in his form-fitting black clothes, he seems to extend the darkness rather than emerge from it. One arm lengthened along the wall, the other collected against his body, he nearly flattens himself against the brief portion of dappled white wall lit between the shadows, and his curved body visually echoes the shape of darkness behind him. Each weighty step taken on *relevé*, his elongated figure more resembles one of the unnatural, perspective-distorting shadows drawn onto the set than a character moving within it. With no

pretense toward realism, the tenebrous tree branches in the foreground suggest more than resemble their object, and harsh lighting emphasizes the set's hollowness. While a recurrent criticism of the film has been the distance between the performers' generally naturalistic acting and the set design, Cesare's coerced, midnight hunt signals their central overlap.⁷⁷ The stylization of his movement echoes the sinister, defamiliarizing shadows and uncanny proportions of the film's set. The set flattens perspective, but Cesare's diagonal path along the wall then toward the bed produces a three-dimensional depth that makes his re-emergence uncanny: the murderer could appear from any dark corner, and if he is discovered, he could be reabsorbed again into the walls whence he emerged. He seems to step into the scenery only to step back out of it. Each time he appears, it is unclear whether he is moving through the world or giving it shape. His path stages the same relation described in *The Blind*: the figure that both constitutes the setting and moves within it. His movement does not simply traverse space but articulates the spatial logic of the world. His anonymity is that of the *choros*, the folding of figure and ground.

Like the doctor's interpellation into the role of Caligari, Cesare's movement establishes a connection between body and background that makes him not merely a character within the scene but its animation. As in *The Blind*, this dynamic yields a form of choral figuration in which the individual becomes momentarily indistinct from the space he traverses. Cesare becomes a choral figure because through his relation to the place he animates (and which animates him) he *becomes* a "group of one." What is dramatized is a folding of presence: the performer appears plural. In this sense, the film does not ask the viewer to recognize themselves in Cesare but rather implicates the viewer through Cesare's apparent plurality. The figure's integration into the

⁷⁷ See Mike Budd.

background becomes a metonymic cue that extends across the screen, enlisting the spectator through attachment and contiguity.⁷⁸

Caligari and Cesare have been critically highlighted as the only ones who blend with the background. In Siegfried Kracauer's elegant phrasing, they appear, like the surroundings, created "by a draftsman's imagination. Werner Krauss as Caligari had the appearance of a phantom magician himself weaving the lines and shades through which he paced, and when Conrad Veidt's Cesare prowled along a wall, it was as if the wall had exuded him" (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 69). In his extensive exploration of German Expressionist theater, David F. Kuhns applies Mel Gordon's classification of "Schrei" Expressionism, characterized by ecstatic outbursts of emotion and individual personality. In *Caligari*, however, Kuhns cautions that "here the Schrei has become so entangled in its graphic reflections in the set designs that it loses something of its human-centered emotional power (Kuhns 136). Lotte Eisner, meanwhile, deemed their stylized acting as "dictated by the setting," in contrast to the other performers who remain "locked in a naturalistic style" (Eisner 25). Whether praise or criticism, by all accounts only Caligari and Cesare (and their unnamed counterparts) effectively stylize their performance to be of a piece with the set. Through their stylized movement, they both set themselves apart from the other characters and establish a unique relationship to their surroundings.⁷⁹

Crucially, these analyses attribute that transformation to the actors, not to the characters or the film's diegesis. Eisner, for example, after meticulously describing Werner Krauss and

⁷⁸ I would also add that Francis is subject to the choral operation of narration, which at various moments allows him to occupy a similar middle ground between audience and actor.

⁷⁹ This is an oversimplification- other characters also engage the choreographic relationship and their performances similarly work to constitute the setting, albeit more fleetingly. One is the anonymous Raskolnikov-type character who murdered his landlady but was mistakenly arrested for killing the town clerk, one of Caligari's victims. The image of him sitting shackled in the jail house is enough for the spectator to realize that this no one could be anyone. Another is Jane, a "woman in white" who sleepwalks through each chapter of this dissertation in different forms and guises.

Conrad Veidt's "reduction of gesture" and the affinity between their brusque movements and the "broken angles of the sets," concludes that Cesare is "detached from his everyday ambience" (Eisner 25). In other words, the actor merged with the set, while the character became "abstract" (Eisner 25). The figure becomes more legible as a performer than as a character. In this way, the stylization of the body exceeds narrative function and produces a different kind of presence—one that cannot be fully subsumed into metaphor or role.

The stylization of the body and its movement that exceeds poesis is symptomatic of choral figuration and marks a different logic of relation. These moments reorient attention from character psychology to the performer's physicality, from symbolic meaning to social modes of attachment. The tendency to name the actor rather than the character reflects this displacement: as with Althusser's use of "experience," the dramatic persona no longer suffices to account for the body's role in structuring appearance or effects. The actor's name enters analysis not as a biographical reference but as a sign of the body's refusal to disappear into the role. In this way, the choral emerges as a surplus, neither fully representational nor fully expressive, that connects performer and background through contiguity rather than intention or expression.

While the place in *Caligari* appears already imbued with life, actively menacing and shaping perspective, "Cesare" and "Caligari" are extensions of the place itself. The connection between the body and the background anthropomorphizes the setting into the named figure. In what de Man, in his "outrageous" essay on Nietzsche and Baudelaire, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric," calls the "metonymic moment" of anthropomorphism—the giving of a name to a substance—"Cesare" is the background hypostasized as character.⁸⁰ But even as the place becomes body, the body becomes place, sculpted into the jagged architecture of the background.

⁸⁰ Barbara Johnson's term, from her essay "Anthropomorphism in Lyric and Law" (B. Johnson 206).

This bidirectional exchange directly addresses the simultaneous overlap and difference that de Man elaborates between metonymy and anthropomorphism. On one side, a name is given to a substance, freezing the tropological chain as it “culminates” in the “singleness of a proper name,” asking us to perceive “Cesare” as a self-sustaining, individuated entity; on the other, the body forfeits the name (which never fully contained it) as it is absorbed into the setting.

“Cesare,” then, both identifies and effaces the body. He could be anyone, or anywhere: body and background co-constitute each other through contiguity, not resemblance, establishing a metonymic chain. Stated one way: this place is dangerous—it kills through its shadows. “Cesare,” in this reading, is the menace of the place made mobile. Stated another: “Cesare” remains bound to the plot and appears as Caligari’s instrument, himself a product of the same spatial logic. In both versions, the metonymic movement cuts in both directions: the name animates the body, but the body is also stripped of name as it becomes the space that surrounds it. This reciprocal structure reflects the doubleness de Man elaborates between metonymy and anthropomorphism. On one side, the name “Cesare” momentarily halts the tropological drift, “culminating” in the “singleness of a proper name” that sustains the illusion of identity. On the other, the named figure is displaced into the environment, losing the specificity the name was meant to confer. In this second motion, the body becomes the setting—it is “naturalized,” in de Man’s term—and the name no longer attaches. As “anyone” converges with “anywhere,” the mediating body is produced as a performative, anonymous figure.

For Siegfried Kracauer this was the figure of totalitarianism, and, citing Hans Janowitz, one of the script writers, Cesare specifically as “the common man who, under the pressure of compulsory military service, is drilled to kill and to be killed” (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 65). As has been well documented, “the expressionist style” of the film prompted

Kracauer to discuss the staging and architecture as “phenomena of the soul” (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 71). The setting, and Caligari and Cesare’s enmeshment in it, work to externalize collective psychological events and movements. For Kracauer, the collective was formed within national stakes, which leads him to a diagnosis of the specifically German soul and psyche. His ultimate thesis, as indicated by the book’s title, proposes a kind of master-narrative of the German soul “wavering between tyranny and chaos,” such that the series of tyrants portrayed in German cinema foreshadow the rise of Hitler.

Many have criticized his position on historical and methodological grounds, which amply demonstrate a lack of specificity in his historicization of aesthetic movements, and a lack of concordance between those movements and any definitive, social, let alone national, body.⁸¹ Elsaesser also convincingly argues that the specific aesthetic techniques of Weimar-era films, such as the ambiguous causal links within sequences, complicate Kracauer’s “structural convergence between story and history, dramatic conflict and social conflict” (Elsaesser 30). Put directly, the film cannot be read as an allegory because the system of signification is not sustained throughout the work, and such a conflation of “story and history” ascribes too tidy a correlation between historic and aesthetic phenomena, anyway. In both Elsaesser and Dietrich Scheunemann’s analyses, the film’s lack of any narrative authority and the seemingly endless number of “displacements,” “doublings,” and “repressions” work against reading *Caligari* as merely a figure of insane authority and Cesare as a mere tool.

Yet if these disfigurations resist coherent allegory, they do not wholly erase the meanings the film temporarily assembles. The ending’s frame tale may undermine Francis’s narrative

⁸¹ See Thomas Elsaesser’s *Weimar Cinema and After*, as well as chapters by Elsaesser and Dietrich Scheunemann in the anthology *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives* edited by Scheunemann. Kracauer’s argument has also fallen into disfavor since the discovery of the original film script in 1977, which proved the presence of the frame tale before the director Robert Wiene’s involvement.

authority, but it does not fully dispel the sense that the doctor may still be “Caligari.” That is, even seeing our narrator as a patient in the asylum does not conclusively dispel all doubts that the chief doctor is not the murderous Caligari. The film does not differentiate truth from falsehood so much as work through regimes of plausibility and ideological pressure.

In this light, the question is not whether Caligari “really is” a tyrant or Cesare a victim, but how the film positions these figures in relation to the spectator’s own ideological attachments. When Kracauer, citing Hans Janowitz, identifies Cesare as “the common man who, under the pressure of compulsory military service, is drilled to kill and to be killed,” he points to a historically charged site of identification that is at once impersonal and overdetermined (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 65). Janowitz’s history of the script’s genesis and treatment in the production process has been widely documented, and many specific aspects have been disputed, but relatively little has been written about this outlandish point. The suggestion seems extravagant: how can such an extreme figure, one whose appearance and movement mark him as wholly exceptional, whose name is contingent, whose body resists identification, represent the common man? And yet that is precisely the ideological function I wish to pursue.

Rather than treat this formulation as a misreading, I take it seriously as a symptom of the film’s performative operations. What Kracauer identifies in political terms, I understand as the choral function of Cesare’s anonymity. Cesare becomes “everyman” not by virtue of resemblance or psychological identification, but through the metonymic pull that aligns the anonymous body with a collective place. This transformation from named character to anonymized figure crystallizes the ideological work of the chorus. Cesare is both himself and a site of substitution; his body becomes the medium through which the audience is not reflected, but “enlisted,” to literalize Althusser’s terminology.

Notably, “You must become Caligari” was also the choral expression that flooded Berlin in the months before the film’s 1920 premiere as the centerpiece of the film’s massive advertising campaign. As Kracauer highlighted early on, the campaign was thorough and “puzzling.” The posters provided no details about the film, no cast information, or even the title of the film (Thompson 138). These posters were everywhere and successfully lured a tremendous audience to the film’s opening run.⁸² In some versions of the poster, hands stretch up towards the words from the vantage point of the spectator, as if the passerby were grasping towards the command (if the command was meant for “you,” that is). Other versions may have simply presented the stylized lettering. The film’s producer, Eric Pommer, remembers some versions featuring Conrad Veidt (note: not Cesare, but the actor), although this account has been questioned (Thompson 137). The commanding posters clearly worked to attract a particular kind of consumer, perhaps one intrigued by the Modernist forms apparent from the lettering, or by the mystery of Modernism’s sudden overlap with a popular form. However, the sliding interpellation out of the film and onto the walls of Berlin also creates an odd symmetry between the spectator and the nameless doctor whose hands will ultimately (also) come to grasp at the fateful command. Even before encountering the film, the audience is drawn into the logic of interpellation. By addressing the passerby as “you,” the campaign enacts the same interpellative logic that, within the film, transforms the nameless doctor into Caligari. The symmetry is not allegorical—the audience does not identify with the doctor—but structural. The call has already passed through them. Like the doctor, they become spectators only by submitting to the role. Their desire to see the film retroactively mirrors the doctor’s desire to become Caligari.

⁸² Stefan Andriopoulos has placed the film and its advertisement in terms of hypnosis, a rising fear of hypnosis induced crime, and the proliferation of advertisement in the 20th century (Andriopoulos).

The spectator, however, accedes to the command to become Caligari, but catachrestically finds themselves as Cesare. These two choral figures—Caligari and Cesare—are not symmetrical counterparts but steps in a metonymic sequence. Another poster, still more widely circulated and more enduring, also relied on the second-person address. Across the Atlantic: “I Want YOU for the U.S. Army.” Based on a similar British poster featuring Lord Kitchener, the famous image of Uncle Sam and his finger-pointing direct address first appeared on an army recruitment poster in 1917 (Capozzola 3).⁸³ The US had just declared war on Germany, and the Uncle Sam recruitment campaign worked in tandem with the Selective Service Act, the nation’s first mass draft, also passed that year. The posters were incredibly effective, so that the combination of obligatory service and ideological interpellation yielded millions of new conscripts and forged “new forms of citizenship.” Historian Christopher Capozzola speculates on the anti-German tenor of the war-time campaign, also citing the prohibition of Germans living in the US, known as enemy aliens, from serving in the armed forces. In essence, the “I want YOU” interpellation was perhaps aimed at everyone except Germans. The point is not whether *Caligari* intentionally echoes wartime propaganda, but rather that the repetition of “you” operates metonymically, sliding between anti-German military recruitment, the film’s advertising campaign, and its internal scene of interpellation. These adjacent steps are not mere resemblance but catachrestic imbrications that distort prior significations, and granted Caligari’s choral figure a distinctly national and militaristic charge. These overlapping “you’s”—propagandistic, cinematic, commercial—do not simply resemble one another. They expose how anonymity, command, and collectivity converge metonymically in the production of subject positions, across aesthetic and political forms and in the construction of a modern chorus.

⁸³ The image was first used separately, slightly earlier, in July, 1916 on the cover of *Leslie’s*.

De Man's passage also sheds light on this second performative step, how the trope generates a particular ideology. His initial analysis pries open Nietzsche's famous line from *On Truth and Lying*, "What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms," and shows that truth is not simply subject to the disruption of rhetoric, but also to the ascription of a name. His argument thus hinges on anthropomorphism as "not just a trope" (its metaphoric and metonymic moments) but as "an identification on the level of substance." This doubleness of anthropomorphism may contain the seeds of the performative (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 241). He hints at this possibility as early as the first paragraph.

What interests us primarily in the poetic and philosophical versions of this transaction, in this give-and-take between reason and imagination, is not, at this point, the critical schemes that deny certainty considered in themselves, but their disruption by patterns that cannot be reassimilated to these schemes, but that are nevertheless, *if not produced*, then at least brought into focus by the distortions the disruption inflicts upon them. (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 240)(emphasis added)

Restated: the patterns that disrupt critical schemes inflict distortions that bring into focus, if not produce, themselves. Yet again, in other words, it is not that rhetoric simply denies certainty but that it performatively generates the very configurations they appear to interrupt. What he intriguingly calls in the above passage "patterns," includes rhetoric, but must be expanded to include the double meaning of anthropomorphism, which exceeds and acts upon the tropological. In case my parsing of the sentence makes the self-reflexive quality of patterns potentially producing themselves appear tautological, we can recall that this is precisely the aporia de Man had already found between the constative and the performative. There, he found rhetoric to be

both performative and a system of tropes that “deconstructs its own performance” (de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 131). Interestingly, that earlier exploration of the performative also turned on a metonym.⁸⁴ In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, de Man returns to the question of rhetorical figuration and begins to consider how tropes might generate not just meaning, but ideological “production.” Restating Nietzsche’s famous line from *On Truth and Lying*, he writes: “Truth is a trope; a trope generates a norm or value; this value (or ideology) is no longer true. It is true that tropes are the producers of ideologies that are no longer true” (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 242). Taking de Man at his word, he is less interested in the fact that the ideologies are ultimately “no longer true” than the sheer fact that they are produced.

Also telling is the way his deconstructed version of Nietzsche begins as a syllogism but then gives way to a metonymic contiguity that pushes from norm to ideology: “a norm or value; this value (or ideology).” The catachrestic aspect of metonymy, or specifically, the metonymic moment of anthropomorphism, moves through the “or,” the “;” and the “(or...)”. These seemingly sideways steps mark the procession from norm to value, value to ideology—a progression that must remain present in the culminating term, “ideology,” for it to have full force. The performative production that interests de Man lurks precisely in these obscure grammatological shufflings, such that his method replicates the point he seeks to make: through the metonym, the trope gives way to the performative production of ideology.

Hanging in the balance of “Cesare’s” incorporation/naturalization with the setting and emergence as an anonymous, choral figure is none other than this ideological production. What de Man identifies as the metonymic drift from trope to ideology—its “grammatological shufflings”—is precisely what *Caligari* stages in the transition from unnamed body to

⁸⁴ De Man analyzes “the Marion episode” in Rousseau’s *Confessions*, in *Allegories of Reading Figural Language*.

anonymous subject. The transition from the personalized address of “I Want YOU” to the anonymous figure of the German soldier is not a collapse of meaning but the metonymic logic that underwrites ideological enlistment. Cesare is the anonymous surplus through which ideology materializes.

Kracauer’s seminal analysis is all the more valuable *not* because it historicizes the film accurately but because it identifies the ideological relay that *Caligari* both absorbs and animates. In that conjuncture, in which *Caligari* mediated US and German relations, the film’s choral figures drew on the nationalistic, militaristic interpellations already present to fuel its own choral procedures within the film. The figure of Cesare as a “common man” conscripted to kill is compelling not as a reflection of national character but as an expression of the film’s own choral logic; that is, it names the very apparatus of militarization, anonymity, and the anonymous “you” that the film choreographs into being. Kracauer, in his diagnosis, becomes one more spectator “enlisted” into the scene, describing the specific terms of his recruitment in that historical moment.

If Cesare and *Caligari* blur into the background to become choral figures, the voice that enables their incorporation must also be understood chorally. The anonymous address that recruits them does not issue from a singular subject, but reverberates through the environment across image, script, and architecture. What emerges is a chorus: spatially embedded yet plurally dispersed and indexed by the force of address. This shift from interpellating agent as embodied form to discursive calling and back to an anonymous body requires a more complex account of materiality itself. What does it mean for rhetoric to produce “actual” effects? How might “tropological disruption,” as de Man describes it, translate into a performative event? What

follows stages a collision between figuration and ideology, to reconsider what it means for a voice to interpellate, to produce a subject within ideology.

For de Man, “what we call ideology” is precisely the figure as an enabling materiality of truth. The figure does not simply undermine the relationship between mind and material reality, as Terry Eagleton’s might rephrase de Man’s stance, but is at once a construction and deconstruction of that bridge. The material figures of Cesare and Caligari realize (*verwirklichen*) an ideology that is itself not true; the figures at once disrupt an equation of materiality as truth and materialize ideas that are not true in themselves, they have the value of truth but are not “the truth.”

Michael Sprinker has pointed out the fundamental overlap between de Man and Althusser’s conceptions of ideology, and how the production of ideology through the trope works as an interpellation (Sprinker). As opposed to the prior notion of ideology as false consciousness, Althusser argues that ideology is the system of meanings and representations through which people make sense of their lives. It is the imaginary relation to the real social relations that undergird the exploitative system. It is not a form of consciousness, but a lived relation, and is in fact largely unconscious. As for Gramsci, it serves a “practico-social function” and an “organic” role in society (Althusser, *For Marx* 233).⁸⁵ Ideology only exists insofar as it is performed and the individuals who perform it become subjects within and through that performance.

⁸⁵ A key difference between Gramsci and Althusser lies in the status of ideology and the possibility of stepping outside it. For Gramsci, all thought is historically situated and embedded in ideology; even philosophy, including Marxism, operates within a hegemonic formation. Althusser, by contrast, and to the dismay of many who read him in the post ’68 era, insists that Marxist theory, because it constitutes a science, can in fact break from ideology and produce knowledge of the social totality that is not itself ideological. This “epistemological break” grounds his broader distinction between ideology and science. By the same logic, a revolutionary party, though it may take the form of an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), does not function as one. Its aim is not the reproduction of existing social relations, but their transformation. It is thus situated outside the ideological field that structures state power, even if it engages that field tactically.

This double logic of materiality—the material base and the materialization of ideology—remains an aporia in Althusser’s work. In de Man, this paradox takes the form of a rhetorical structure: materialism names both the trope and the trope’s passage into something that appears to “occur” historically. The chorus “figures” this passage. It is an aesthetic construction within representation that also metonymically mediates a relation to an outside. The chorus is not an origin but a hinge between the symbolic system and the material configuration of bodies.

Butler refers to this contradiction in de Man’s work as a “literalization of the trope of performativity.” Even as he insists that tropes are not performative in themselves, Butler tracks how de Man speculatively imagines a point at which figuration gives way to the performative. In his late lecture, “Kant and Schiller,” de Man marks the progression from cognition/constative language to the performative but describes the end of this irreversible process as “something which is no longer a cognition but which is to some extent an occurrence, which has the materiality of something that actually happens, that actually occurs” (de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* 132). He then clarifies that this is in itself an elaboration of the performative, a kind of performative act within language that makes the tropological “disruption” of cognition possible and constitutes an opening in the otherwise closed, referential system of tropes. His repetition of “actually”—not “actual”—signals a profound hesitation. He wants to affirm the structure of figuration as culminating in an “event” without claiming it as ontological fact.

Nor does the performative function remain a performative as a separate class of language; it is continually “recuperated” and “reinscribed” back into the cognitive system from which it emerged. It is a “super-performative;” a self-referential ability of the trope to critique its own epistemology. This conflict between state and occurrence, the performative force of language and the passage into the performative, has led Derrida to suggest that de Man’s materialism is a

“materiality” without “matter,” a judgment that I also find confirmed in the naming of an entity that also remains unnamed, and the giving of a face to that which remains faceless (Derrida 350) (de Man, *Resistance to Theory* 44). This is not necessarily a criticism on Derrida’s part, but it is a warning. The danger (or seduction) of this formulation lies in its reliance on the fact of occurrence, on something having “actually happened,” without specifying how or where that materialization takes place. It becomes a kind of rhetorical miracle, theological in its structure, where the effect of ideology seems to occur but cannot be situated in social practice.

Against this theological drift—a materiality that “happens” without place, body, or structure—Spivak proposes a different model of inscription. She locates a catachrestic moment in Marx, where the “value form” is “contentless yet not pure form”; it “cannot appear but must be presupposed to grasp the mechanics of the production of the world” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 13). The value-form is neither empirical substance nor conceptual essence. Like de Man’s “actually,” it names not an ontological event but, as Spivak writes, “the possibility of the possibility of mediation” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 13). What cannot appear nonetheless produces effects: value circulates, ideology takes hold, subjects are recruited. The shift here is methodological: Spivak does not resolve the aporia of materialism by grounding it in ontology, but by reframing it as a problem of textuality. “Value must be read through textuality,” she writes, which means not literary form per se, but the historical organization of difference, repetition, and displacement that structure how meaning is assigned and lived.

Cesare and Caligari are thus not “examples” of ideology. As Spivak might put it, their figures articulate the “possibility of the possibility” of ideological inscription. They represent while remaining anonymous. They are not subjects; they are the figures through which

subjectivity is choreographed. Neither form, name, nor face, de Man searches for a limit of the trope, where the figure “actually” materializes into “what we call” ideology. Cesare, whose name is provisional and whose appearance never stabilizes into character, gives this limit its figural form. As the name is withheld, the body takes on the burden of appearance. To return to the quote from de Man above: they have the *value* of truth but are not the truth. What appears is not “truth,” but a value—produced, performed, circulated. This will also be the choreography of interpellation: not a theological a moment of naming, but an anonymous hinge in the ideological structure, where the figural logic of ideology turns on the impersonal collectivity of the chorus.

In the “street scene” of interpellation, Althusser captures this performative moment of something actually happening as the inauguration of the subject. He famously invites his reader to imagine the transformation of concrete individuals into concrete subjects by way of interpellation, which

can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace, everyday hailing, by (or not by) the police: “Hey, you there!” If, to offer readers the most concrete sort of concreteness, we suppose that the theoretical scene we are imagining happens in the street, the hailed individual turns around. With this simple 180-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. (Althusser, *Reproduction* 191)⁸⁶

The individual, both recognizing himself as being summoned and heeding the call, becomes a subject in the grammatical/ontological as well as in the political/theological sense: he is both

⁸⁶ As Warren Montag has noted, “interpellation” poses a vexing translation problem. Most editions follow Ben Brewster’s original solution of variously translating the French *interpellation* as “interpellation” or “hailing.” The former functions primarily as a neologism and captures Althusser’s specific and particular usage, while “hailing,” which does not appear in the French text at all and is not exactly implied by the word’s possible significations allows for easier assimilation into the quotidian register of the actions Althusser describes. It is also worth noting that Althusser at times substitutes the words “recruit” and “constitute” for interpellation, which can serve as helpful indications of what he intended. In that vein, I find his early use of “enlist” in his “Piccolo Teatro” essay to describe the spectator’s participation in the ideological world of the play an appropriate addition.

dominated and able to participate in subjective (social) life. Althusser himself seems perplexed why this system works so thoroughly, why “the one hailed (*l’interpellé*) always recognizes that he really was the one hailed (*interpellait*)” (Althusser, *Reproduction* 191). It is nearly deterministic in its functioning and, as in the anonymous doctor’s interpellation as Caligari in the final scene of Act V, precludes from the outset the possibility of resistance.

The scene begins with the anonymous doctor running down the street towards the camera. He pauses for a moment downstage center, as the staging of the scene tempts me to say. He clutches Caligari’s book in one arm and with the other offers a vague wave toward the camera, as if seeing something in front of him that we cannot. He then turns away and takes a few rapid but lumbering steps away until the text appears above him, visible to both the viewer and the doctor. “DU MUST CALIGARI WERDEN” He reaches toward the command and staggers vaguely in its direction, seemingly half attracted and half repulsed by it.⁸⁷ Again the command appears, and then again, more and more quickly, until the Doctor turns around and runs back the way he came. This interpellation scene presents a “tropological inauguration” of the subject, to use Butler’s rephrasing of Althusser, playing off the Greek etymology of *tropos* as turn. The doctor, at this moment “a figure,” heeds the call and “turns.” In Althusser’s words this is to say that he performs the “180-degree physical conversion” through which “he becomes a subject” (Althusser, *Reproduction* 191). Like the other “practiced rituals of everyday life,” the specificity of the turn, the performance of the body as a trope, enacts a particular choreography, not simply an obedience. At the same time, the doubleness of Butler’s “trope” parallels

⁸⁷ I do not comment on the music because it has changed and been recorded various times. Nor do we have the original compilation score. The film was accompanied live at its German and US premieres but with different scores. Both seem to have relied on a Wagnerian leitmotif system, assigning themes to the principal characters. For further discussion see Julie Hubbert.

Althusser's "subjectivation," such that it is only through subjection (the turn) that the individual (figure) becomes a subject (can express).

It is not clear in this scene from where or whom the words originate. In the ideal, they seem to be enunciated by the mystical "Caligari," the name itself, interpellating the next person/body it will recruit. At the same time, the voice/writing is nonidentifiable. Like in Althusser's "example" of Christian interpellation, it is nearly the voice of God.⁸⁸ There, the "street scene" gives way into a "divine performative" that explicitly names the subject and fixes them materially and socially— "This is your place in the world! This is what you must do!" or even, "This is who you are; you are Peter!" (Althusser, *Reproduction* 194). The voice of the Divine, like the Symbolic for Lacan, to which Althusser's conception of subject formation is deeply indebted, names as it interpellates. It sets the very terms through which the subject will actualize itself.⁸⁹

In this case, the name "Caligari" forms the subject as such, allowing the nameless doctor to act and express as Caligari. The name nearly operates as a dramatic role, returning us to the discourse of named "characters," not as the Romantic fullness and presence of self but as the persona which performs certain actions within a narrative. However, as Butler persuasively

⁸⁸ To clarify: I argue, on the contrary, that the structure of interpellation need not depend on divine authority or naming and may operate instead through anonymity, through the diffuse and impersonal logics of attachment that the chorus makes visible.

⁸⁹ As in the street scene, the subject "recognizes" themselves as being called and obeys. For Althusser, as for Lacan, there is a fundamental misrecognition inherent in recognition. For Lacan, this occurs during the mirror stage and inaugurates the subject into the imaginary. As a child looks in the mirror, the parents and everyone else exclaim "There you are! That's you!" leading to an identification with its image which is also an alienation from itself. The identification with the image, imbued with the desire for an unattainable future plenitude, a constitutive lack, is itself a misrecognition because "I" am separated from the body and projected onto the whole image in the mirror. For Althusser, where ideology makes up our imaginary relations to the relations of production, the subject similarly misrecognizes themselves. They both mistake the imaginary for the real, and the image of themselves of their actual self. The very terms of ideological recognition, like the projected expectations of the parents' desires, the Symbolic imposition of a libidinal economy, create an ideological structure that at once enables and debilitates the subject. We identify in order to act, and those actions consolidate the subject as such.

argues, identification with “the name” is not determining. Her argument focuses our attention on the “ideological reach and power of the call,” and thus the limits of the name and naming practices. If we assume that we are absolutely the name we are called, that there is no play, or, in my vocabulary, anonymity, within the name, “we make the error of overriding that alterity in us that can only be covered over by an ideological capture” (Butler, “Theatrical Machines” 34). For Butler, whose conception of interpellation takes flight from Austin’s performatives as speech acts, this form of nomination constitutes the performative moment of interpellation. In *Caligari*, we might say that the introduction of “you must become” rather than “you are” also implies the kind of processual change (in Butler’s view an iterative development) that institutes the name over time and allows for spaces of anonymity within the name. It is not clear, for example, when the nameless doctor becomes *Caligari*, or whether, in some sense, he was *Caligari* all along without knowing it himself.

The surprising aspect of Butler’s argument, particularly for her Marxist readers, is that this idealist construction of interpellation as divine nomination sets the precedent for her reading of Althusser’s more “concrete” scenes. Instead of privileging the series of social interactions, such as handshakes and all the gestures comprising familiar social life, she argues that “the divine power of naming structures the theory of interpellation that accounts for the ideological constitution of the subject” (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 110–11). For Butler, the policeman in the street scene is therefore a representation of the Symbolic, the Law, and merges seamlessly with Christian interpellation where God is unmistakably such, and interpellates through nomination. While Balibar, for example, has tended to reproduce Althusser’s own subtle if repeated distinction between “interpellation” proper and an interpellation that is a “nomination,” by reading the scenes in the opposing order Butler raises the stakes of “the

name.”⁹⁰ This reading allows her to elucidate the role of recognition and the Symbolic, and then create space within the name for the alterity of the subject, the anonymity that allows for the “bad subject.”⁹¹ This approach also carries at least two risks. First, it overly directs attention to the subjective behavior of the interpellated individual. Once she asserts the limits of the interpellation, the question becomes how the individual might respond otherwise.⁹² Second, as Balibar points out in his brief critique of Butler, interpellation becomes more a question of the reiteration of repression than the reproduction of exploitation. This shift reflects a broader analytic tendency to frame subject-formation in terms of discursive subjection or psychic constraint, rather than the ongoing organization of labor and life under capitalism. For Althusser, ideology works to reproduce the relations of production, such that “reproduction” is not simply repetition or iteration. The repression implicit in the power relations of interpellation cannot be

⁹⁰ Butler follows Michel Pêcheux here. He writes, “The main thesis is that the interpellation of the individual as the subject of his discourse is achieved by an identification of the subject with the discursive formation which dominates him, an identification in which, simultaneously, meaning is produced as evident for the subject and the subject is ‘produced as cause of himself’” (Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology* 187).

⁹¹ “Recognition” shifts our attention away from the action and the scene of interpellation, or even the felicity of the Symbolic ordering and naming, and towards a question of “identification:” the delivery of the sent message and the possibility that the message is not received. For Butler, “*identification* names that process by which ideology reproduces more or less consistently and where it deviates from its apparent goals” (Butler, “Theatrical Machines” 26). The very question of recognition and misrecognition introduces a slippage that the “bad” political subject can exploit. The Imaginary recognition of the specular image as the self, the “you” as the constitutive “I,” is not guaranteed, allowing for the possibility of “bad subjects” who do not heed the call, or who refuse to recognize themselves as being called in the first place. “Interpellation *hardly ever* misses its mark,” Althusser tells us (Althusser, *Reproduction* 191). In addition, as present in Butler’s readings of Kafka’s *The Penal Colony*, each repetition introduces the possibility for a misfire.

⁹² The potential for “bad subjects” is one of the central disagreements between Butler and Balibar’s attempts to theorize political action against hegemonic ideology. In Balibar’s view, and citing the Freudian underpinnings of Althusser’s identification, the only possibility outside of any interpellation is madness. “There is “freedom,” of course, but only in the sense of *shifting from one identification, one interpellation, to another*... There is no “anarchic” freedom in the sense of living, thinking, and acting in the void, the absence of every interpellation, every ideal, that Freud calls an ideal object of love, and Althusser a “subject” with a capital S” (Balibar, “Althusser’s Dramaturgy” 13). Bad subjects, in his view, are perhaps more “trapped” by ideology than those who overtly heed the call. We can see the risks of abjuring all identifications, of an existence outside of subjectivity, in Cesare’s “anarchic moment.” His unattributable impulse to *not* kill Jane, and instead carry her Tarzan-like away, quickly leads to his death. His body is found shortly after in a woods just outside the city. To Butler’s point, Cesare’s fate demonstrates the perils which potentially await those who resist interpellation. Another issue with Balibar’s argument is the ambiguous role of “revolution.” As in his earlier suggestion of an “interpellation *out of* ideology,” “revolutionary” is both an interpellation within ideology as well as a possible escape from it.

divorced from the question of exploitation in a “material” sense. At its most basic level, for Althusser, interpellation is the reproduction of ideology within and through subjectivity.⁹³ The figures which populate Althusser’s scenes are not simply symbols of repressive apparatuses, but also concrete individuals.

Looking at the interpellation scene of *Caligari* through this lens reveals that while the doctor may have arrived at this scene because of his desire, the scene itself does not present a desiring subject purely attracted to its object. It would be thus hasty to wholly attribute his

⁹³ An example of interpellation perhaps so obvious that Althusser himself did not find it necessary to state at the time is interpellation (of a worker) as a worker. More precisely, and again following Spivak, what is dramatized is not the transformation into the figure of “the worker” as such, but the moment in which labor-power becomes intelligible as labor-power: the recruitment of the subject not into a role but into the particular condition of being value-producing. An example can be found in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, when Paul D finally reaches Trenton, New Jersey. “Moving down a busy street full of whitepeople who needed no explanation for his presence, the glances he got had to do with his disgusting clothes and unforgivable hair. Still, nobody raised an alarm. Then came the miracle. Standing in a street in front of a row of brick houses, he heard a whiteman call him (“Say there! Yo!”) to help unload two trunks from a coach cab. Afterward the whiteman gave him a coin. Paul D walked around with it for hours—nor sure what it could buy (a suit? A meal? A horse?) and if anybody would sell him anything. His first earned purchase made him glow, never mind the turnips were withered dry. That was when he decided that to eat, walk and sleep anywhere was life as good as it got” (Morrison 317–18). This is not simply a scene of employment; it is a scene in which Paul D is conscripted into the ideological structure that retroactively produces him as “worker.” This particular interpellation is perhaps more important because of the misidentification of the recognition. That is, Paul D knows the interpellation is meant for him and he heeds the call, but he is unaware of what social relation he is being called into, or what subjectivity it will produce. His “recognition” is not epistemic but affective: a glow, a turn, a satisfaction that exceeds comprehension.

This scene of recognition differs from the subject’s self-recognition (as identification) within the functioning of the symbolic. The point is evident when we contrast it to Lacan’s elaboration of the two-phase movement of the symbolic. Playing off Lukacs, he writes “phase one, the man who works at the level of production in our society considers himself as belonging to the proletariat; phase two, in the name of belonging to it, he joins in a general strike” (Lacan 55). For Althusser, we might conjecture that there is also a “phase zero” operating between “the man who works at the level of production” and his ability to “consider himself as belonging to the proletariat.” Before any act of political recognition or class affiliation, there is the inscription of labor-power as intelligible, as useful, as disposable. There is a fine grey area of ideology/interpellation just between the reproduction of the productive forces and the reproduction of the relations of production. Althusser anxiously insists on the specifically political importance of this point, “for it is *in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that the reproduction of the qualification of labor-power is ensured*” (Althusser, *Reproduction* 52). In other words, the subject does not yet “know” themselves as worker, nor are they called by name; but the body is already positioned within the ideological apparatus as capable of producing surplus-value. The identification with a name, consciously or not, must be delayed. Prior to that recognition there is still an internal action of ideological reproduction bridging “forces of production” and “relations of production” that qualifies, or recruits, labor power as such.

Paul D’s ambivalence—his elation at “earning,” his uncertainty about the value of the coin, his inability to imagine what it might purchase—is not a failure to recognize himself in the name “worker;” it is the affective proof that he has already been interpellated as labor-power, thereby bridging the gap between being physically capable of work and adopting a new place in the relations of production.

subsequent transformation to that desire. Althusser similarly claims that the obedient turn upon being interpellated cannot be “explained by ‘guilt feelings’ alone.” Although a “guilty conscience,” like desire, may be operative and precede the subject’s entrance into the scene, or even their disposition to accede to a call, it does not explain the coercive functioning of the interpellation. At the risk of imposing de Man onto Butler, we might say that no matter which way the figure turns it remains within the trope, ensuring both its own reproduction and the production of an ideology. Whether towards or away, the dance continues. The call’s first iteration seems to originate in the doctor’s own desire— “I must become Caligari”—but the interpellative “you” suddenly dominates the subjective “I.” While matters of conscience may be subjective productions of the “I” (where the “I” is in turn produced, psychically and corporeally, by the systems of repression which regulate, if not produce, desire) and may even address some questions of how a subject responds to the call, the action of interpellation functions first through the second-person address.

Although anonymity has been more commonly linked through the unattributable 3rd person (“it was said”),⁹⁴ this interpellative “you” is also anonymous insofar as it does not name as it hails. As Althusser points out, daily recognitions of ourselves as ideological subjects function through this layer of anonymity, which, like every material instance of anonymity, operates under the assumption that the anonymous subject also has a name. “The fact of knowing that you ‘have’ a name of your own thanks to which you are recognized as a unique subject, even if I do not know what your name is” (Althusser, *Reproduction* 190). A still more extreme case, such as in a tragic chorus, would be to say that while “you” have a name elsewhere, insofar as you are part of the chorus here, you do not: I know that you have a name, but in this space

⁹⁴ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*.

(which we are creating and which creates us), you can only be hailed through/as an anonymous “you.” This performative moment of interpellation, which in fact precedes interpellation as nomination, occurs through this “you.” These two performative moments often work together: the police interpellate/hail and then demand identification papers.⁹⁵ While nomination invokes the reign of a Symbolic order, and indeed the subject’s saturation with that order, the second-person address relies on a mysterious openness which admits a layer of anonymity. Similarly, while the demanding of papers, like other forms of nomination, are repressive (both as an exercise in authority and as an iteration of identity assignment) this first performative moment of interpellation is neither based on identification nor is repressive in itself.

Returning this ambiguity of the concrete interpellating figure to Althusser’s text directs our attention not to the named speaker, “the policeman,” but rather to the anonymous parenthetical beside it: that interpellation is performed “by (or not by) the police.” In an already “open” text, Althusser insists repeatedly on this particular opening. In a later unpublished essay, collected as Appendix II in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, he again writes of interpellation “by the police (or other)” (Althusser, *Reproduction* 264). The “(or not),” or the “(or other)” destabilize the identity of the hailing agent, such that every interpellator is both themselves and an (or other). If a reader were searching the text for a self-sustaining character, or a firm identity on which to hang the costume and append the name of “interpellator,” Althusser clearly does not provide one; he retracts the promise as soon as he offers it. Such a reader might wonder whether the interpellation is the same—whether the same subject is produced—if the person hailing were

⁹⁵ “Hailing as an everyday practice governed by a precise ritual takes a spectacular form in the police practice of hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’ (It functions in very similar forms in interpellating or summoning at school.) Police hailing, however, unlike other kinds of hailing, is repressive: ‘Your papers!’ ‘Papers’ means above all *identity* papers, frontal photo of one’s face, first and middle names, last name, date of birth, home address, profession, citizenship, etc” (Althusser, *Reproduction* 190).

in fact not the police. In that case, the search for a firm identity would lead in one of two directions: to ignore the potential disruption of identity and focus on who “actually” did the hailing, or to consider the subjective response of the individual who turns—why did they turn? who did the turning figure expect to be hailing them? Among these two, overlapping paths, the former leads us towards the ISA’s which materialize ideology as a consolidation of the ruling class’s hegemony, the latter towards the subject’s inner motivations, or perhaps their “guilty conscience” which prompted them to submit to the interpellation to begin with, and the entanglement of these two options, leading us towards the functioning of the Symbolic.

A third way of interpreting the scene, however, is to admit the parenthetical as equal to the name and equally constitutive of any interpellation. Althusser insists that he is offering his reader “the most concrete sort of concreteness,” but he builds into that concreteness a fundamental non-identity of the interpellating agent. Somehow an anonymous contingency is constitutive of the interpellator: by (or not by) X. The nameless doctor’s interpellation by (or not by) the name “Caligari” simultaneously fixes and releases the identity of the speaking agent. Most directly, the call visually appears as an expression, or “exscription” of the place itself. It materializes as inseparable from the setting, both part of it and emerging from it. Like the trope which exceeds and acts upon itself, deconstructing its own terms, the source of the voice is anonymized even as the name is assigned. Like the chorus, the trope of interpellation in its enunciation is a convergence of person and place; and like the chorus, whose members are also always themselves (or other), the interpellator also enacts a form of “becoming anonymous.” “Caligari (or other)” is the name assumed by the chorus, which in this moment is none other than the place itself. That is, on one hand the name becomes “mystical,” and anthropomorphizes the setting, imbuing it with life; on the other hand, the chorus becomes “incorporeal”—not in the

sense of becoming ideal, but by naturalizing into the place of the chorus. In some sense, as the words appear over and over again all around the nameless doctor, anyone again merges with anywhere, and we must imagine not a sole figure enunciating the phrase “You must become Caligari,” but an entire chorus. Interpellation is rightly understood as a choral voice, a speaking subject who is also always “(or other).” If Cesare and Caligari blend with the background to become “choral” figures, the subjectifying voice which enables their incorporation is the (invisible) chorus itself. The interpellating call is concretely, in an Althusserian sense, understood as the voice of the *choros*, the place speaking through/as the plural, anonymous, chorus.

Chapter 3: Anonymity of the Proletariat: *Bicycle Thieves* (1948)

As the opening credits of the Italian neorealist film *Bicycle Thieves* roll, a bus arrives in Valmelaina, a recently constructed, economically depressed Roman suburb. A crowd of unemployed men hoping to be given a job follow the bus to the front of the employment office, where a clerk utters the first words of the film: “Ricci, is Ricci here?” These words simultaneously nominate the protagonist and set the film’s narrative in motion, suturing together being employed and having a name. The film’s central narrative, Antonio Ricci’s quest to retain the job he is given in these opening moments, also becomes his quest to retain his name. Unfortunately, he fails. From the start, his employment depends on having a bicycle. Although he acquires one quickly by retrieving his own from a pawnshop, it is just as quickly stolen. He and his son, Bruno, search Rome for the bicycle, but are unable to get it back. In desperation, he becomes a thief himself when he tries to ride off on someone else’s bicycle. The film’s final sequence, among the most iconic in film history, captures Antonio and Bruno walking away from the camera along with a great mass of people. If the protagonist is named, employed, and individuated as the film opens, he is anonymized, unemployed and deindividuated as it closes.

Indeed, critics have persistently read *Bicycle Thieves* as a failed struggle to retain individuality and morality against the threat of anonymity. Karl Schoonover has recently developed this point:

The film depicts the loss of individual identity as the result of a society that narrows the opportunities to sustain oneself and perverts the concept of personal property, and it allegorizes this theme in its locations and set décor. Anonymity is a threatening force that gets expressed visually in a mammoth library of bed linens, a similarly huge warehouse of bicycles, the bureaucracy of a police records office who mailboxes formally echo the

gridlike structure of the bed linen repository, the dark, hollow windows of housing projects, the disorganized vastness of a bicycle black market, and even the narrow window streets of the *borgate*. (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 158–59)

Throughout the film these images of anonymous lives visually echo the multitudes of a crowd, homogenized by their sheer number. By losing his job Ricci also loses his name—his good name, we might say, reproducing a familiar opposition between the moral, self-sustaining individual and the anonymous, invisible, potential criminal.⁹⁶

This is no longer Antonio's bicycle, just as he is no longer 'himself', but is about to fall into the anonymous category of 'thieves.' There are ideological, existential and psychological implications in this dialectic, and the film is interested in all of these. In this world, the one is always at risk of falling away into anonymity – and the hostility, physical danger and loss of difference – of the many, the crowd. Ultimately, this means losing his individuality and becoming one of the masses.(Gordon 44)

Antonio does not simply become a thief among other thieves but loses himself as an individual. Anonymity does not solely mean the loss of a name, but rather the “loss of difference,” the principle of individuation. Further, following Gordon's account, the ethically abject, non-individual becomes one of the “masses.” Or, as Charles L. Leavitt IV has recently put it, “The act of individuation with which the film began is thus seemingly undone in its final images: the protagonists are subsumed by the masses” (Leavitt IV 127). “Masses,” here, the “many,” the “crowd” resonate closely with the damaging effects of the individual's incorporation into the group famously described by Gustave Le Bon in his 1895 book, *Psychology of the Crowd* (*des*

⁹⁶ The Introduction develops this opposition further as an anti-anonymous discourse comprising ethics and politics. From Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*, where invisibility and anonymity (as mutability or fungibility of identity) give way to immoral action and Plato counters that there is a sustaining soul which does not reap the benefits of anonymity, to the ideal of a transparent public sphere, the anonymous falls to the side of the treacherous.

foules).⁹⁷ For Le Bon, as arguably for Gordon in his analysis of *Bicycle Thieves*, “the masses” routes together the “popular classes,” the political “majority,” and the mob, an ethically and rationally diminished counter to the individual. For such analyses, there is no further cohesion or differentiation to be found within economically formed classes or politically consolidated groups; there are only individuals and groups. However, just as Le Bon takes the individual as the ethical, ontological and epistemic starting point (the individual as the subject of being, knowing, and being good), nearly all analyses of the film take Ricci’s individuality as a given.⁹⁸

Raymond Williams, who decries the prejudicial conflation of classes, masses, and the mob in common uses of the term “masses,” proposes that the masses are objectively formed by three “social tendencies,” urbanization, capitalist forms of collective production, and the political organization of a working class (Williams 316–17). He then sets this concrete meaning in an unresolved tension with the subjective sense that “the masses are always the others, whom we don’t know, and can’t know” (Williams 319). Because “there are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses,” the primary issue at stake for Williams becomes how and on what grounds we individually and collectively approach the unknown, unnamable other, through what cultural mechanisms and forms of communication the subjective can better apprehend the objective. But if “there are in fact no masses,” then what unknowable subject are we approaching? Williams’s point is that being part of “the masses” is a question of perspective; once the distance between self and other is bridged, the “other” is no longer part of “the masses.” But doesn’t such an operation simply allow one individual to exempt another individual from a group that persists as “the masses?” That is, doesn’t it always leave a remainder? Moreover,

⁹⁷ Le Bon’s work was translated into German as *Psychologie der Massen*.

⁹⁸ An exception to this is Christopher Wagstaff who describes the work of De Sica, Zavattini, and Rossellini as deriving from an “organic ontology” that sees the human as always part of a broader group (Wagstaff 65).

resigning “the masses” as a concept to an abstraction seems to betray the three concrete social tendencies he began by laying out. In addition, the masses, which do not actually exist, are not just unknown (“we don’t know”) but unknowable (“we...can’t know”). The masses are the individual’s unknowable, unnamable, collective other. This onto-epistemological problem either forces the epistemic to underwrite the ontological (because the other cannot be known they therefore must not exist), or allows the ontological to debase the epistemic (the masses do exist but force a crisis of meaning). In other words, insofar as we are objectively part of the masses, we are ourselves unknowable, unnamable.

Following Williams, this chapter argues that *Bicycle Thieves* and the theoretical texts of Cesare Zavattini, the film’s screenwriter and preeminent theorist of neorealism as a political and aesthetic movement, elaborate a kind of *transindividuality*.⁹⁹ Most directly, transindividuality adopts neither an individualist nor an organicist point of view, and instead insists on a relational mode of being, an ontology (to the extent that we are left with one) of relations rather than of individuals or of a social whole. Or, in what Balibar takes as a root of Marx’s transindividuality, that man’s “essence is in reality the *ensemble* of social relations” (6th *Thesis on Feuerbach*). The point is not that we are either named or anonymous, an individual or a collective, but rather that we are always already both.

The film promotes transindividuality primarily through the casting and performance of a so-called “nonprofessional” actor, Lamberto Maggiorani, as Antonio Ricci. Referring to the director Vittorio De Sica’s refusal to let a movie star, Cary Grant, play the role, Andre Bazin states that “the worker had to be at once as anonymous and as objective as his bicycle” (Bazin

⁹⁹ Although coined by Gilbert Simondon, I am building here on Étienne Balibar’s use of the term. Balibar does not develop a singular or unified philosophy of the transindividual, but rather traces moments, or philosophies of the transindividual through the thought of various thinkers, most notably Spinoza, Marx and Freud. If I neglect Spinoza it is simply because Marx and Freud are primary references.

56). The film indeed opens by asking us to see Antonio Ricci as a protagonist, named and separated from the crowd, as an individual. At the same time, we are also acutely aware of how the “anonymous worker’s” performance and presence implicate Antonio as inextricable from a broader collective of Roman workmen, underscoring his transindividual, relational being. The film does not dissolve individuality into collectivity, but rather offers a more complex passage between competing forms identification and anonymization.

Reading transindividuality into *Bicycle Thieves* allows us to glean a very different politics than those which pit the named individual against the anonymous masses. I argue that the film’s primary contribution lies precisely in the attempted aesthetic and political shift from “worker” to “masses,” a move that requires revising the processes of identification and anonymization at work on each category. Specifically for Marxists, the film not only challenges us to grapple with the theoretically ambiguous relationship between masses and history, but also with incorporating the masses so thoroughly into class that the identification and nomination of a class, the proletariat, as a definitive subject, be postponed to some later moment in the analysis. The strong version of this argument, which I find in Zavattini’s theorizations and unproduced “sequel” to *Bicycle Thieves*, tentatively titled *Tu, Maggiorani*, is a “never yet” named group: one that is always on the brink of identification but never actually succumbs to the name. A necessary counter to “always already,” “never yet” is the name/category/predicament that surely exists but cannot be stated until it is realized in actuality.¹⁰⁰ Like Balibar’s insistence on the conjuncture, the final moments of *Bicycle Thieves* and Zavattini’s unproduced “sequel,” *Tu, Maggiorani*,

¹⁰⁰ Another never yet might be, for Lacan, how the other (*autre*, objet a) has never yet been written into the Symbolic system, or how, in Laclau’s version of Gramsci, hegemony can never yet be complete. It is a closure that must always be worked for but can never occur.

offer up a form of anonymity that defers naming the collective, reimagining history-production through the lens of the transindividual.

Despite Bazin's contention that "*Ladri di Biciclette* is certainly the only valid Communist film of the whole past decade," the film has been critiqued because of its lack of "rigorous class analysis" (*rigurosa prospettiva di classe*) (Alonge 18). That is, the movement from class to masses, the lack solidarity among a cohesive proletariat, and the powerful forms of "identification" that promote the protagonist's personal turmoil as distinct from the working class around him, have all worked to undermine leftist and Marxist readings of the film. Sergio Amidei, who worked on the script of *Bicycle Thieves* before abandoning the project, was an early strong voice against the film's politics (Wagstaff 296–99). While there are conflicting stories of his departure from the writing team, he himself later claimed that

Io in fondo avevo dei dubbi su tutto il film, nel senso che non trovavo «italiano», non trovavo giusto in quel momento che un compagno, un comunista, un operaio che vive in una borgata, e al quale rubano la bicicletta, non andasse alla sezione del partito e non gli trovassero una bicicletta. Si ignorava questo tipo di solidarietà, che allora c'era.

I basically had doubts about the whole film, in the sense that I did not find it "Italian," I did not find it right at that moment that a comrade, a Communist, a worker who lives in the suburbs, and whose bicycle is stolen, should not go to local party headquarters and that they should not find him a bicycle. They were ignoring this type of solidarity, which existed at the time. (Alonge 18)

When Antonio crashes a Communist Party meeting to ask his friend Baiocco for help, he finds the party members rehearsing a choral song for a variety show. Not only does Antonio not belong to this chorus, but their rehearsal is fraught with conflict: they struggle to get the correct

pitch on the word “*Gente*” (people), and they are themselves divided between “rehearsing” or “meeting.” This short scene quickly emphasizes both Antonio’s distance from the party and the film’s central concern of the disjuncture between aesthetics and politics. Perhaps worse, various scenes portray groups antagonizing Antonio. When Antonio apprehends the boy who stole his bicycle, the thief’s neighbors gang up against Antonio to defend him. Finally, when Antonio becomes a thief himself, a group quickly forms to chastise him. These moments of “mob mentality,” as Schoonover calls the scene in the thief’s neighborhood, stigmatize collectives in the films and reiterate Ricci’s separation from them. In this light, Amidei’s observation and judgment certainly seem plausible. After all, how can a film be “communist,” or Marxist, even, if it does not depict solidarity among workers? If not a “proletarian” class consciousness, then what solidarity are we struggling to create? Or, without a clearly named and defined proletarian subject, what view of history and progress are we left with?

Writing from a Marxist perspective in 1982, Frank Tomasulo similarly argues that the lack of solidarity presents us with, at best, populism, or at worst, as in the thief’s neighborhood, intra-class antagonism (Tomasulo 12). Tomasulo’s often-cited critique of *Bicycle Thieves* contends that the dialectic between individual and collective never arrives at a clear expression of “the real forces at work within the society” (Tomasulo 3). Historical forces are displaced into ideological arenas such that the viewer never gains a new perspective on the issues as they actually operate in society. For Tomasulo, as for many Marxists, integrating Ricci’s social and economic conflict into a cogent historical analysis requires constructing an identifiable subject: the proletariat. *Bicycle Thieves*, however, ends by dissolving class into a kind of lumpenproletariat, hardly the passage Marxists are looking for. The viewer faces the conflict between the individual and the collective without any “class analysis at all” (Tomasulo 4).

Tomasulo argues that the film's proposed solution to poverty and to the problems of the poor is ultimately found through "interpersonal forces, not part of an interclass struggle" (Tomasulo 4). Through a reference to Wilhelm Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Tomasulo completes the picture: Antonio is one of the "masses," what Reich would call a "mass individual," and therefore nothing less than the reproduction of authoritarian ideology. If we search *Bicycle Thieves* for worker solidarity or depictions of a definitive proletariat fighting the bourgeoisie, we will be left measuring the great distance between classes and masses.

Far from debilitating a Marxist analysis, this move towards the masses is in fact an imperative. As Denise Ferreira da Silva has pointed out, even as Marxists and post-Marxists have attempted to disentangle history from teleology and science from universality, historical materialism still relies on a self-conscious subject as the agent of history. Da Silva locates the emergence of self-consciousness in Marx's *German Ideology*, where becoming conscious corresponds to becoming an "actual" individual. Eventually, "when the proletariat recognizes the "true" nature of its existence as the dominated/exploited class, when the movement of history—the play of class struggles determined by the laws of production—comes to an end," this consciousness of actual individuals assumes its place as the universal subject of history (da Silva 190). In other words, the Marxist insistence on "real" productive forces and "actual" individuals imports a universality that its materialism should have vanquished. In Tomasulo's Lukács-inspired critique, reference to the "real" coincides with an exit from ideology that immediately conjures historical materialism as a science, such that the very function of art is to *not* be ideological, to engage a "real" world and analysis that allows us to overcome ideology.

For da Silva, this founding gesture of modern thought also deploys a racial logic that signifies this universal subject of history as white and the racial subaltern as "other." Because

self-consciousness and self-determination are founded through this production and reproduction of racial difference, any and all attempts to redeem the “other” through this philosophical system are doomed to fail. They can only strive to include the other as universal subject even as they produce racial difference as the very conditions which exclude the other to begin with. This Dodo Race explains why the violent deaths of people of color does not spark an ethical crisis.

Taking my cue from da Silva, I address the racializing logic at work in the film and in the reception of “nonprofessional” actors such as Lamberto Maggiorani. While the performances of nonprofessionals may fruitfully mobilize transindividuality, they do so by engaging the optics of raciality. Scouring Maggiorani’s face, body and movements for details that betray him as a nonprofessional means employing a racializing, gendering, and class-ifying gaze that will name him as a “Roman workman.” Perhaps surprisingly, this conclusion is supported by early discourse around nonprofessionals, known until Italian neorealism as “types.” Highlighting a text by Marxist theorist and film critic, Umberto Barbaro, I explore the frightening overlap between the discourse of the nonprofessional as a “type,” and that of “biotypes,” a term from Fascist eugenics programs, exposing the representational schemata of race at work in the production of worker subjectivity. Said better, by examining the complicity between types and biotypes through their common representational structure we can more clearly apprehend the production of racialized labor and “class-ified” race.

I then follow this logic of masses, classes and anonymity one step further to examine how these strategies of representation (re)produce a racial logic that has been edited out of most accounts of the masses. Returning to Le Bon and Freud, I find that the “masses,” the individual’s anonymous collective other, is always already racialized. Although generally erased from accounts of the masses, I follow Le Bon’s biological racism through Freud’s construction of a

“racial subconscious.” Read together, *Bicycle Thieves* does not simply turn to the masses in order to explode class, but also tries to undo the racial logic by which class is constructed. That is, exceeding the bounds of identification, it enacts a collective subject that rewrites universality, da Silva’s “transparent I,” as collective anonymity. I find that the film mobilizes transindividuality to decenter the persistence of teleological constructions of history, as well as the exclusionary mechanism founded in the gesture of self-recognition. That is, the film theorizes an anonymous collective subject which effectively remaps the relationship between subjectivity and history. Just as anonymity forces us to grapple with a historicity without history, the anonymous chorus of the film’s ending ultimately turns the racial on itself so that the masses in the film’s final sequence are indeed racialized, but a race left radically anonymous.

3.1

“Nonprofessionals” typically refers to those who had not previously worked as actors.¹⁰¹ They were also known in the Russian Formalist tradition as “non-actors,” a term that immediately suggests an imbrication between Modernism and filmic realism. However, both of these terms are clearly insufficient: “non-actor” reproduces a division between reality and representation, or even the artifice of theatricality against the supposed reality of everyday life.

¹⁰¹ The use of nonprofessional actors in Italian neorealism practically and theoretically derives from the Russian Formalist tradition of Vladimir Gardin, Lev Kuleshov and V.I. Pudovkin. Beginning in the 1910’s they explored various forms of casting and acting which were then rearranged and reformulated by the neorealists. They found prior performance training, from Meyerhold to Stanislavsky, although particularly Stanislavsky’s realism, inappropriate for film acting. Trained behaviors appeared false on film, granting priority to the original media from which the training derived: filming stage actors amounted to a filmed theatrical production (Kuleshov 70–71). In order to combat this lack of authenticity, they both trained actors in new techniques, often based on the teachings of Delsarte and Dalcroze, and cast “non-actors,” who were often used for bit parts and crowd scenes (Pudovkin 342–43). The new training for cinema resulted in the “model actor” (*naturshchik*), also translated as the “mannequin actor,” who could “remold” their appearance within the physical parameters of their body. Nonprofessionals and non-actors, meanwhile, were often laborers, also returning us to a question of “authenticity.” If the *naturshchik* asserted a distance from the theater and stage acting techniques, the performance of non-actors further blurred the boundaries of where the cinematic frame started and stopped.

“Nonprofessional,” meanwhile, appears to speak to the professionalization or institutional training of performers, but fails to capture the aesthetic register of how these performers are perceived/recognized as such. After all, couldn’t a movie star with no acting training be seen as a “professional?” Or conversely, couldn’t a movie star who does have professional training still be viewed as a “nonprofessional” if shot in certain settings or situations? In other words, both non-actor and nonprofessional miss their mark. Although I will continue to these terms throughout my discussion, at the end of the chapter I ultimately turn to Zavattini’s more productive lexicon. He offers “*personaggio vero*” (real character), to describe the apparent self-representation of a subject, and “*operaio attore*” (worker-actor), to refer to the tension between the film industry and other, less public-facing and lucrative professions. Not interchangeable, to be a “real character” speaks to the overlap between reality and representation, being and acting, performer and character, etc. and how that overlap allows us to refashion the hierarchies of poetic systems. Accordingly, “*siamo tutti personaggi*” (we are all characters) as well as *siamo tutti artisti*, thus speak to our ability to refashion ideology and are potent elaborations of Gramsci’s *tutti gli uomini sono intellettuali*. The worker-actor, on the other hand, envisions a division of labor that could democratically repurpose systems of representation. We might say that if the first term elaborates on Gramsci, the latter revises Benjamin.¹⁰²

Following Zavattini’s theorizations, one of the primary impulses of neorealism is to name those who have been marginalized from society and edited out of the dominant narratives of the time. “A starving man, a humiliated man, must be shown by name and surname,” and various

¹⁰² Compare Zavattini’s “worker actor” to Benjamin’s claim in “The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility,” that “Some of the actors taking part in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray *themselves*—and primarily in their own work process. In Western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being’s legitimate claim to being reproduced” (Benjamin 262). Zavattini’s worker-actor is his attempt to overcome this obstruction, but without the idealist sense of people “representing themselves” in Benjamin’s formulation.

other versions of this refrain appear throughout his post-*Bicycle Thieves* writings. The coherence of two purposes, to engage people's actual living conditions (to reapproach reality through art) and to ply their lives for a new poetics (to reapproach narrative more democratically) laid the groundwork for neorealism. Reading anonymity into neorealism may thus at first blush appear counterintuitive; and yet, without admitting anonymity into the name we cannot adequately comprehend lead actor Lamberto Maggiorani's persistent presence in the film as a "non-actor," which continually upsets any clean circumscription of "Antonio Ricci" as a character. That is, the discourse of "non-actors," or "nonprofessionals," immediately courts a dialectic between being named and anonymous. Writing about Zavattini's radical aesthetics of reenactment in the 1950's, Ivonne Margulies offers that "The anonymous mass, the everyman, may be the most extreme expression of everyone acting in his or her own name" (Margulies 56). At a certain point, for Margulies, the name cedes to the anonymous in order to, strikingly, express itself. In my analysis, the nonprofessional as anonymous becomes an enabling condition for the concrete particular (in an Adornian, non-Hegelian sense) to work upon and redefine the larger group, engendering a shift in the way we relate the artistic product to the world beyond it.

Beyond heightening an effect of the real or of working to create the illusion of realism, the anonymity of the nonprofessional raises distinctly Modernist questions of form and historical contingency that elude realism's mimetic/metaphoric representational structure.¹⁰³ We can hear

¹⁰³ Gaggiotti similarly laments the pervasiveness and insufficiency of "realism" in describing the effect of nonprofessionals, an association which he feels shuts down more penetrating analyses (Gaggiotti 257–59). Instead, I argue that we should take our cue from Marxist theorist and film critic, Umberto Barbaro, who early on noted parallels between film and the theatrical avantgarde, particularly citing the Russian film legacy of a *cinema senza attore* (cinema without actors). Barbaro points out that the terms "nonprofessional" or "cinema without actors" were in fact used to consecrate the film director as the sole author of the film, a relationship which immediately engages the dialectic of individuality and impersonality so common in Modernist theorizations. For this reason, he generally argues against the use of non-professionals; film is a "collective product," and an auteur cinema denies the artistry and creativity of the other artists. As such, actors are indeed necessary as creative agents in making a film. For Barbaro, the theatrical avantgarde and film both offer powerful correctives to the bourgeois theater of Chekhov and Stanislavsky, which he condemns as inward-looking and pseudo-psychological. Techniques based on physical form,

this latent Modernism at work in Bazin's tethering of "anonymity" to "objectivity" in the quote cited above. However, due to the insistent tethering of nonprofessionals to realist aesthetics and politics, which in turn remained tightly wedded to forms of nomination and identification, prior analyses of the film and of neorealism in general have been unable to account for the relations engendered by the anonymity of nonprofessional actors.¹⁰⁴ On one side, nonprofessionals are written off as a naïve attempt to reproduce an unmediated reality. On the other side, how and under what conditions a person or group may "represent themselves" has remained a pivotal political question for Marxists since the 18th Brumaire. Indeed, in Tomasulo's desire for the representation of "real" productive forces that elude ideology we can note the allure of a transparent, or self-sustaining proletarian subject.¹⁰⁵ In other words, Tomasulo's appeal to a "real" that eludes ideological capture, like a realism that can reproduce a transparent history, rests on a subject capable of representing itself.

Further, the discourse of people "representing themselves" spans both nonprofessional actors and the second aspect of neorealism that I interrogate here, *coralità* (chorality), an overlap which highlights these two fields as a fertile if undertheorized aesthetic territory.¹⁰⁶ Leavitt has

particularly dance and movement-based approaches, as well as performances that encourage participation between audience and spectacle, are primary sites that unite the avantgarde and film. For Barbaro, film did not assert a division between active performer and passive observer, but instead allowed the spectator to occupy various and multiple positions in regard to the subject. Perhaps surprisingly, Barbaro reads various theatrical techniques that obscure the boundaries between actor and audience, or that allow the spectator to occupy various subject positions within a work, as deriving from the cinema. In this light, Pirandello, Reinhardt, among others, offer a "cinematic theater." Considering Pirandello's six characters, he teases that "more than an author they go in search of a film director" (*più che di autore vanno in cerca di cinematograf*).

¹⁰⁴ As Giame Alonge puts it, "*realismo è la parola magica del marxismo ortodosso*" (realism is the magic word of orthodox Marxism) (Alonge 18).

¹⁰⁵ For a critique of the gap between presence and representation see Gayatri Spivak, who emphasizes the identity-in-difference of *darstellen* vs *vertreten*. Spivak notes how the overlap between "representation" in strictly political and philosophical senses has led leftist intellectuals to imagine a subaltern subject outside of representation. Our task instead must be to expose the complicity between these forms of representation.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Luzzi and Elizabeth Alsop have recently breathed new life into chorality as a key term in Anglo criticism. These discussions primarily conceive of choral performances as created by large groups, often ones who sing and dance, or in Luzzi's case, "witness" (Luzzi 19). For a more extended history of the term through literature see Charles Leavitt IV. The term was already widely applied to *verismo* novelists such as Giovanni Verga when the journalist Carlo Trabucco described the first half of Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta*, as "choral" in 1945.

recently hinted at this possibility, arguing that the “chorality” authorized by the performance of historical partisans in Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* “serves symbolically to create a collective conscience, a metonymic figuration of the post-war Italian body politic” (Leavitt IV 152). I lean into and develop Leavitt’s use of “metonymic:” because chorality and so-called nonprofessional actors encourage a form of spectatorship outside the metaphoric logic of mimesis, they appear to escape representation.¹⁰⁷ The metonymic relationship, however, is still ideological, not a positivist assertion of reality.¹⁰⁸ Chorality and the nonprofessional performer do not reflect a historically static object so much as encourage an ideological apprehension of a dynamic object in the moment of performance/reception. In place of the metaphoric operation which asks the spectator to substitute a present representation for an absent reality, they partake in a metonymic relationship to the spectator and the world beyond the film. Insofar as the nonprofessional is “part” of the whole, it does not “stand in” for its object. The chorus and the nonprofessional performer do not rest on a division between screen and spectator, or stage and audience, but rather connect and mediate them. They represent through their contiguity with social life and ask what world that face, body, performer, and collective participate in. Put in the first person, chorality asks us to see what we already are, in what ways “we were already ourselves in the play itself, from the beginning,” to return to Althusser from Chapter 2.

“Of the two parts, the first, in which no single protagonist dominates the action, but Rome, the whole city, which lives and trembles, suffers and conspires, resists and exalts itself, this first part is truly choral and is representative of the whole population whose hidden and unknown merits have been well recorded with an objectivity lacking in rhetoric.” (Sitney 29) Rossellini himself adopted the term shortly after, as have many subsequent critics of his work, and of neorealism in general.

¹⁰⁷ I am thus building off of Annette Michelson’s 1967 review of André Bazin’s collected essays, *What Is Cinema?*, where Michelson briefly recognizes Bazin’s rejection of metaphor as a turn towards metonymy (Michelson).

¹⁰⁸ Eisenstein was also quite clear about the ideological aspect of this “recognition.” For Eisenstein, the point was not that the performer *was* who they represent, but rather that their physiognomy would be recognized (ideologically) as such.

Moreover, as in Verga's *I Malavoglia*, where the voices of unnamed speakers create the novel's choral quality, neorealist chorality functions through anonymity. As I argue in Chapter 2, insofar as we are part of a chorus, we are also anonymous, blurring the distinction between singular and plural subjects. Against Trabucco, quoted in a footnote above, who threads together chorality with "an objectivity lacking in rhetoric," I view the choral as fully rhetorical. For Alsop and Wagstaff, the rhetorical aspect of chorality debilitates its work as a historical referent, dislodging the real from representation. Against this, I argue that rhetorical and figurative forms remain material and historically pertinent. In this, I depart from recent scholarship which has limited chorality as a critical concept to an idealism, both in the philosophical sense of divorcing the choral from historical-material groundings, as well as in the utopian sense of creating an ideal, "imagined community." The problem for Alsop is that chorality has often been leveraged by "historicist" critics to engage leftist politics. Exploiting the fact that the subject of collective representation is never defined or agreed upon, Alsop argues that chorality has been leveraged both as a historical reference point ("an existing class or group") and as an unfixed, malleable reference to whatever group the author chooses, "almost inevitably a disenfranchised one" (Alsop 28).¹⁰⁹ In other words, chorality appears to denote a precise historical subject but in fact is not precisely enunciated or delimited. In political readings of neorealist works, chorality can thus be bent towards the inclinations of the author. In response to the complicity between supposed historical accuracy and an undefined subject in political readings, Alsop argues that the cinematic separations of voice and body in supposedly choral scenes are an imaginary way of "constructing, in the wake of Fascism, a kind of fantasmatic ideal of community" (Alsop 29). She then suggests a loose progression from neorealist idealism through Pasolini to Fellini, who is

¹⁰⁹ Both critics join a recent wave of publications seeking to undo the "reflectionist" position which claims a one-to-one representation of history in neorealist cinema.

(finally?) able to “debunk, and often in spectacular fashion, the very choral ideals his films paradoxically continue to imagine and explore” (Alsop 39). At stake in this discussion, and indeed in the larger movement against a “certain tendency” in neorealist film criticism,¹¹⁰ is how to successfully reevaluate these films as historical representations but also accurately depict the equally historical political interventions they continue to make. Alsop, following Wagstaff, reads neorealist films as “aesthetic artifacts” as if the real can be successfully disentangled from the fictive, the historical from the aesthetic. But slashing this Gordian knot ultimately grounds a materialist politics in an idealist separation of art and life that artists like Zavattini conscientiously worked to overcome. For both critics, chorality is an ideal in itself which can only represent an ideal community. Untethering realism from history has meant immolating their materialist politics.

While I do not dispute that the ethical and political strivings of neorealist artists and thinkers contain a degree of the latter, I find that Zavattini’s writings, in particular, insist on a material overlap between art and reality. In other words, chorality as an aesthetic trope demands to be understood “materially;” that is, how it actually acts (“the most concrete sort of concreteness,” as Althusser says) with and upon the spectator. While other activist Marxists, in a Brechtian vein, were interested in fostering a critical awareness in the spectator of their social and historical position, Zavattini’s chorality sought to generate “participation” (*convivenza*) in a performative sense. In other words, and continuing my argument from Chapter 2, chorality in *Bicycle Thieves* is ultimately crucial because of how it “interpellates” the spectator. While that chapter argued that *Caligari* and Maeterlinck’s *The Blind* deployed anonymity as a critique of

¹¹⁰ “Against realism: on a ‘certain tendency’ in Italian film criticism” by Alan O’Leary & Catherine O’Rawe is often cited as a watershed moment in arguing against reading neorealism as a “mirror of life” or “window onto the world” (O’Leary and O’Rawe).

the individual, this chapter argues that *Bicycle Thieves* deploys anonymity to critique the fixity of the collective. To arrive at this conclusion, I highlight an unproduced script, *Tu, Maggiorani*, that Zavattini wrote in the years immediately following the release of *Bicycle Thieves* and which, by revisiting that earlier film's ending, teaches us how to interpret it. There, as elsewhere, he explores the limits between acting and reenactment, reality and representation. By backreading *Bicycle Thieves* with *Tu, Maggiorani* in mind, we can see how the chorality that at the end of *Bicycle Thieves* attempts to assert a performative, "participative" relationship that "interpellates" the spectator.

The distinction I draw between "identification" and "interpellation" hinges on naming.¹¹¹ For Diana Fuss, identification as naming the Subject in History and the history of the subject is the first and last word of her monograph (Fuss 3, 165). Meanwhile, Butler will search for the performative dimension of interpellation through its overlap with Austin's speech acts. They ultimately claim that interpellation is tantamount to being named, both in the particular sense of a proper name or the general sense of a social category, such as "'woman" or "Jew" or "queer" or "Black" or "Chicana"' (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 96). For Butler, interpellation speaks

¹¹¹ In arguing for this distinction between identification and interpellation I am running counter to a generation of scholars, perhaps since Michel Pêcheux's *Language, Semiotics, and Ideology* (1982), that has very productively folded the terms together (Pêcheux, *Language, Semiotics, and Ideology*). Pêcheux understands identification linguistically as the nomination and designation of objects, but also rhetorically and psychologically as the substitution of self for other. Interpellation extends identification into Marxist materialism that he works to redeem from idealist linguists. Because both are metaphoric substitutions ("subject for object, subject for Subject, Subject for process, etc.") and both are braced discursively, they become equivalent. Interpellation thus sits at the interstice between a quasi-historical dimension of the Symbolic that precedes the subject and the subject's (formation of) identity in the present. In these accounts, interpellation and identification are threaded together by a third term: subjectivity. That is, as per Borch-Jacobsen's phrasing, identification is the subject (Borch-Jacobsen). In common usage, as in my analysis of Freud, interpellation tends to signal the more coercive side of identification, and stems, at times, from the disjuncture between our emotional, psychic lives and our Symbolic identities, and at other times from the social structuring of subjectivity that exceeds the markings of individuality. While I do not intend to diminish this "discursive" constitution of the subject, I argue that these two questions—what precedes the subject? what exceeds the subject?—begin in Freud's account of identification and ultimately return us to a non-discursive materiality. I am emphatically not suggesting, as Mladen Dolar's "materia prima" argument, that some part of the subject precedes the subject and eludes ideological capture.

to the performative force of identification. Indeed, as I discuss in the prior chapter, much of the concern with interpellation has attempted to understand the power of the name and naming practices, and to what degree a subject can resist that power.¹¹² If identification is strictly discursive, and if interpellation is viewed strictly as an act of nomination demanded by our entrance into the Symbolic, then the two terms are interchangeable. As Michel Pêcheux puts it, individuals are interpellated as subjects of discourse, and they always identify within the discourse that dominates them.¹¹³ It would also seem that neither term leaves space for the anonymous and that both work to mitigate anonymity. Following Fuss's formulation, where is the space in history for an anonymous "nonsubject?"¹¹⁴ If, as Balibar has put it, echoing but also revising Pêcheux, being both a class and the masses implies the proletariat as the "nonsubject" of history, do the politics of identification exclude the non-class that is the proletariat? If we are only attuned to the forms of appearing and acting through the ascription of a name, in which the metaphoric relationship between signs and referents or signs and other signs enables visibility and action, what subjectivities are we discounting from the outset?

In my prior chapter, I examined Althusser's dissatisfaction with the identification/alienation paradigm and argued that he nearly proposes the then-untheorized concept of interpellation as an alternative. I argued further that interpellation functions, in large

¹¹² Chapter 2 details this in greater detail. Or see *Bodies That Matter*, particularly from p156, for a recounting of the debates of naming, descriptivist vs anti-descriptivist arguments, etc.

¹¹³ Although José Esteban Muñoz does not contest the overlap of these terms, I would argue that where Pêcheux's disidentification is strictly discursive, Muñoz is ultimately interested in "feeling," "affects," and forms of living that are as yet unvoiced and unspoken. The difference between these versions of "disidentification" also helps pry apart identification and interpellation.

¹¹⁴ Pêcheux proposes a "non-subjectivist" theory of subjectivity, by which a subject can assume a non-subjective position through "disidentification:" a reworking of ideology from within ideology. This theory does not depend on the subject existing outside ideology, but rather that the "experimental science of history," the simultaneous apprehension and transformation of history (i.e. Marxist-Leninism), is able to produce concepts which elude further representation. Those concepts are therefore also practices, as per their double existence as knowledge and *dispositif*. Relying on this "experimentation-transformation" as the "raw material" for ideology, the nonsubject is able to act as a subject, reworking the very terms of identification and politics.

part, not through the enunciation of a name, as an identification, but through the anonymous, “hey you.” Neither instantiated as a nomination nor dependent on a structure of substitution, interpellation gestures towards a metonymic subjectivization of what/who we already are in spite of ourselves (“*malgré moi*,” as Althusser says of his own experience of interpellation). Interpellation, I argued, works primarily through anonymity, not through the functioning of the name. Nor can this anonymity be bypassed simply because the name is already known or assumed, as some have inferred; while I do not claim that interpellation works outside of structures of identity, ideology, or names in general, interpellation cannot be subsumed completely into speech acts via processes or rituals of naming. Zavattini, like Althusser, was also frustrated by the structuring power of identification in the alignment of performer, character and spectator. Pivotal, the film’s final, performative gesture, relies on a form of Zavattinian “participation,” a chorality that exceeds identification and “interpellates” the spectator.

Unlike *Battleship Potemkin*’s Vakulinchuk, for example, who is rarely framed alone and indeed dies halfway through the film, ceding the role of protagonist to the battleship’s entire crew, Antonio is consistently visually set apart from the crowd. From the opening nomination scene, although unemployed like the others, he does not stand with the group of men hoping to hear his name called. Instead, after one of the men runs off to get him, the camera finds him by himself, seemingly lost in thought, stretched out idly on the ground near the water pump where a woman is washing clothes. His pose immediately entreats pathos, like a modern image of *Il Galata morente* (The Dying Gaul). His upright torso visually echoes the water pump beside him, and behind him, the public housing complex where he and his fellow unemployed live appears abruptly interrupted by a nondescript wasteland, as if the city simply stopped there; we are at the outer limits of the outskirts of Rome. Antonio is not introduced as one of the many in the crowd,

but as a body in a landscape. Touching the ground with one hand, his body is invested with its connection to this place. In his formidable study of Italian neorealism, Christopher Wagstaff refers to Antonio in this moment as a “figure in a landscape,” a phrase he applies more generally to how the film, and neorealism as a whole, constructs the individual in relation to their social surroundings. His use of “figure,” not directly explicated or scrutinized, implies the way this body, an image of the body in relation to place, precedes and resists individualization. That is, the narrative has not yet, or not completely, “figured” this body. Although Antonio has a name, and he is in fact the only named character at this point, Wagstaff’s use of “figure” rather than “character” points to a resistance to, or excess beyond, the individualization of the name. He is both a named character, separated from the anonymous groups around him, but also what I call in Chapter 2 a “choral figure:” he does not emerge from the landscape, but remains within it, capturing the etymological and material roots of the chorus in/as the place of dance. Antonio, separated from the group, is a kind of chorus in himself.

As Antonio hurriedly stands and follows his neighbor back to the employment office, his lanky frame and heavy steps contrast with his friend’s nimble movements. Antonio lumbers, and despite his long legs, seems to take two steps for every one taken by his shorter companion. Arriving at the crowd by the Employment Office, Antonio is taller than nearly all the other waiting men. When his face finally appears fully in the camera, our attention is not captured by a dressed-down, momentarily disheveled Cary Grant but by a kind of everyman, a nonprofessional actor *preso dalla strada* (taken from the streets). As James Price put it in the London Magazine in 1964, the non-professional actor playing Antonio, Lamberto Maggiorani, “is nakedly what he is, a Roman workman: his face is a kind of tragic mask, conveying the pain and despair appropriate to the role while at the same time preserving a secrecy and dignity. It is an

anonymous face, and it is an anonymous performance” (Price 224). Price’s assessment of Maggiorani’s face as a mask speaks to a deep ambivalence in this performance: beyond the dichotomy between actor and role, reality and representation, lies an anonymity which supplements and unsettles both categories. The anonymous mask of the actor “taken from the street” does not threaten individuality but is produced by it: Maggiorani is “nakedly what he is,” a particularity that is also an “anonymous face,” and gives way to form of group identity as a “Roman workman.” It is a slippage enabled by a surprisingly “anonymous performance.” In other words, Maggiorani’s performance cannot be stably inserted into a continuum between the individual and the group, the named and the anonymous—he is already both. Through his physical connection to the place he inhabits, as well as through his “anonymous performance,” Antonio merges the singular individual with the plurality of a chorus; invoking the mutual constitution of the individual and the collective, the film presents us with a transindividual subject that is both named and anonymous.

Antonio, therefore, cannot be understood in complete opposition to the groups around him when his presence and performance immediately bespeak a larger group. Inspired by Freudian transindividuality, Balibar might call him a “*Masse zu eins*,” by which the individual is an effect of social relations. Nor can the film be read as a path from individuality to anonymity without excising Maggiorani’s anonymous performance from Ricci, and perhaps even his relation to the film as a whole.

Schoonover has convincingly argued that neorealism participated in the construction of a “new visual politics of liberal compassion” (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* xiv). However, a full consideration of the nonprofessional actor ultimately complicates, and potentially undermines that project. Drawing on Luc Boltanski’s version of Hannah Arendt’s “politics of pity,”

Schoonover contends that films such as *Bicycle Thieves* construct the international spectator as the “emblematic postwar humanist:” an international eyewitness to the suffering of Italians after WWII who can pity the sufferer and attest to their suffering, but who is clearly separated from them. Predicated on the international viewer’s distance from the suffering bodies on the screen, these postwar Italian films “formalize a structure of charity” (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 227). In this paradigm, “ethical viewing” becomes a form of Arendtian action.¹¹⁵ The use of nonprofessional actors, which Schoonover, following Bazin, understands as an appeal to “authenticity,” clearly bears a central role in this operation: Maggiorani and others of the Roman poor who form the film’s cast and ensemble create the corporeal material for the images of suffering and violence that Schoonover argues were destined to produce the international spectator as liberal humanist.

For Schoonover, the fact that Maggiorani’s star rose with the film but then quickly returned him to the difficult life of poverty he had led prior to the film reveals a fundamental complication in this construction of liberal compassion, as well as a limit of neorealism. Through a reference to *Slumdog Millionaire*, Schoonover nearly implies that Maggiorani had been taken advantage of by De Sica.¹¹⁶ Considering his later destitution, “Maggiorani’s presence

¹¹⁵ Beyond my critique of Schoonover’s analysis below via nonprofessional actors, I am also wary of how strongly he emphasizes the detachment of the spectator, which ultimately effaces other local, national and international entanglements. His analysis of De Sica and Zavattini’s 1946 collaboration, *Sciuscià*, for example, argues that the title itself, a “pidgin word” for “shoe shine,” “enacts a global space by speaking two languages just enough to establish the flow of sympathy and then dollars from the outside” (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 157). This view very likely adequately reflects the reception of the film in the United States but ignores how *sciuscià* operated as a loanword assimilated into the Neapolitan dialect in the postwar period. Viewed from inside Italy, the use of dialect more generally and this word in particular forces us to grapple with the interweaving of the international in the local. In other words, in addition to the exportation of local life and suffering for the ethical pleasure of an international viewer, the title also reflects how that foreign spectator was already an agent to begin with. Viewed from within, the international spectator is not viewing a spectacle that they are detached from, but rather experiencing the aesthetic, linguistic, political, and ethical consequences of their own actions and presences. The title, then, does not establish a detached “sympathy,” but asserts the

¹¹⁶ I would also argue that even potentially exploitative relationships such as between the amateur child actors featured in *Slumdog Millionaire* are worth scrutinizing further. My point is not to defend the exploitation of

contaminates not only the cinematic body that his performance for De Sica's camera helped to create, but also the space of charity that his films enabled for viewers around the world" (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 227). Schoonover here intends to show how Maggiorani's continued financial struggles reveal the insufficiency of liberal politics predicated on pity from a distance. If *Bicycle Thieves* was meant to intervene in the circumstances it depicts, then the poverty of the lead actor betrays a clear limitation, if not failure. Further, Maggiorani's presence "contaminates" not just this "space of charity," but the "cinematic body" created by his performance. Rather than "contaminate" in the Bazinian sense of productively introducing contingency, Schoonover suggests that Maggiorani's presence undoes the operating principles of his own performance, undermining the representation of his own body in the film. Schoonover is not exactly saying that reality contaminates representation, but rather that particular contaminates the general, and possibly that the actor contaminates the character. His generic use of "the cinematic body" is clearly tethered to the film's humanist project, such that "the body" (Antonio's body?) grants access from Maggiorani to a diffuse category of the human. An Adornian take on Schoonover's argument might say that it is therefore the particular which enables but then ultimately contaminates neorealism's universalizing humanist project. In his view, the particular grants a necessary (perception of) "authenticity," which allows "this body" to become "the body," but then overstays its welcome.

The film's investment in the particular is precisely what Bazin famously celebrated about *Bicycle Thieves*: for allowing things to exist for their own sakes, for "loving them in their singular individuality" (Bazin 69). By insisting on the identity and importance of the singular individual the film reaffirms the importance of the particular against the humanist project of an

performers, but rather to examine how the labor and identity of the performer differently constitutes the relationship between spectator and performer.

uncontaminated general as presented by “the cinematic body.” As the film’s director Vittorio De Sica states in 1950, “I had no intention of presenting Antonio as a kind of ‘Everyman’ or a personification of ‘the underprivileged.’ To me he was an individual, with his individual joys and worries, with his individual story.” However, we can quickly register here that De Sica contains the discussion within the poles of character, where Antonio is the source of individuality. From there we can easily imagine, as Leavitt does, a dialectical progression which registers both the particular and the general and carries us to the universal (125-6).

Against this idealist dialectic, I find Zavattini’s formulation more capacious and capable of comprehending the materiality of Maggiorani’s anonymous performance, not just Antonio. As Zavattini would go on to clarify in a well-known interview published in 1953 under the title “Theses on neorealism,” “I have been criticized on the grounds that my preoccupation with the *particular* is excessive and risks distorting reality. I would like to point out that my work is not motivated by a search for the *particular*, but rather by an intense polemic against the *general*, in the sense that it has been understood up until now” (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 140).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Citations refer to David Brancalone’s 2021 authoritative two-volume collection and translation of selected writings by Zavattini. As a companion to his two-volume anthology of Zavattini’s writings, Brancalone has also published *Cesare Zavattini’s Neo-realism and the Afterlife of an Idea*, an intellectual biography of Zavattini, the first of its kind in English, as well as *Zavattini: Il Neo-Realismo e il Nuovo Cinema Latino-americano*, a dual-volume anthology in Italian of Zavattini’s scripts and writings related to Latin America, and his correspondence with key figures in Latin American cinema. Stefania Parigi has also written a thorough exploration of Zavattini’s idiosyncratic, phenomenological approach to life and art. Together, they constitute a long overdue overhaul of scholarship on this foundational thinker. While I will not dwell on the cultural chauvinism which privileges French over Italian, suffice it to say that Bazin’s criticism has enjoyed various periods of renewed interest, and has remained, alongside other French theorists, a touchstone of cinema studies. Zavattini as an artistic and theoretical architect of neorealism had hardly been translated or, seemingly, read at all. Prior to Brancalone’s authoritative translations, amid a tremendous body of work only two articles by Zavattini were widely available in English: Lanza and Overbey’s respective translations of *Alcune idee sul cinema*, and Overbey’s translation of *Tesi sul neorealismo*. In all three cases, unremarked redactions and omissions abound, alongside inaccuracies and lack of historical or biographical context. As has been the case in Gramsci scholarship, due to irresponsible editing and translation Zavattini has remained an ambiguous, misunderstood, and sidelined figure. Brancalone’s newly released translation of *Alcune idee sul cinema*, which compares both the original typescript of the interview and the standard published Italian version with the two English translations, is perhaps now the most authoritative in both English and Italian.

Giuliana Minghelli raises some excellent criticisms of Brancalone’s *Cesare Zavattini: Selected Writings* concerning his perfunctory chronology and generic categories. She also laments that Zavattini, “the man of immense contradictions,” as William Weaver called him in the introduction to his 1970 collection of Zavattini’s writings, is

Zavattini is at once making a strictly strategic statement, addressing the way the general appeared at that moment and how it was mobilized by commercial cinema, and expressing his unique form of materialism that saw the general as obstructing our understanding of reality. Zavattini does not mobilize the particular as an end in itself but as a way to reapproach (and ultimately produce) reality. For Zavattini, the general must be unfixed, and its indefinite deferral constitutes a radical and defining aspect of his political theoretical contribution.

Zavattini and De Sica's reliance on the particular as a concrete point of departure is perhaps surprising, and theoretically confounding to critics, because the use of nonprofessional actors historically began on the other end of the equation as an image of the general. As Aristarco notes in his write up of *Bicycle Thieves*, the film's casting was then understood through "typage," or the use of "types."¹¹⁸ Kracauer similarly contends that in *Bicycle Thieves* and

hardly present in Brancaleone's work (Minghelli). Instead, Brancaleone tows a consistent line throughout with little space for the artistic and theoretical tensions or reconsidered opinions. As Minghelli points out, the lack of visuals is almost ironic considering Brancaleone, on the first page of the introduction to the first book, dubs Zavattini, who was also a recognized painter, "a pioneer of visual culture in Italy." Grammatical and spelling errors also persist throughout all three English volumes. Anastasia Valecce draws attention to similar shortcomings in Brancaleone's dual volume set *Zavattini: Il Neo-Realismo e il Nuovo Cinema Latino-americano*, including typos, misspellings, and even mistranslations from the Spanish. Further, Brancaleone's work only engages Zavattini's perspective in these transnational exchanges, a decision which results in crucial omissions of cultural, racial, and political consequence. Despite these substantial problems and valid criticisms, the 5 volumes Brancaleone has released on Zavattini since 2019 are bound to mark a watershed moment in scholarship on Zavattini and neorealism, particularly in English. One can only hope that future anthologies of Zavattini's key texts are based on Brancaleone's translations (Valecce).¹¹⁸ Kuleshov and Pudovkin worked out a system of "types," emphasizing the personalities and physicalities of subjects would best match the desired character. "People who, in themselves, as they were born, present some kind of interest for cinematic treatment. That is, a person with an exterior of character, with a definite, brightly expressive appearance could be such a cinematic "type"" (Pudovkin 135). I highlight Pudovkin and Kuleshov here because they were the primary interlocutors of the Italian neorealists. However, Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, among others, also relied on and theorized the use of "non-actors" and a cinema of "types." Eisenstein's slightly different use of "type" more explicitly connects the external physiognomy of the performer to a social role, usually based on class. Eisenstein imagined a contemporary use of types that infinitely multiplied the stock characters from *Commedia dell'arte*. The concept of "typage" as received by later filmmakers, particularly outside of Russia, thus crosscut the difference between models and non-actors, and remained a guiding principle of casting performers and coaching them based on exterior expressions and gestures.

Even among these early film artists, however, there are additional complicating factors. On one hand, Pudovkin asserts multiple times that the casual "non-actor" is "wrongly called 'type,'" and a footnote by the translator points out that "Pudovkin uses the word "type," not for the non-acting material, to whom it is sometimes applied in the West, but for a stylized figure, who always plays a given role and none other—villain, hero, policeman, mother-in-law, etc." (Pudovkin 328). On the other hand, Pudovkin also suggests that type is relevant to the casting of what the translator called "non-acting material." He mentions that "It is therefore easy to understand

Umberto D., also a collaboration between De Sica and Zavattini, “the emphasis is on the world about us; their protagonists are not so much particular individuals as types representative of whole groups of people. These narratives serve to dramatize social conditions in general” (Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* 98–99). In other words, nonprofessional actors, “types,” were historically chosen because they were already seen as representative of determined social groups and did not remain “particular” in themselves. They might even be said to produce “the image of a type” “in the image of an individual face,” which is to say that the general completely overtakes the particular (Geil 337). The logic of the type effaces the individuality and uniqueness of a face as it becomes representative of a broader social class.

The performance of the non-professional thus ushers a historically contingent question of “identity” into an equally historical mode and genre of representation. The perceived exigencies of realism as pertinent to different forms and genres dictate how and when non-professionals are used, creating a complex dialogue between the norms which produce identity as such (in social reality) and the norms of representation (in realism, and then cinematic realism). In his seminal text on film acting, early Soviet filmmaker and theorist Vseleвод Pudovkin notes the differences in realistic casting between theater and film:

Stanislavski himself, who, from the very beginning of his dramatic career, strove to attain naturalness in acting, was forced to abandon the idea of introducing into a theatrical

why, in film production, a man, passing by chance on the street, who has never had any idea of being an actor, is often brought in, only because he happens to be a vividly externally expressive *type*, and, moreover, the one desired by the director” (Pudovkin 135)(emphasis added). As Miguel Gaggiotti notes, another problem lies in inaccurate translations. “In Ivor Montagu’s seminal translation of Pudovkin’s texts as well as in popular translations of Kuleshov’s writings, such as Ron Levaco’s, the word “type” was chosen as the English equivalent of various concepts such as “*naturshchik*” and “non-actor”. This conflation in translation makes it almost impossible to tell apart the already shady nuances each of the original concepts proposes” (Gaggiotti 35).

performance an old peasant woman, in spite of the fact that she seemed to him to be the embodiment of truth and expressiveness. (Pudovkin 327)

In other words, according to Pudovkin, Stanislavsky lamented the portrayal of an “old peasant woman” as a particular limit of theatrical realism.¹¹⁹ Because “old” characters frequently appeared on Stanislavsky’s stage, both as played by older actors and through the artifice of makeup, we must assume that it was the appearance of a “peasant” onstage which upended his techniques of realism. The “non-theatrical behavior” of the peasant, which Pudovkin unintentionally aligns with the appearance onstage of “dogs and horses” and children, creates an “out-of-placeness for the spectator” (Pudovkin 327).¹²⁰ For the Soviet artists and spectators of the time, her identity as a “peasant,” a term which tellingly weaves together race and class, unmasks the theatricality of Stanislavsky’s theater. By overstepping the rules of realism Stanislavsky risked undoing precisely the illusion he hoped to create. Ultimately, I argue that this overstep beyond the theatrical realism of the time is best understood as a step beyond the metaphoric relationship of the then dominant realistic theater. Like the discourse of “authenticity,” to be “the embodiment of truth,” in Pudovkin’s words, signals symptomatically towards the metonymic relationship of the chorus. In other words, the peasant woman is the “embodiment of truth” because her performance bespeaks a contiguity with social life rather than a metaphoric representation of it.

The advent of film marked a pivotal change in the bounds of this metaphoric relationship. For many neorealists, who at first strove for a representation of social groups much in the manner of the 19th century naturalists, the identity of the performers was paramount. In a text

¹¹⁹ Another limit, for Stanislavsky, was performing in “natural environment” (Pudovkin, ?).

¹²⁰ As an unresolved juxtaposition, however, I would like to note that the *Critical Iconography* which closes this cited volume begins like this: “PUDOVKIN was born in 1893, died 1953. His father, *of peasant stock*, was a commercial traveler in Penza, Volga region” (Pudovkin 375)(emphasis added).

that I return to later in this chapter, Marxist film critic and theorist as well as Pudovkin's Italian translator and champion, Umberto Barbaro, remarks in a 1937 text that non-actors are

Indispensabile poi senz'altro in particolari casi di film, come documentari romanzati, o di ambienti tali che esigano un'autenticità d'interpreti che gli altri non potrebbero ottenere: film di ambienti tropicali o polari, film di particolari classi lavoratrici, pescatori ad esempio, specialmente quando la storia narrata non s'impersoni in pochi protagonisti ma sia storia di interesse più generale o di massa. (Barbaro 26)

undoubtedly indispensable in particular cases of films, such as fictional documentaries, or environments that demand/require an authenticity of interpreters that others could not attain: films of tropical or polar environments, films of particular working classes, fishermen for example, especially when just a few protagonists do not embody the narrated story, but is rather a story of more general or mass interest.

While Barbaro supports the use of trained actors in general, each of these exceptions points to a scenario in which “authentic” interpreters, non-actors, must be used. Among them we find the genres which straddle reality and fiction, works that engage large groups and masses (which reappears in my discussion of “chorality”), and works that open categories of identity.¹²¹ Why is it that representations of racial subjects, working classes *qua* working classes, and collective subjects require the use of nonprofessionals?

In regard to race and gender, we have generally, albeit with certain openings and even omissions, grown more insistent on the alignment of identity between actor and character.¹²²

¹²¹ Because Barbaro's point pertains to the actors in the films and not the settings, I read “films of tropical or polar environments” as implying the physical attributes of the performers.

¹²² Some of the “openings” include the various versions of color-blind casting, on one hand, and color-conscious casting that intentionally breaks the racial alignment of character and performer, on the other. The “omissions” lie in those areas that are less nationally politically sensitive, such as in the portrayal of Asians, Latin Americans, Middle Easterners, and Jews. In each of these cases, we frequently do not demand “authenticity” but rather insist on a rough phenotypical alignment of skin color.

Again, social norms articulate with aesthetic norms, determining both what is socially acceptable and what is aesthetically/rhetorically persuasive in a given moment. The politics of identity demand that races represent themselves, a norm that generally holds true for gender as well.¹²³ National origin slightly less so, depending on the context. Meanwhile, over the same century since these texts were published, we have insisted less and less on class as a point of identification. Class and the economic/productive shaping of social reality and relations, on the other hand, has all but disappeared from this matrix of realism and social identity. Films of particular working classes no longer demand authenticity: *pace* Visconti, a film about fishermen played by actors who have never been on a fishing boat is unlikely to undermine the dictates of cinematic realism. While the laboring body was in fact the dividing line between representable and unrepresentable for Stanislavsky, Pudovkin and others, as well as the tell-tale example of Peirce's "indexicality," we can now note that these self-same elements rarely crosscut representations of the social and even more rarely make claims on the relationship between signs and referents.¹²⁴ Beyond historicizing these social and generic conventions, I am interested in how Zavattini's "polemic against the general" and *Bicycle Thieves* deployed these conventions of representation to work against themselves. Not just what the conventions were, but how *Bicycle Thieves*, in particular, theorized and attempted to enact a politics of race and class through anonymity.

And yet, as much as class as a social category has been dislodged from the empirical (not material) signs of the body, we can see the reappearance of that racializing logic return in

¹²³ Barbaro, interestingly, does not mention gender in his text. Perhaps it was too common sense to even mention?

¹²⁴ Peirce's prime example of indexicality referred to the movements and shape of the laborer's body: the stride of a sailor which immediately bespeaks his experience and work at sea. Peirce's point, which has been frequently repurposed and simplified to mean a direct claim of historical veracity, is the contiguous, spatio-temporal relationship between a sign and the signaled entity. The use of nonprofessional actors does indeed "index" reality, but not in the way its detractors believe. Moreover, "contiguity" already signals the logic of the metonym, as opposed to the metaphoric relation of Peirce's two other categories (icon and symbol).

discussions of the nonprofessional, where a notion of “authenticity” still prevails. Like the scare quotes around *race* which indicate its ideological falsity, so we continually rely on the marked discourse of *authenticity* and *reality* when trying to describe the purchase of the nonprofessional actor. In addition to a statement about genre, then, Barbaro also makes the claim that neither race nor class, at least the working classes, can be imitated (reproduced through metaphor). In other words, where Stanislavsky lamented that the old peasant woman could not represent herself on stage, Barbaro would argue that now she *must* represent herself.

Importantly, although somewhat ambiguously, Barbaro also claims that “type” can teach us something about the social nature of psychology. Referencing the Italian School of medical constitutionalism—the dual-pronged idea of an attachment between psychological and somatic states that finds expression physiognomically, and that these traits are therefore hereditary—Barbaro asserts an overlap between the aesthetic discourse of types and the scientific discourse of “biotypes” (constitutions).¹²⁵ “By contrasting the type to the actor, the great importance of the very current study in psychology and medicine of the psychological behavior of the various biotypes has been understood and demonstrated. Investigation which, if in the scientific field is still in an auroral stage, in the field of art, supported by happy and fortunate intuitions, has always given very brilliant results” (Barbaro 26–27). Barbaro’s invocation of biotypes is disconcerting because of the latter’s application in Fascist ideology and policy. Biotypology, a term coined in 1922 by the famous endocrinologist Nicola Pende (who also coined the term “endocrinology”), was indissociable from Fascist eugenics and social engineering programs

¹²⁵ Eisenstein outright denied that typage linked the aesthetic and the scientific. For Eisenstein, the connection between the biological and the social seems purely ideological, a stance which both rejects the material conditions of performance as well as the performative dimension of the type. To this latter point, as I will go on to argue, the type as a category, as a pluralization of the singular, also produces the concrete singular as such. Denying this logical connection, which produces and excludes the racial subject, the affective subject in da Silva’s terms, also serves to obscure the operation of race.

(Beccalossi, “Optimizing and Normalizing” 72).¹²⁶ Barbaro’s text was written in 1937.¹²⁷ The relationship between the Fascist regime and eugenics was well-established, and Pende’s star was still on the rise.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Constitutional medicine emerged in the mid to late 19th century, most notably in Italy with the work of Achille De Giovanni. This movement towards holistic encounters with and analyses of the human body was a direct response to the increasing empirical focus on cells and microbiology dominant in laboratory driven medicine. Both with and against the burgeoning emphasis on bacteriology, De Giovanni sought to treat the patient, not just the disease, and redeem the dynamic Hippocratic approach against the then current “ontological theory” of disease, as Canguilhem calls it. To that end, he wondered why the same bacteria did not always produce the same results in every human specimen. His seminal work, *Morfologia del corpo umano*, strikingly dedicated to Charcot, engaged a 16 yearlong project of anthropometric research in order to understand “individuality” “in its concrete morphological value.” Individuality, the morphological combination of the specific patient, was the goal of his research.

His work was thus also a counter to other schools of constitutionalism and anthropology that sought to create “types,” describing how individuals fit into larger groups based on their shared characteristics. Instead, De Giovanni, who actually preferred “combinations” to “types” in order to emphasize the mutable aspects of form, worked from the group to the individual (De Giovanni 224–25). Working within deeply racist paradigms of dominant and subordinate races, he simultaneously confirmed and surpassed the categories he laid out for himself. In addition to race (white, black, Asian), he also created three types: proportional, thin with long limbs, fat with short limbs. On one hand, the racial categories he uses would be passed on to the next two generations of his students and factor directly and powerfully into the Fascist regime’s “New Man” ideology. On the other hand, his emphasis on the particular was such that, contrary to positivist thinking of the time and in an almost Freudian vein, he ultimately deemed the pathological to be the norm, and “normal” an ideal that did not exist in reality. Within and alongside his racist ideology of superior and inferior races, his approach to form and his analytic method allowed him to write such startling sentences as, the morphological type in the vulgar sense, that which should represent the norm in everything and reproduce itself in the majority of men, does not exist. THE MORPHOLOGICAL HUMAN, JUST LIKE THE MORPHOLOGICAL TYPE OF THE RACES, IS A CONCEPT; MEANWHILE THE MORPHOLOGICAL TYPE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IS A REALITY” (De Giovanni 131).

In other words, the human and race are not empirical referents for de Giovanni. However, despite the ideal nature of the human and of race, the normal as pathological does not successfully destabilize the conceptual framework in which he worked. Instead, the norm as ideal inspires the formulation of a “perfect type.” De Giovanni’s student, Giacinto Viola, then incorporated Quetelet’s statistical method to arrive at a “normotype,” the statistical average of all specimens within given parameters (region, gender, and race). He thus reversed De Giovanni’s ideal conception of the norm, even while admitting its rarity. He also reversed de Giovanni’s paradigm of seeking to understand the individual within the group and sought instead to create groups out of individuals. Nicola Pende, who was Viola’s medical assistant, ultimately combined both of these perspectives by differentiating “clinical normality” (health) and “statistical normality” (ideal human type) (Beccalossi, “Types, Norms, and Normalization” 118).

¹²⁷ This historical and ideological overlap between aesthetic forms and racist ideology also creates an unsettling continuity between Fascism and Communism in Italy. Barbaro himself, as Ruth Ben-Ghiat points out “was an enigmatic figure whose politics throughout the entire fascist era were extremely ambiguous. The few accounts of his activities in the interwar period have been framed by his postwar position as the foremost communist theoretician of cinematic neorealism, and his literary endeavors have received almost no attention from critics” (Ben-Ghiat 647). Interestingly, Barbaro’s novels were embraced by the Fascists in their ideological creation of a “new man” and a “new morality.” To that end, Ben-Ghiat quotes one critic as praising the “chorality” of Barbaro’s novel *Luce Fredda* (Ben-Ghiat 650).

¹²⁸ His Biotypological Institute had been established in the early 1920’s, and he received increasing support from Mussolini through the 1930’s. In 1938 Mussolini approved Pende’s Orthogenesis and Naturist Therapy and named him Chancellor of the Academy of Italian Youth of Littorio in 1940. He continued to support Pende until the end of WWII (Cassata 214).

Exploiting what Canguilhem called the “ambiguity” of the term “normality,” namely that in the 19th century it came to refer both to an ideal and an average, Pende’s research and the rhetoric of normalization/optimalization ultimately found a sponsor in Fascist biopolitical and racial hygienic projects. On endocrinological grounds, he created “integral biotypological profiles” to visualize the individual morphologically, physiologically, and psychologically. The biotype took into account familial and racial heredity and attempted to coordinate these types with receptivity to disease, as well as character and personality (Cassata 42). Pende envisioned a comprehensive state system of normalization and optimization of the four primary groups which Pende saw as the pillars of the Fascist state: women, children, workers, and race. The goals were clear: minimize supposed deviancy from the ideal norm within each group, increasing quality and quantity. Each group required intensive surveillance and intervention in order to be normalized and optimized. In place of the “health passbooks” adopted by schools in 1936, Pende envisioned a “biotypological card” for all Italians. The card would state their biotype, along with many other measurements, and would have to be regularly updated by a doctor. Pende’s pivotal work, *Bonifica umana razionale e biologia politica* (Rational human reclamation and political biology, published in 1933 and dedicated to Mussolini, drew organicist parallels between the individual body and the nation, imagining “a fascist biomedical architecture, structured on different levels of biotypological control” (Cassata 44). Pende’s rise within the Fascist party and the importance of his research to Fascist ideology and programming are testament to the “profound coalescence between biotypology and fascism” (Cassata 43–44). Indeed, the holistic view of the individual, which took into account physical and psychological characteristics and then projected moral dispositions and productive potential from those quantitative measurements, coincided with the Fascist demand for the “New Man.”

Workers were also classified so that social classes would coincide with biotypes, creating “biologically differentiated classes of workers and producers” (Cassata 198). In this sense, labor appears as always already racialized. The biological and ideological imbrication of race and class in the formation of the New Man in Mussolini’s corporative economy betrays the racial underpinnings of class identity. That is, the suturing of the sociopolitical and the economic through biology constructs both race and class as mutually constitutive. The racial hygienic programs meant to purify the heterogenous “Latin” Italian race and the effort to optimize the workforce are one and the same. Because of its heterogenous racial composition at this pivotal moment of nation building, Italy emerges as a complex site of analysis, where both the material and its representation are both being produced. It is both producing itself within the terms of racial capitalism (as a Latin race) and excluding the racial other (Blacks, Jews, etc.). In the Italian context, the racial difference of the worker already existed, but had to be found empirically. The simultaneity of race and class is already evident in de Giovanni’s 1891 text, spanning both in a single sweep:

Between the wingspan and the height there is a constant proportion: it is proportionally greater in apes than in man – and greater in negros, negritos and papuas than in Caucasian races. The wingspan of wealthy classes is almost constantly greater than that of middle class and that of poor is almost constantly lesser than that of the latter. I have actually only found in certain cases the transverse diameter, or wingspan if you prefer, less than the height; these cases, too, were poor individuals, who presented symptoms of various nervous infirmities.

The point is not simply that the constitutionalists sought an empirical, biological basis for class divisions and therefore as a justification of oppression, but rather that the logic of racialization

also functions to construct the worker as such. Biotypes are not simply a biopolitical construct in the Foucauldian sense of governmentality and control, but rather open up categories of labor as racialized. As Italy consolidates itself nationally, the fault lines between racial and political subjectivization are exposed.

We can thus reappraise Amidei's comment, quoted earlier, that the lack of solidarity among workers and within the Communist party led him to feel that the film wasn't "Italian" (Faldini and Fofi 135).¹²⁹ Indeed the primary mode of interpreting *Bicycle Thieves* until more recent, "aesthetic" interventions such as by Wagstaff, Schoonover, and others, has been to read neorealism as the construction of national identity. For Amidei, if the film is meant to rely on the imbrication of leftist politics that vanquish a Fascist past with a newfound sense of being Italian, then the film clearly fails. Without a leftist political solidarity, the film is no longer "Italian." My point here is not that nationalism should be totally vanquished from Communist political struggle, but rather to point out how the political subtended the national in this moment of imagining and performing the "new Italian man." Further, just as the discourse on "chorality" moves from a historical empiricism to an idealized community in a single step, in recent criticism the only alternative to viewing neorealism as a "national" cinema producing a "national" body and identity is that it produces an idealistic humanity. However, Zavattini's "polemic against the general" clearly encompasses the particular "type of solidarity" that leads to this national/racial identity, and his materialism insists against a humanist satisfaction. Instead, the film deconstructs these general categories of identity formation. Specifically, the use of types, understood through the racializing and classifying terms of the biotype, is repurposed against itself; it does not reinforce an already apprehended combination of race, class, gender,

¹²⁹ Instead, this sentence is often quoted for its political value rather than for how the political subtends the national.

and nation, but mobilizes type through the concrete particular to rearticulate these categories as points of difference.

I began this chapter by reproducing James Price's phrase "Roman workman" to describe Maggiorani's anonymous performance, a joint moniker that class-ifies, racializes and genders the "general" category. Better said, the phrase exposes the forms of identification at work in the movement from the singular, through the anonymous, to the plural. With time and distance, the affective and metonymic layers of these constructions may no longer function. In terms of plot, *Giame Alonge* has drawn attention to a series of details that would certainly not have escaped the 1948 viewer. In particular, the unemployed man who calls Antonio in the opening scene wears an Italian beret. The thief, meanwhile, wears a German military cap. *Pace* Bazin, who did not recognize the thief despite this flagrant marking, the thief was likely immediately recognizable when he reappears later. Antonio tries to leverage the German hat as proof that he accurately recognizes thief but is undermined by one of the thief's neighbors who also wears a German hat (although not a "field" cap). Beyond the historical pertinence of these postwar souvenirs, the association between the thief and his neighbors and German presence constructs a point of national/racial difference.

Perhaps more central, however, is how this connection between biotype and type shifts our understanding of the spectator's perception of the nonprofessional actor. As Schoonover puts it, "the merits" of using nonprofessionals in key roles

"appear particularly visible in those amateurs whose life experience weighs heavily on their bodies... These amateurs were often chosen for a defining physical characteristic—an automatic quirk or ingrained bearing that was taken to index their personal histories,

national pain, and the aftereffects of a global war on the human community.”

(Schoonover, “Wastrels” 69)¹³⁰

Although Schoonover contends that the amateur may be “detectable” through the ““natural” action of their bodies,” or even by contrasting their performances with those of the professionals, perhaps even in the same film, I think he is also suggesting that the bodies themselves may divulge their own histories (Schoonover, “Wastrels” 69). There is no shortage of such observations. Lamberto Maggiorani was “chosen precisely for the hands, gestures and movements that betrayed the factory worker in him” (Haaland 128). At that moment, the racializing logic returns, demanding the appearance of an empirical “substantive bodily trait,” as Denise Ferreira da Silva calls it, in analyses that would otherwise relegate race to a neatly symbolic value (da Silva xxvi). In other words, the discourse of authenticity forces the repetition of a pathologizing, racial optic. As the spectator’s attitude towards the nonprofessional searches for what world those hand, face, and movements belong to, they seek to ideologically apprehend this anonymity.

By animating the particular in their *polemic against the general*, they effectively disturb the functioning of raciality. What Schoonover ultimately interprets as international distance is actually this dynamic attack on the production of racial categorization. At stake in Zavattini’s polemic against the general and his reversal of the particular to the type, therefore, is nothing less than an opening of the racial categories delimiting the subject’s passage from the singular to the plural: as we attempt to read Antonio racially as representative of a larger “chorus,” the racial category of that group is disturbed. In its construction of transindividuality, *Bicycle Thieves* does not sacrifice Maggiorani’s (or Antonio’s) particularity in order to represent an *everyman*, nor

¹³⁰ In this article, Schoonover considers how labor is made visible. While I appreciate how he readmits “labor” into discussions of the nonprofessional, there is a certain irony in his omission of race.

allow that same particularity to efface his connection to a larger group; instead, the film elaborates the mutual constitution of the particular and the general. While these two points are indeed in a dialectical relationship, as Leavitt says, it is not an innocent one. Zavattini's polemic against the general does not entail blithely chasing the brute fact, the *crudité* that exceeds its own identifying terms. An Adornian take might be something like: an insistence on the non-identical within an expression of identity creates new "constellations" which in turn upset identity. Or, in Adorno's more Marxist inflection, by continually manifesting use value in and through exchange value, new subjectively created contexts upset the stability and common sense of exchange value. The general, like Balibar's *nonsubject*, becomes an anonymous category that remains open except in certain conjunctures. It is therefore no surprise that Antonio does not ultimately prompt empathy as a "Roman workman," understood in its full sense as a racial/class identity.

In addition to deconstructing itself as an "Italian" film, *Bicycle Thieves* also works against a default reading of proletarian. Following Amidei's lack of "solidarity" a step farther, the film's notoriously ambiguous ending pries open the operation of class identity. To the disappointment of many Marxists, the film refuses to suture class position to either consciousness or history in a Lukácsian sense. Ultimately, this separation between proletarian subjectivity and history takes us on a radically new approach to class consciousness, not as the apprehension of an already occupied position, but as the formation of a position in that specific conjuncture. For Lukács, class consciousness—the apprehension of both one's own class interests and of economic interest as the motor of history—is (finally) possible through capitalism. A "critical realism," as he called it, would furnish such a perspective on history. Aristarco, with Lukács' view of Balzac in mind, viewed neorealism as a step towards "realism."

Particularly as expressed by De Sica and Zavattini's "documentary making," neorealism appears still too concerned with spontaneous everyday life to be "art." In emulation of the historical novel, neorealism should aspire to develop from *cronaca* to *storia*, a charge which reveals the interweaving of a named subject with the comprehension of history.¹³¹ In essence, the Lukácsian inspired critique political critique of *Bicycle Thieves* implies not only the dissipation of a particular, preconceived, named subject, the proletariat, but also a notion of history as constructing and constructed by that subject. The problem is not as simple as reevaluating the positivity of the working class; the problem is to, in the wake of that lack of positivity, somehow track the movements and plot the developments of an unfolding anonymity.

While classes in a strict sense are formed by their relation to the means of production, the proletariat as a revolutionary force only partly so. That is, the proletariat is nothing if not a class, but, as Balibar points out, the teleology of historical materialism rests on the emergence of the proletariat as a positive, political subject produced by and then producing historical change.¹³² Following this view, which predominated through the Second and Third Internationals and still persists at the heart of Humanist Marxism, the proletariat as a named identity/subject constitutes itself through revolutionary action. Despite their differences, the views of Lukács and Aristarco, and Tomasulo's critique of *Bicycle Thieves* all fall under this banner. The primary political thrust for these theorists is the formation and consolidation of this named subject, the working class as an active agent, from out of the fragmenting, alienating, anonymizing conditions of capitalism. Looked at from this perspective, it is hard not to read Aristarco or even Tomasulo as resorting to

¹³¹ I leave these terms in the Italian to better capture the double meanings between actuality and aesthetic forms. *Cronaca* means both "chronicle" in the sense of a short narrative, an account, but also "current event," as in a newspaper. *Storia* similarly a "story," but first and foremost means "history." For a more in-depth discussion, see Leavitt's *Italian Neorealism: A Cultural History*, Chapter 3 "Chronicle and Tragedy: The Neorealist Representation of History."

¹³² We might connect this materialist circularity, if only provisionally, to the ideological circularity of interpellation, or what Pêcheux calls the "Munchausen Effect."

a form of party vanguardism which indulges a class consciousness idealistically ahead of the actual conditions and organization of the working class.

However, the dual aspect of the proletariat as the working class and as a political/historical subject leaves an opening. The proletariat as a class symmetrical to the bourgeoisie and as a political subject absolutely asymmetrical to any hegemonic class, has led Balibar to call the proletariat the subject that is a “nonsubject” of history, or the class that is a “non-class.”¹³³ If the proletariat were a class in the same sense as the bourgeoisie, it would express particular class interest and would not be the universal class. It would simply be another competing interest. Balibar works out this “antinomy” in Marxist thought through an articulation of the economic and the political: while the bourgeoisie and the working class are formed and organized around a system of exploitation, only the bourgeoisie, because they are the bearers of the relations of production, appear in the moment as an organized political force. They offer a distinct “perspective” and consolidate according to their interest as a class. The proletariat, however, does not exist in this dual economic/political dimension: it must emerge as such, however temporarily or partially, in certain conjunctures. It is thus concretely, objectively present as “the masses,” but absent because it does not represent a consolidated political (subjective) position. For Balibar, this is why the proletariat must be both the subject of history and the non-subject.

The idea of the proletariat as a “subject” supposes an identity, whether spontaneous or acquired as the result of a process of formation and coming to consciousness, but always already

¹³³ Despite a different point of departure, Balibar’s point clearly resonates with a certain line in Rancière. As he put it in *Disagreement*, elaborating on his idea of “the part with no part,” the proletariat is “that class that is not one” (89). In various ways, I believe both are responding to Althusser’s early reference to the masses as a nonsubject, referring to its lack of grounding in material reality. Of course, that warning against idealism became an injunction for Marxists to grapple with the material productions of an ever more diverse, fragmented, heterogenous workforce and grapple with an ever-widening array of subjectivities.

guaranteed by the class condition. The fact that the proletariat, which is both a “class” and the “masses,” is not a subject, that it never coincides with itself, does not mean that the proletariat never presents itself or acts *as a subject in* history. However, this revolutionary action is always tied to a conjuncture, lasting or not, and only exists within its limits (Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas* 147) (italics in original)

For Balibar, the question becomes how (in what conjuncture) the class that is not a class will emerge, and what (conjunctural) “forms of collective representation...can maintain class struggle within mass movements” (Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas* 147). His materialism insists on admitting the overdetermination of each historical moment, such that “history” is never mastered and the “subject” is never fixed. The critical capacity of “historicism” is therefore dislodged from “history;” the analytic framework remains, but the scaffolding is torn down. The insertion of the masses within class formation in *Bicycle Thieves* productively troubles a teleological view of history that rests on the identification of a named subject in history. Taken to its extreme, which I believe we find in the final moments of *Bicycle Thieves*, we might say that the assignment of an anonymous general is a “never yet:” a name that is indefinitely deferred.

However, even this move does not shake the reach of the racial; class has not disappeared but is always articulated with other interpellations. That is, and taking a step further, if class does not appeal to a “real” beyond the “ideological” constitution of subjectivity, the “masses” is also always already subject to the same racializing logic. In this I depart from a tradition of scholars who continue to imagine the masses as if they existed both beyond the racial and gendered “objective” construction of labor, populations, and migration patterns, or the subjective construction of the masses within discourse and representation. Such accounts conveniently ignore the ceaseless racial and gendered groundings of the masses in historical accounts. This

erasure has contributed to a “de-exoticized” and “de-ethnologized” Freud,¹³⁴ but is particularly evident in references to Le Bon, whose argument against equality is often regaled as simply recognizing the crowd as “the most powerful force in modern society” (Jannarone 137). In contrast to the absence of commentary on gender and race in recent reappraisals of Le Bon and the works of other early “crowd theorists,” I argue that this racialization and gendering are complicit in the very construction of “the masses.”¹³⁵ For Le Bon, while races themselves may be more or less feminine, being part of a crowd always feminizes and racializes the (white male) individual (Le Bon, *The Crowd* 46).

“It will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds there are several—such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides—which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution—in women, savages, and children, for instance. (Le Bon, *The Crowd* 41–42)

Gender and race constitute the specific forms of “regression,” as Freud will call them, that define the group mind, so that what the individual overcomes as he distances himself from the group is a mythical feminine, savage, and childlike past. Although Le Bon does not explicitly name him as such, the “individual” thus emerges as a white male who has overcome his own geographic and national origins.¹³⁶ Clearly, while the individual seems to transcend his own race, the group

¹³⁴ See John Zilcosky, “Savage Science.” (Zilcosky)

¹³⁵ One example among many is Ernesto Laclau’s *On Populist Reason*, which makes no mention of race and indeed edits it out of the sources referenced in his early chapters (Laclau)

¹³⁶ Despite their apparent difference, we should not forget the deep imbrication of nationality and skin color in Le Bon’s use of “race.” Reading *The Crowd* alongside Le Bon’s prior work, *Psychology of Peoples*, however, clarifies that he does not solely mean national origin. While at times he refers to “racial” distinctions between the peoples of European nations, his prior work states directly that all European races are among “the superior races” (Le Bon, *The Psychology of Peoples* 27)). That is, while “English,” “German,” and “Latin” are “races,” so are “negroes,” “Asiatics,” and “Hindoos.” There can be no doubt that both books form one and the same project—a “sociological, “scientific” account of and strategy for white, male domination.

cannot be imagined without one. Further, the characteristics of a “race” “constitute the unvarying source from which all our sentiments spring,” such that race is the ultimate ground, one of the “mysterious master-causes that rule our destiny” (Le Bon, *The Crowd* 45, 227).

Freud’s critique of Le Bon in his 1921 text, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, waffles over the question of race.¹³⁷ Freud rewrites Le Bon’s “mysterious master-cause,” not unsurprisingly, as a “racial unconscious” which, surprisingly, he can only half-address: the unconscious, “racial mind” “lies outside the scope of psychoanalysis” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 6–7).¹³⁸ While the text naturally focuses on those arguments within the scope of psychoanalysis, precisely this external element reappears at pivotal moments throughout.¹³⁹ Lurking behind the Church and the Army, the organized groups which immediately conjure Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses, we find scattered references to the “mass attachments (*Massenbindungen*) of

¹³⁷ This text is all the more important because it is also where Balibar locates Freud’s transindividuality, directly challenging the anti-collective sentiment that many have found in Freud’s text. Balibar draws our attention to Freud’s opening statement, where he contends that the separation between individual and social psychologies is but the product of an “abstract,” or else disciplinary distinction. In contrast to prior theories of the masses and crowd psychology, Freud argues that both the *Ich* and masses (groups) are formed through emotional relations and bonds, which he calls processes of “identification.” Freud thus addresses the problem of the masses from quite the opposite vantage point as Le Bon, who figures prominently throughout. In Balibar’s reading, the individual and the group are mutually constitutive and mutually expressive, or as Balibar summarizes Freud’s argument, “the individual and the collective stem from one single *structure*, whose poles or functions they constitute, and which are themselves reversible” (Balibar, “Group Psychology” 46). For Balibar, Freud’s rejection of the abstract distinction between individual and social, which importantly does not favor either side against the other but finds them equivalent in their dependence on the same structure, constitutes a “moment of the transindividual.”

¹³⁸ As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen notes, for Le Bon and Freud the unconscious is “unnameable” and “hereditary” (Borch-Jacobsen 18). He goes on to claim that “Le Bon’s unconscious, except for the biological racism, is Freud’s as well” (Borch-Jacobsen 138). I do not argue that Freud agreed with or condoned Le Bon’s biological racism, but rather that a racializing logic operates through his construction of time and identities. Further, I find the overlaps mentioned by Borch-Jacobsen more substantive than perhaps he does himself.

¹³⁹ In light of this racializing logic, we should also consider the implications of the “de-ethnologizing” that Freud’s text has undergone in recent years alongside another important trend. As Balibar points out, Freud reverses the line of approach of other crowd theorists by addressing, first and foremost, the most organized “institutions of the established order,” the Church and the Army. At the same time, these two “primary masses” are indeed the two “pillars of the state,” as Balibar puts it, and therefore “names the state metonymically” (Balibar, “Group Psychology” 48). At the same time, his elision of any direct reference to the state constitutes a “de-politicizing” of a deeply political analysis. Read together, I ask, what is this dual trajectory in contemporary scholarship that simultaneously re-politicizes and yet de-ethnologizes? If the path towards a political Freud, one that recenters mass organization and psychology, has thus far been one that elides the racial, the primitive, the exotic, and the ethnographic. I argue that we in fact must do the opposite: as we reinvest the text with its political value, we must also explore how Freud bound those politics to race and identity.

race, national divisions, and of the social class system.” He begins to comprehend these attachments through the three forms of identification (Oedipal, substitute for libidinal object-choice, and commonality),¹⁴⁰ but at the beginning of his chapter on “The Herd Instinct” admits the movement from psychoanalysis into speculative anthropology, which corresponds to a movement from identification into a kind of unnamed attachment. There, after recounting the symptoms which can be explained through identification among members of a group, such as a lack of independence, he interrupts himself.

“But if we look at it as a whole, a group shows us more than this. Some of its features—the weakness of intellectual ability, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation and delay, the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion and to work it off completely in the form of action—these and similar features, which we find so impressively described in Le Bon, show an unmistakable picture of a regression of mental activity to an earlier stage such as we are not surprised to find among savages or children” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 49).

On one hand, the intense emotional ties of identification can explain the mimicry of “group individuals.” On the other hand, the features described by Le Bon, which importantly are also the distinguishing expressions between the categorization of races, show us “more than this.”

In the final chapters of *Massen*, he follows the roots of these symptoms into an inherited “archaic heritage” that he had explored a few years prior in *Totem and Taboo*. There, a band of

¹⁴⁰ Freud delineates three distinct, although potentially overlapping forms. The first is “the most original (*ursprünglichste*) form of emotional tie with an object,” identification with the figure of the father, which leads to the Oedipal complex (Freud, *Group Psychology* 39)(translation modified). The second occurs when sexual object-choice regresses to a form of identification. Instead of desiring an (appropriate) object, the object is “introjected” into the ego, causing an identification with the libidinal object rather than a desire for it. Instead of wanting to *be* the father the child wants to *have* the father. The third form partially structures emotional bonds between members of a group and “may arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 40).

brothers are ruled by a primal Father, who “coerced (*zwang*) them into abstinence and consequently into the emotional ties with him and with one another which could arise out of their impulses that were inhibited in their sexual aim. He coerced (*zwang*) them, so to speak, into mass psychology” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 56)(translation modified). Eventually they kill (and possibly eat) their father, forging another layer of “identification with him,” and therefore also between each other through the mutual substitution of the same object in place of their ego or ego ideal (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 176). On one hand, although group and individual psychologies always coexisted, they were separate in that the Father did not identify with anyone, and the band of sons could do nothing except identify (Freud, *Group Psychology* 55). Breaking this division, Freud pinpoints when one of the members of the group “achieved” “individual psychology” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 67). “It was then, perhaps, that some individual, in the exigency of his longing, may have been moved to free himself from the group and take over the father’s part” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 68). Weaving a second layer of representation into this “just so story,” Freud claims that “He who did this was the first epic poet; and the advance was achieved in his imagination” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 68). Individual psychology thus emerges through the “false” representation of an individual imaging himself as a Hero and single-handedly killing the primal father. At this point he references a pivotal chapter in *Totem and Taboo*, where the epic tale of the primal father is told through ancient Greek Tragedy. In that version, the Hero is not a son who claims to have slain the father, but the Father himself, who is doomed to suffer. Crucially, it is the Chorus who accompany, sympathize, and ultimately mourn his demise (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 193). Again, fantasy works to displace the tragic guilt, because it was ultimately “the Chorus who caused the Hero’s suffering” (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 193).

For Freud, “racial characteristics, class prejudices, public opinion, etc.,” signal towards a subconscious regression, through which the “mass appears to us as a revival of the primal horde” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 55). Further, this “just so story” continues influencing if not determining our “mass minds” (*Massenseele*), or elsewhere “mass attachments,” which ambiguously operate both in and outside of the system of identifications Freud develops in order to comprehend the complex interweaving of group and individual.¹⁴¹ Because those symptoms are none other than the racialized characteristics of savages and primitives, they carry with them the “racial mind,” that which from the outset “lies outside the scope of psychoanalysis.” Not only does Freud turn to this originary scene of ambivalent love for the father, the rivalry among brothers followed by parricide and guilt, precisely in order to explain what we could not learn through identification, but this move carries with it the previously proscribed question of a racial mind. In Freud’s account, race is simultaneously its own absent cause and the origin of processes of identification which it symptomatically exceeds. In other words, the symptoms of racial origin, those features “so impressively described in Le Bon,” cannot be explained by the processes of identification; at the same time, these symptoms lead him to probe the primitivist “just so” myth, where he counterintuitively locates the origins of identification. While the limits of various forms of identification in a strict definitional sense (whether or not a particular tie is actually a form of identification), as well as the distinctions between those forms (whether one form implies or relies upon another form), remain cloudy, we can also note that the most pressing group attachments partially (insofar as they are regressive) exceed and precede any

¹⁴¹ Rena Grant, citing the same passage from the beginning of “The Herd Instinct,” homes in on another logical inconsistency: “This statement...is quite clearly a case of Freud’s particular assumption as to what kind of individual we’re talking about; quite crudely, it can’t be true that *every* individual in a group is dragged down to the average level of intelligence—some of them presumably will have to be *raised* to it” (Grant 147). For Grant, this “assumption” raises a deep ambivalence concerning the distinction between normal and pathological.

form of individual identification.¹⁴² Beyond a question of simply repeating Le Bon's prejudicial view of the masses (albeit without the overt racism of directly ascribing those same qualities to "inferior" peoples), the point here is that race and "origin" reappear in his analysis prior to and in excess of identification. Comparing these two fantastic representations of the primal horde and Father, one epic and one Tragic, we can say that, for Freud, the chorus represents pure origin while the Hero continually invents and reinvents his own history. The chorus always has a race and an origin, while the Hero, the narcissist, the writer of History, has none.

The implications are twofold. First, race reappears at the level of the unconscious, mysteriously influencing, if not determining, our transindividual being. This is to say, race does not appear here as a statement of ontology, nor does "origin" imply the beginning of being. Instead, "origin" functions rhetorically, asserting a metonymic continuation over time and attachment within groups. We see the functioning of a racial logic of origin inherent in the regressive construction of groups. Which is to say that, while Freud constructs a universal subject through an imagined past for all humans, the workings of race within both the symptoms and inheritance of regression delimit that universality. What the individual overcomes through

¹⁴² The Freudian formulation of identification contains a few ambiguities. First, as José Esteban Muñoz points out, citing Diana Fuss, Freud both trenchantly separates desire and identification while also mapping one on top of the other (Muñoz 13). In the first form of identification, identification with the father, which Freud argues is ambivalent insofar as it naturally becomes a hostile wish to replace the father, simultaneously structures and is structured by desire: on one hand, identification with the father precedes sexual object choice; on the other hand, desire for the mother (the mother as a sexual object cathexis bolsters the ambivalence which characterizes that identification. In this form Freud separates identification and desire. But then the second form, which Muñoz playfully terms a "queer introjection," speaks to the blurring of identification and desire in Freud's normative structure (Muñoz 203 fn.16). In the third form, homosexual libidinal bonds are excised from the start. Alongside the structuring of desire and identification, Rena Grant has pointed out that, since Freud grounds the second and third forms in examples of young girls, he blurs the typically male subject of Freudian thought. As Grant points out, the blurring of male and female subjects coincides with the blurring of normal and pathological.

Ernesto Laclau points out a second ambiguity, namely that identification between members of a group is not solely based on the perception of a common quality (the third form), but also "lies in the nature of the tie with the leader" (Laclau 54). Freud thus ties a theoretical and terminological knot, such that identification with a leader may or may not enable identification between members of a group, while the term itself speaks to a varied assortment of emotional ties.

“independence” and “originality” is ultimately “origin” itself, as articulated by the dominant terms of identity in that moment (race, nation, class, gender, etc). The lurching appearance of race, nation, and class behind the “primary masses” of the Church and Army do not only reproduce the primitivism or racial thinking of the moment, but they also teach us that “origin” is both the ground and excess of identification. Following Freud’s argument, we can conclude that *there are no non-raced masses*.

Second, all of this points to an unresolved point of difference in the Freudian mechanisms of identification: regressive identification is never reconciled with the three primary forms. It would seem that as we regress to the “primitive man” which potentially survives in every individual, the identifications with brothers and murdered father reappear. But what caused that regression to begin with, except the fact that, following Balibar’s convincing argument concerning Freudian transindividuality, we are always already in masses? This process always leaves us with an excess, an unaccounted-for history that led to the conditions of regression prior to identification as such. In every case of identification there will always be a moment prior. Freud signals this prior moment in the material quoted above with the term “coerce” (*Zwang, zwingen*).¹⁴³ That is, as quoted above, the members of the group are “forced” into mass psychology (Freud, *Group Psychology* 56). The same moment recurs in his account of a group of children (where, we must remember, “child” is identical to the neurotic, the savage, the racialized subject, the other) who are put in a nursery. Because all the children are loved equally by the parents, they are “forced (*gezwungen*) into identifying” with the other children (Freud, *Group Psychology* 52). Once that identification takes place, which is to say the substitution of

¹⁴³ We can note that this use of coercion is not quite the same as the external *Zwang* necessary to create “artificial” masses such as the Church and the Army; this use of coercion actually contributes to the formation of “natural” masses.

the same object in place of either their ego or ego ideal, a repression of rivalry/ambivalence allows them to experience a “*Gemeingeist, esprit de corps*, ‘group spirit’, etc.” and ignites the desire to appear as equals before the law (Freud, *Group Psychology* 52). In other words, identification insufficiently explains the various relationships between members of groups; another, “coercive” mechanism is at work beyond identification.¹⁴⁴ That is, outside of the three primary forms of identification, a “coercive moment” appears in the construction of groups, signaling that another process is at work. If identification occurs “voluntarily,” so to speak, such as in the various scenes illustrating the three primary forms of identification, then both identification and this secondary process completely overlap. In those cases, “coercion” does not appear as an external force. Identification and this “other process” become indistinguishable. However, once the process is coercive, then the existence of the group prior to, or in excess of any identification emerges more clearly. I propose that first, this other, coercive mechanism might best be understood as interpellation; and second, reading the dually political and ethnological Freud reveals that regression is in fact always a racial term, implying the masses and the Chorus as always subject to a racializing logic.

In its final moments, *Bicycle Thieves* performs two interrelated actions. First, it thematizes its own poetic structure by dissolving the opening identification. As Wagstaff describes the ending, “Antonio is reabsorbed into the landscape from which he first emerged at the beginning of the film. But the crowd into which he is shown merging is the very crowd that De Sica has, with enormous eloquence, shown rejecting and ‘ejecting’ him a short while earlier” (Wagstaff 393). While I appreciate Wagstaff’s attention to the landscape, and indeed agree that

¹⁴⁴ Freud also uses *Zwang* to describe the compulsive or obsessive behaviors of the individual. Continuing the question of transindividuality, in which the solitary individual is really a “mass of one,” there is perhaps an important connection between obsessive-compulsive behavior, understood as self-coercion, and a latent group mind within the individual.

Antonio's relation to the landscape constructs him as a choral figure, what I think Wagstaff misses is that the very basis of Antonio's separation from the crowd was the poetic operation which nominated him as the protagonist to begin with. Antonio's repeated ejections and rejections from the group thematize and draw our attention to the fate of the protagonist who has been separated from the mass. As Freud asks in *Totem and Tabu*, "but why did the Hero of tragedy have to suffer?" Freud's answer, which resonates quite easily with Schoonover and Tomasulo's analyses, as well as Zavattini's indictment of his own film, is that originally it was the Chorus that caused the Hero to suffer. Now, however, the Hero is made to appear responsible for his own suffering, and through identification with the Hero, the Chorus suffers along with him and may assuage their own guilt. However, in this case, the Hero is not killed or banished from the city—quite to the contrary. In this case, the film attempts to dissolve the artifice of narrative along with its glorification of the hero. Antonio rejoins the crowd, the chorus, drawing our awareness to the poetic operation which temporarily, and "fictitiously," set him apart to begin with.

Second, the ending attempts to enact a relationship beyond identification, one based on the metonymic attachment already present in Maggiorani's anonymous performance. Once Antonio is no longer the Hero, no longer a point of identification, he returns to the chorus. And no longer the compact chorus of the opening. The ending throws wide the tightly defined chorus of Roman workmen who open the film into a frighteningly expansive public. He happens to join a tremendous crowd leaving a sports stadium after a match, and their excitement briefly contrasts with his suffering. The final shot shows him and Bruno from behind, completely reabsorbed into the crowd, no longer physically or affectively set apart. What I think this notoriously "ambiguous" ending means to convey is a self-reflexive view of a contingent attachment beyond

identification. It is not a representation of a group in the metaphoric sense, but rather a choral attachment meant to encompass both the heterogeneous crowd that stretches in front of Antonio, but also the crowd behind him: the audience. The point is neither to be optimistic nor pessimistic about Antonio's fate or that of the working class, neither an image of solidarity, such as that found at the end of *La Terra Trema*, nor one of alienation.

By first thematizing the ends of poetic identification and then returning Antonio and Bruno to the chorus as the masses, the film tries to capture our own attachment to them. The fact that the chorus can no longer be named or identified speaks directly to the core political problematic: solidarity within a preestablished, identified group is easy, but how can we admit or create the attachments that lead to future productive identifications? As Torunn Haaland describes it, alluding to the classic *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* dichotomy, "the film categorically rejects a nostalgic vision of *communities* as built on common interests extinguished by the self-interests of *societies* (Haaland 130). In other words, De Sica and Zavattini are not issuing a vision of the working class through the lens of an already mastered History, one which already recognizes the emergent subject of history, but rather a materially formed subject caught in the conjuncture. It is a history of the present, better understood as a historicity without history. At this crucial limit of identification where class has been fully opened to the masses, we can see the border between the "masses as the other," in Raymond Williams's sense, and the "self as masses" in a transindividual sense.

Considering contemporary reactions to the film, the structures of identification prevailed and the audience was not interpellated as one of the masses. Schoonover, for example, struggles to maintain identification even as those nodes are dissolved. "*Bicycle Thieves* initially draws its spectator's attention and identification from the crowd into the story of the plight of one man,

Antonio, but the film's encouragement of an exclusive narrative identification devolves over the course of the narrative...The film begins to make an exclusive sympathetic identification with a single character increasingly confining and morally uncomfortable" (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 167). Then, following in the tradition which takes the camera's point of view to be coeval with the spectator's, Schoonover relays precise camera angles to confirm our distance from Antonio, and Antonio's demoted status from "authoring subject" to "object of our gaze" (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 169). He no longer identifies with Antonio, and yet cannot reconcile the conflict of self and other implicit in this choral construction. "The two walk off into the crowd, and as the film feels to be drawing to a close, we realize that it will not release them from our charge. Like the stranger, we, the international spectator, have been asked to take mercy on the pitiful" (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 171). Stretching the bounds of identification, he finds himself symptomatically as the international spectator in the place of an anonymous stranger, *the well-dressed man whose bike Antonio stole*. The man who does not help Antonio but rather forgives him.¹⁴⁵ Even for Leavitt, the masses are those who do not understand the ethical "tragedy" Antonio has endured. Although Leavitt's point is ultimately that Antonio's tragedy is both particular and universal, I hope to point out that assuming greater knowledge than the masses immediately asserts his separation from them, and also returns us fairly quickly to the vanguardist politics of addressing an uninformed, disintegrated working class. In fact, as Zavattini's later observations confirm, I think the film implies that the theft of the bicycle is tragic because it is absolutely quotidian. The masses around Antonio, those in front of him and us behind him, are equally subject to tragedy and equally bear the responsibility. In other words,

¹⁴⁵ Perhaps, had Antonio successfully rode off with the international spectator's bicycle, Schoonover would feel differently. Ironically, Aristarco quotes Zavattini making nearly the same joke: "'We hope,'" continued Zavattini ironically, that the well-off spectators don't come to the conclusion that workers would be better off without bicycles." (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 1* 95).

the point is not to reproduce the epistemic implications of Poetics, but rather the performative implications of the chorus. Beyond the bounds of identification Zavattini worked to create new forms of participation.

While this expansive, misunderstood category at the end of *Bicycle Thieves*, along with the persistence of identification as guiding operation, have unfortunately lent themselves to the charge of liberal humanism, a more generous reading of the final, choral moments allows for a contingency that is ultimately essential to Zavattini's revision of Marxism. This contingency superficially depends on its own kind of identification, Maggiorani as himself and as a Roman workman, but Zavattini's contribution ultimately lies in his attempt to secure a relationship outside of this identification (albeit without forsaking it completely).

And this is where Zavattini, who was acutely aware of both the detached, humanist spectatorship engendered by the film and of Maggiorani's subsequent struggles, ultimately realized the film's failing. Despite all the accolades showered on the film, in the years after *Bicycle Thieves*' 1948 release, he came to chalk these failings up to the film's reliance on mimesis: because, as he puts it, the "metaphorical" aspect of the film was too strong, the public identified with the portrayed character and neglected both its real-world referent and their own attachment to that referent. As he says in his frequently anthologized "Some Ideas on the Cinema," a 1952 text based on a series of interviews with Michele Gandin from *Cinema Nuovo*, *Bicycle Thieves*, as well as other important neorealist works of the time, are "still metaphorical, because there is still an invented story." In his view, "the persistent habit of identifying with characters is very dangerous (*pericolosa*)," and "there is no need to identify oneself with anyone but oneself (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 112). Clearly, for Zavattini, as for Freud,

metaphor and identification go hand in hand,¹⁴⁶ and both are unsatisfactory. Insofar as metaphorical substitution, which he also considered a “limit” of neorealism at the time, dominates our relation to representation, we are forced into a structure of identification which ultimately paralyzes action in the real world. Because the metaphoric action was so strong, the image of the masses could only be read through distance. For many viewers, Antonio Ricci had completely taken over Lamberto Maggiorani. Moreover, this pattern of identification created the paradigm for reading the entire film, such that the masses could only be read symbolically in relation to Antonio. Ricci does not return to the chorus, Maggiorani does not leave the screen and return to work in the Breda factory, and we spectators do not walk along with the masses. Instead, the masses become a completely instrumental image, allowing the viewer to understand something more about the tragedy of the Hero. However, following Zavattini’s later theorizations, the point is precisely to vanquish the poetic hierarchies which extract heroes from everyday life and build in their place a metonymic relationship outside of identification. In this, *Bicycle Thieves*’s dramaturgy appears ultimately unsuccessful.

Against the waning tide of neorealism in Italy in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, Zavattini persisted in his campaign for a neorealism that employed a “documentary approach” (*spirito documentarista*)¹⁴⁷ and asserted more stringently the presence of the nonfictive within the fictive (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 102). This “documentary approach” is not simply objective or immediately apparent, as we might read into Vertov’s view of cinema, nor does he

¹⁴⁶ As Diane Fuss defines it, “Freud’s scientific theory of identification is entirely predicated on a logic of metaphoric exchange and displacement. Metaphor, *the substitution of the one for the other*, is internal to the work of identification” (Fuss 5)(italics in original). The metaphoric logic of substitution sustains (Freudian) identification as the substitution of an external object in place of the *Ich* or *Ichideal*, as well as a more generic sense of exchanging self with other (or vice versa). This same logic goes to work in aesthetic discussions, framing the spectator’s relationship to the characters.

¹⁴⁷ I follow Brancaleone in translating *spirito* as “approach.” Although “spirit” would be the more literal choice, “approach” better captures the concreteness of Zavattini’s methods.

claim the real-world referent of film as immediately accessible. To the contrary, he continually asserts the necessity of relentlessly “scrutinizing,” “investigating,” and “excavating” reality, processes that reveal reality to be anything but self-evident. Thus, even while Zavattini demands that we establish “immediate” relations with our neighbors and not insert a “veil” between reality and fiction, the active relationship we must adopt in order to know reality undoes any simple opposition between fiction and documentary.¹⁴⁸ As he blurred that line between life and representation, exploring their various points of continuity, he ultimately attempts to reforge their relationship. The technique he reiterated most often was the importance of using real identities, insisting that “The person on the screen who is starving or humiliated should be a real person”

¹⁴⁸ Although he does at times, speak of an “original” and a “symbolic form,” such as in his speech at the 1953 Parma Conference, the importance Zavattini grants to the real within representation has been reduced time and again to a naïve objectivity by nearly every source cited here (as well as those I have not cited, such as Peter Bondanella) (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 158–59). While Bazin has been more or less redeemed in this regard, Zavattini is still made to hold the flag of a subjectless indexing of reality. I cite Wagstaff at length here because I find his position representative of English language scholarship: “For ‘realism’ in general, and for Zavattini in particular, as we have seen, this is to be guaranteed by ‘reality,’ which is in turn partly guaranteed by the indexical characteristics of the cinema as a scientific instrument of inscription” (Wagstaff 82). “In his thinking lies a notion we encounter so often in realist theorizing, and one shared by the neorealists: that ‘reduction’ brings you closer to the ‘real.’ The smaller the ‘facts,’ the more ‘everyday’ they are, the humbler the protagonists, the fewer the events and the more they are preserved in their ‘fullest duration,’ the simpler the apparatus used for recording them, the quicker they are reproduced ..., the closer you are to ‘reality’” (Wagstaff 80). Even out of context, Wagstaff’s use of scare quotes signals where he believes Zavattini oversteps, granting too much importance to an objective reality that persists within representation. He, and the others quoted thus far, depict Zavattini as concerned primarily with the indexical value of cinema, a realism that is inherent in the medium itself. Such a view disregards the analytic, investigative mode which presents reality as anything but self-evident or superficially present. While Zavattini does strategically emphasize the importance of “objective reality,” these terms must be put in the context of his larger output.

For Wagstaff, Zavattini’s frequent blurring of fiction and documentary is symptomatic of an inherited idealism. Similarly, his imperative of a socially engaged cinema constitutes a “‘moralizing’ of the aesthetic that is entirely in line with the idealist aesthetics of *realismo* he inherited from the 1920s and 1930s in Italy” (Wagstaff 80). Charles L. Leavitt IV’s groundbreaking work *Italian Neorealism: A Cultural History* makes great strides in dispelling charges of idealism and the strictly Italian inheritance of neorealism. For Schoonover, Zavattini is a “less theoretical” Bazin. Rather than engaging Zavattini’s Marxism, Schoonover depicts him as a conflicted humanist, one who “intends to argue for how realism forces its viewer to rethink reality and his or her position in it,” but ultimately relied on the “structural distance” required by a contemporary, international humanism (Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* 157). Finally, in an epigraph, Tomasulo quotes Zavattini’s frequent statement that “there must be no gap between life and what is on screen.” Tomasulo does not engage this idea as it appears in context, but positions Zavattini’s use of “life” as a strawman argument suggesting that neorealism exists outside of ideological structures and positionings of the spectator. Nothing could be further from the truth.

(Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 99). Zavattini's first step to overcoming identification is to insist on the value of the real-world referent within the film itself.

“When we speak of a documentary spirit this doesn't mean passive reproduction, but making choices, within the broadest possible panorama, of what, from the point of view of our role as citizens, we consider a necessary object of investigation. To do so, you need to establish a relationship of what I have dubbed “cohabitation” (*convivenza*) with what is going on.” (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 301)

It is a “living-together” or “cohabitation” which expresses a participative relationship with people and situations and speaks to the “*tangible* relations” that constitute our transindividual being (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 157).¹⁴⁹ *Convivenza* is circularly both a prerequisite for approaching reality as well as a result of having thoroughly and concretely investigated it.

If Brecht's solution to the problem of identification was to distance the performer from the character, audience from spectacle, Zavattini's response is merge them together as completely as possible. The point is not to separate reality and spectacle so that an audience may critically reflect on it, but rather to join them—“the gap between life and spectacle should disappear,” he says—so that the audience's attention and empathy remain trained on material life and not diverted towards abstractions (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 110). The gap between spectacle and life disappears not because reality covers spectacle, thus escaping representation, but rather because one flows seamlessly into the other, because they are metonymically contiguous. Further, and reading an element of the performative into his call to invent new forms

¹⁴⁹ In various texts we can hear Zavattini, like Marx in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, wrestling with the counterintuitive disconnection we feel from our neighbors: even as modes of production increasingly connect us in reality, we experience this connection as a disconnection. *Convivenza*, at times, appears to remedy the alienation of social subjects by simply reestablishing relations of production and consumption: by understanding our economic connections to each other we reaffirm our own material bounds. This reductive overcoming of alienation should not exclude the less obvious ones, which take aim at the more mysterious, affective levels of *convivenza* as “participation.”

of “participation” and *convivenza*, he is attempting to enact a different attachment, “revolutionize (the audience’s) conception of what a spectacle is” (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 2* 193).

His response to Maggiorani’s plight and renewed attempt to overcome metaphoric identification, was to make a film about Lamberto Maggiorani starring Maggiorani himself.¹⁵⁰ Immediately following the release of *Bicycle Thieves*, Zavattini wrote the scenario for a new film, first titled *Il grande inganno*, and then, by 1950, *Tu, Maggiorani* (Zavattini, *Selected Writings Vol 1* 101).¹⁵¹ In it, he considers the parallels between Ricci and Maggiorani in order to instantiate this “revolutionized” form of spectacle and overcome the public’s lack of concern for problems in the real world. The 1950 treatment begins by imagining De Sica arriving at the Breda factory in the outskirts of Rome, where he searches for an “authentic worker” to cast in his upcoming film, *Bicycle Thieves*. It then follows an approximation of Maggiorani’s struggles during the filming of *Bicycle Thieves* and his return to the factory once the project was completed. There, however, he finds his identity split. When the workers hear that the company is discussing mass layoffs, Maggiorani tries to organize with the others. They claim that he is an actor now, not a worker, and ignore his pleas for solidarity (Zavattini, *Uomo, vieni fuori!* 140).¹⁵² He is soon laid off and the workers, all due to their individual hardships, are unable to organize a strike. His personal difficulties continue mounting, and he is unable to secure work. Meanwhile, an American magazine, *Life*, arrives to take pictures and interview him. After a fight with his wife, Maggiorani runs off and wanders through the foggy streets of Roma. He stumbles upon a

¹⁵⁰ The project, however, was never produced, and so Zavattini did not discuss it much in his public-facing discussions and interviews. Instead, *La storia di Caterina*, a reconstruction of the story of a mother who was publicly tried for abandoning her 2-year-old son, has remained the primary reference when discussing his more radical film theories and techniques.

¹⁵¹ The original treatment is anthologized as *The Great Deception* in Brancaleone’s *Cesare Zavattini: Selected Writings*, but the 1950 revision discussed here is not.

¹⁵² Zavattini’s idea of a “worker-actor” attempts to overcome precisely this tension. It also centers being a worker within the matrix of identity.

movie theater playing *Bicycle Thieves*, where a woman is just existing with tears in her eyes. Moved by the film, she doesn't recognize Maggiorani. Nor does the ticket collector, who refuses to let him in. Meanwhile his wife frantically appeals to De Sica for help in both finding and possibly employing her husband. De Sica is just then filming a choral scene from his current film, another collaboration with Zavattini, *Miracolo a Milano*. A chorus of the poor sing:

Ci basta un po' di terra per vivere e morir

Ci basta una capanna per vivere e dormir

Dateci un po' di scarpe, le calze ed anche il pan

A queste condizioni crediamo nel doman'. (Zavattini, *Uomo, vieni fuori!* 144)

All we need's a little land so we can live and die

All we need's a little hut so we can live and sleep

Give us some socks and shoes and just a loaf of bread

That'll be enough for us to go on believing in tomorrow

Juxtaposed with this "literal" chorus, Maggiorani continues walking, completely alone but also, suddenly, as an entire chorus himself. The treatment concludes with a wildly expansive plurality, one that combines the real and the fictitious, characters and spectators.

Il suo passo sembra ora diventare il passo stanco e strascicato di cento di mille persone.

Alle sue spalle ci sono tutti i personaggi dei film che hanno invocato in questo

dopoguerra l'aiuto degli uomini, l'attacchino Antonio, il prete di Roma città aperta, i

bambini di Sciuscià, il bambino di Germania anno zero - e folle, folle che piangono nelle

sale dei cinema, folle che applaudono in un impeto fraterno il personaggio fittizio e non

fanno niente per il personaggio vero. (Zavattini, *Uomo, vieni fuori!* 144)

His steps now seem to become the tired, shuffling step of a hundred thousand people.

Behind him are all the characters from the films who have invoked the help of men in this post-war period, the poster hanger Antonio, the priest of *Rome, Open City*, the children of *Sciuscià*, the child of *Germany Year Zero* - and crowds, crowds who cry in cinema halls, crowds who applaud the fictional character in fraternal impetus and do nothing for the real character.

Maggiorani thus becomes a chorus, both in himself and along with a hundred thousand others, both real and fictitious, characters, performers and spectators. Zavattini's central frustration through this treatment has been the idealist division between art and life that allows a public to evince compassion for fictional characters yet turn a blind eye to actual suffering, to applaud Maggiorani as an actor even as his life continually approaches Antonio's destitution. That frustration resolves by fully collapsing the barriers between actors and spectators, life and representation. As Maggiorani becomes a multitude, as the singular is displaced by the plural, he crosses the metaphoric "limit" of neorealism into a kind of "chorality." It is a chorality that is also a *convivenza*, a participation.

The proposed ending of *Tu, Maggiorani* teaches us how to understand the final moments of *Bicycle Thieves*. Ivonne Margulies also hints at this possibility as well when she writes that one of *Tu, Maggiorani*'s lessons for us is "the need to follow (Maggiorani's) back and magnify its significance, while, at the same time, immersing oneself to become part of this crowd, joining in with the people as they leave the soccer match en masse" (Margulies 56). I am not sure if she intended to conflate *Tu, Maggiorani*, which does not mention a soccer match, with *Bicycle Thieves*, which does, but I believe her point her ultimately correct. The ending of *Tu, Maggiorani*

clarifies that the political and aesthetic stakes of *Bicycle Thieves* indeed lie in the activation of a chorality that performs solidarity even as it metaphorically represents its dissolution.

Although Zavattini saw that metaphoric identification dominated spectators' relation to the film, it is clear that he and De Sica strove not to create an image of an imagined community but to enact a performative chorality. A *convivenza* that metonymically connects the spectator through representation. As the "Roman workman" became something *other* than Italian, and the proletariat opened to the masses, the film attempts to interpellate the spectator into an anonymous collective. Were Althusser's policeman (or other) to call out "hey you!," everyone in this crowd, both the thieves in the film and in the audience, would perform the obligatory 180 degree turn.

Conclusion

In the closing tableau of Federico García Lorca's unstaged, unfinished, and supposedly "impossible" masterpiece, *El público*, an unnamed woman in mourning black crosses the stage; a heavy veil conceals her face as she addresses the Director and a Magician, who converse placidly as though the preceding turmoil had never occurred. Yet a riot has just convulsed the theatre. Across a sequence of surrealist tableaux, the onstage audience has pursued the Director for his latest work. Because the play layers stage within stage, it remains uncertain whether the uprising unfolded inside the fictive performance or struck at the institution of theatre itself. While the Director defends his proposed "theatre of the open air" against the "theatre beneath the sand" championed by his secret lover, the First Man, the boundaries blur: a mobile screen whisks characters away and returns them in altered bodies and genders, dancing figures of vines and bells declare unchanging love even as they themselves change form, and the audience finally storms the production and takes hostages.

"Where is my son?" the woman asks, but the referent remains vague after the violence, transformations, and discontinuous images on stage. The Director responds, "What son?" His evasion mirrors our own uncertainty: we do not know who this woman nor who her son is, and even though we saw her son die, we could not have recognized him. "My son Gonzalo," she answers, naming the Director's secret lover. The printed script assigns that lover only the structural label First Man, a role title that appears in both *dramatis personae* and speech prefixes. The disjunction between the generic role and the spoken name opens a dual awareness: Gonzalo surfaces as a singular individual in dialogue while remaining a functional role in the script's machinery. By keeping the figure in continual drift between particularity and generality, Lorca builds anonymity into the play's textual architecture.

The mother then recounts her son's death, speaking of him through the image of a moonfish, the play's emblem of homoerotic love. "This morning the fishermen brought a huge pale rotting moonfish, and they shouted to me: 'Here is your son!' A steady trickle of blood ran from its mouth, and little children laughed and daubed the soles of their boots red. When I had shut the door, I could tell the market people were dragging it to the sea." The singular lover who begged for public acknowledgment and for a theater that more truly represents the world died an anonymous death, a disappearance the script enables by keeping him in two registers at once as both the spoken name *Gonzalo* and the generic role the *First Man*. This structural anonymity operates as a Benjaminian *Zustand*—a suspended state that is both movement (Zu-) and stasis (-stand), in which crisis endures and redemption remains deferred—where the potential for recognition and the certainty of loss coexist.¹⁵³

When the mother then vows to "demand justice before everyone," arguably the political and emotional climax of the play, we thus immediately know that the demand will fail. Her appeal is swept away by the openness of figuration that allowed him to become a moonfish, and yet that also caused his anonymous death as a moonfish, his form unrecognizable. The paratextual opening to the printed script widens the interval between what "is" and what "dares to appear." Lorca lists the role simply as *Hombre Primero*. Later editors corrected this

¹⁵³ We can also briefly note this Benjaminian "interrupting mother" as a trope in her own right. In *Les Noces* she appears at the end of Scene 3, lamenting, nearly mourning, the loss of her daughter and arguably bearing the affective weight of the work. In Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* a woman ("B Woman") enters as John Wilkes Booth to pretend to assassinate Lincoln. After shooting, rather than exclaim one of the expected lines ("The South is avenged!"), she screams "Lies!" And "Liars" (Parks). Her interruption, like Nijinska's mother, like the Mother of the First Man, briefly halts narrative motion and injects a contradictory surplus: unintegrated grief, truth-telling, or accusation. These figures are anonymous bearers of crisis who briefly interrupt dramatic time with a singular gesture that remains unresolved by the scene. Each performs a kind of *Zustand* in Benjamin and Brecht's use of the term: a condition that interrupts narrative development and renders its social contradictions visible. In these examples, the gesture intensifies the impasses of the narrative even as the narrative itself whistles along unimpeded. That this function recurs in female figures suggests a gendered condition of the *Zustand*: a *gestus* that exposes historical contradiction yet exerts no pressure on narrative form, drawing attention instead to the performative force of the interruption itself.

“mistake,” uneasy with the blank, and insert “Gonzalo.” The most widely read English translation even offers “Gonzales,” a catachrestic slip that multiplies the very uncertainty annotation was meant to resolve. This instability extends the play’s metatheatrical logic to the paper itself, turning the page into a field of competing functions, some naming and others anonymizing, that in fact authorize the “unauthorized.”

The mother’s pledge to demand justice “before everyone” now reaches off the page, across the proscenium, if there was one, and into the margin. Her “everyone” both reverberates within the play’s eponymous “public” and works as a performative invitation to the reader or spectator. The impossibility of justice arises as much from Gonzalo’s disappearance as from the script’s own refusal to anchor him, a refusal that reconfigures textual authority as a performative, collective responsibility. Lorca not only implicates us in his death, but interpellates us into the chorus of his restless public as the final arbiter.

The performative force of the mother’s unanswered appeal clarifies the central claim of this study: anonymity reorganizes subject formation, aesthetic form, and political address through a coercive act of collective assembly. Lorca does, however, offer us the name “the public,” and we might well speak of an “epistemological change” involved in recognizing ourselves as part of it. Had this play been staged in Lorca’s time, it would be difficult not to hear it as a rallying cry against the rise of fascism. Slightly later, just after Lorca’s own assassination, prefigured by the murder of the First Man, the enlisting of a public to demand justice could only be read against the agents of his execution and the ideological suppression and systemic violence of the Spanish Nationalist regime. Performed today, what justice shall we as a chorus be tasked with exacting?

Like Maggioranni's compelled advance into the crowd, Lorca's public recruits us into a collectivity that binds spectator and performer alike. We feel ourselves folded into that chorus, its layers of onstage extras, off-stage performers, and the wider civic multitude merging through the theater's juxtapositions and the city's machinery. Justice is no longer sought for a named figure (Hombre Primero or Gonzalo or Gonzales) but for an indeterminate moonfish: a figure whose gestures and fate are produced through the layered apparatus of performance. The moonfish is the product of illicit love and unauthorized authorship. But he is not simply an outlaw or a martyr in the individual, identitarian sense; he is a positional effect of the very script and theater and system that stages him. Like Chaplin's Tramp, he does not represent a social identity but functions as a product of a broader cinematic and economic apparatus.

That relationality, the singular becoming multiple, conjures class without ever naming it or marking it as such, because he exists entirely within its *mise en scène*. The moonfish dances the result of pressures (legal, economic, erotic) that shape his movement from within. In this sense, the moonfish is a mode of becoming through and by a system that simultaneously produces and punishes him. This system is already a production of a production, and the moonfish emerges not as metaphor for an oppressed individual or group in "the real world" but as the metonymic effect of links between stage, screen, and street. The moonfish enacts structural coercion (*Zwang*) before any desire or identification can form because it is first and foremost a relation. The chorus that demands justice for the moonfish stands as an *ensemble* of relations which is properly understood through "class."

Crucially, when understood through anonymity, class does not present itself as an identity but as a relation without appearance. In each of the primary works examined in this dissertation, representation does not secure class through figuration or typology; instead, it dislodges the

expectation that class must be legible as visual or narrative difference. Anonymous interpellation, I argue, discloses this logic. It interrupts the demand that subjects must be individuated in order to be assembled and exposes a form of collective belonging that precedes and exceeds naming. This is the condition of possibility for what Jameson, in a separate register, identifies as “the non-centered subject that is part of an organic group or collective” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 345). Yet Jameson ultimately reasserts the specularity of class as the primary analytic of political identity, and with it the demand that other forms of difference become legible through class. His reading of Althusser underscores this point: he privileges the religious examples over the figure of the policeman, emphasizing doctrinal intelligibility rather than structural coercion. In this, he resembles Butler, who likewise misconstrues the scene of interpellation by making recognition its central feature. Both treat interpellation as expressive rather than coercive. For Jameson, true class consciousness arrives when class is capable of “*interpellating itself* and dictating the terms of its own specular image”—a formulation that reinstates the visual logic anonymous interpellation resists (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 346).

Bhabha’s critique of Jameson turns on the logic of what he terms Jameson’s “narcissistic” or “autotelic” specularity—his insistence that class must appear as visible difference in order to be politically operative (Bhabha 318–19). This investment in the figuration of class not only reifies its status as identity but forecloses other modes of social differentiation by treating them as secondary, mimetic, or out of sync. What Bhabha identifies—correctly, and with lasting implications—is that contemporary politics demands a visible class identity in order for collective action to take place at all. One must be marked as “classed” in order to organize politically as a class. This is the narcissistic structure Bhabha critiques: a mode of political participation that cannot proceed without first seeing itself reflected. Jameson’s analytic thus

risks re-inscribing the very logic of specular recognition that his concept of the non-centered subject was meant to disrupt. Inadvertently or not, his formulation treats class politically as an identity category that must be named and recognized in order to be mobilized.

Anonymity, however, reminds us that class enters representation not primarily through identity or visible difference, but through the performative and choral effects of relation. It interrupts the habitual equation between political representation and the visual or narrative display of difference, exposing instead a mode of subject formation grounded in collective attachments rather than individual mark. This is neither an autotelic return to identity nor a reactive refusal; it is a performative, collective, and structurally relational mode of political being enacted in/through the absence of names. More than this, it reveals that even what appears as identity is itself relationally produced: a retroactive condensation of social positioning and structural force. I take Bhabha's insistence on articulation and performativity to point toward this same problem: not how to ground identity, but how to understand its emergence through displacement, contiguity, and relation.

Across fifty years of modernist dance, theatre, and cinema, I have traced procedures that yield figures who cannot be fully named, resocialize the body through gesture, and remap the *choros* (the ground and movement of chorality) as an ensemble of relations. The central terms of this dissertation—performativity, interpellation, and the revolutionary subject—do not operate in parallel but develop in a sequence that gradually displaces the epistemic and representational frameworks traditionally attached to political subjectivity. Performativity, as elaborated in the opening chapter, introduces the idea that collective agency does not precede the scene of action but emerges from it, staged through choreography, ritual, and repetition. But if performativity names the conditions under which action takes place, interpellation clarifies the force by which

bodies are coerced into that scene in the first place. Rather than a moment of mutual recognition between subject and state, interpellation appears here as a structural pressure: an anonymous call that recruits subjects into place without requiring individual names or legible identities. Finally, the revolutionary subject, often theorized as either an ideal or preexisting identity or an epistemic awakening, is revealed to be the performative outcome of these layered forces. It does not arrive from outside the apparatus, nor does it crystallize into a stable form. It is produced coercively, gesturally, and collectively, through the very mechanics that deny its singular appearance. Anonymity is therefore not the erasure of subjectivity which anti-anonymous and anti-choral discourses have taken it to be, but the ground on which subjectivity stands and dances. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*

Against that individualist rhetoric which quietly reinstates the named subject by banishing the agency and accomplishments of our anonymous selves—a mode that still dominates aesthetic and political thought—modernist artists forged formal strategies that redirect the way we assemble anonymously. By reading modernism across disciplines and through anonymity, we can identify a reengineering of how bodies are situated, addressed, and moved within collective space. The modernist moment I trace here from roughly 1890 to 1950 has not passed. It recurs wherever anonymity is neither mystified nor fetishized, but materialized: as movement, pressure, relation, address. Contra Bruno Latour, anonymity is not simply a mystified badge of the modern, a secular fetish substituting for premodern authority (Latour 207). It is, as Jameson’s own ambivalent defense of postmodernism reveals, experiential, registered at the level of sensation, and poetic experimentation. Extending Jameson’s critique further we can see from this study that “anonymity” is not just experiential but also procedural and performative.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Bruno Latour critiques the category of “the modern” as a retrospective illusion created by Western societies to distinguish themselves from “the rest.” In *The Pasteurization of France* he argues that abstractions like

Modernists may have sought a form of individuation through stylization, but anonymity teaches us that this engenders its own kind of multiplicity. Wagner's displacement of the chorus onto the characters persists throughout modernism, so that even as figures appear to speak ever more singularly, they channel a diffused and saturated collective. If Jameson argues that "we can thus see down through class categories to the rocky bottom of the stream," we might agree, but only on the condition that class itself is not a category but an anonymous relation and that the rocky stream is mysteriously bottomless (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 346).

If Althusser famously imagined history as an anonymous theatre, this dissertation returns to the material stage that enabled his metaphor and unfolds its media-specific workings. It then shows how modernist dance, film, and theatre actively theorize anonymity in their own idioms, articulating concepts that extend and refine the study's analytic vocabulary. Art here is not merely adjacent to politics or overlapping through an aesthetic regime; it is performative in the strong sense, and anonymity produces the very ensemble it appears to represent.

"rationalization," "anonymity," or "modernity" mystify the actual labor of assembling heterogeneous networks. For Latour, these terms conceal the hybrid practices that always subtend science, politics, and technology. The so-called "Great Divide" between modern and premodern is, in his view, a mythic effect that prevents a proper anthropology of contemporary institutions. Fredric Jameson responds critically to Latour's flattening of historical specificity. While he shares Latour's skepticism toward mystified narratives of Western exceptionalism, he insists that the experience of rupture and difference associated with modernity is a structural symptom of capitalism itself. Latour's rejection of "modernity" risks discarding the very analytic frameworks, especially those of Marxism, that enable us to understand how capitalism reorganizes history. What Latour dismisses as myth, Jameson reinterprets as the ideological form of a real historical dynamic. For Jameson, capitalism must be understood dialectically, not as a "stage" with a fixed essence but as a "vanishing mediator:" a system that reorganizes precapitalist societies and prepares the ground for socialism by violently reshaping economic and cultural life (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 380). This formulation allows him to retain the notion of historical breaks between tribal, feudal, capitalist, and socialist formations without reducing history to a unilinear progression. It also enables a functional reading of postmodernism as the cultural logic of a new phase of capitalism, rather than a simple myth or style.

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