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Judith Butler's Politics of Philosophy in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* – Arendt, Cavarero, and Human "Appearing" and "Plurality"

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Abstract

The article analyses Judith Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), arguing that the volume can be read as presenting Butler's politics of philosophy with respect to Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, and the existentialist philosophy of the human that they represent. The first part of the article introduces the approach of the "politics of philosophy," and the rest of the article scrutinizes Butler's use of two concepts, "appearing" and "plurality," in the book, presenting how they shift into different meanings in Butler's text in comparison to their charged philosophical meaning in Arendt and Cavarero. The article argues that Butler engages in "discharging" of these concepts of their existentialist philosophical charge, and that this gives evidence of her different philosophical choice. Instead of asking the existential philosophical question "what is a human being" in the omnitemporal philosophical tradition, Butler's different philosophical starting point is in changing sociality, and she engages the tradition of philosophy in interventions in the here and now, asking "who counts as the human".

Keywords: Judith Butler, Hannah Arendt, Adriana Cavarero, appearing, plurality, the human, politics of philosophy

Judith Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) is an encounter with contemporary events, which take place at public squares, such as Tahrir square in Cairo, Taksim square in Istanbul, as well as within the Occupy movement at Wall street in New York City and elsewhere. In this paper I argue that the book can simultaneously be read as a philosophically-attuned

encounter with Hannah Arendt and in dialogue with some of the contemporary feminist readers of Hannah Arendt, such as Adriana Cavarero, Linda Zerilli and Bonnie Honig. As such it sits within the continuum of the legacy of feminist readings of Arendt, and is readable within the contemporary politics of philosophy within feminist theory.

While the volume is notably inspired by Arendt's thought on politics, Butler also engages with Arendt's thought more generally and profoundly, encountering her as a representative of a particular type of philosophical approach, one which crucially involves a focus on the generalized question of "the human." These philosophical underpinnings of the encounter with Arendt appear in Butler's text between the lines, and in the not always explicit, but, I argue, noticeable, dialogues through which Butler engages with other feminist thinkers, particularly with Adriana Cavarero's developments on Arendt as a philosopher of human vulnerability and relationality.

I argue that Butler's engagement with Arendt's thought in this book reveals Butler's profoundly different relationship with philosophy in comparison to that of either Arendt that of Cavarero, who theorizes philosophically in a way that is very close to Arendt. The difference of approach, I contend, is best captured through questions asked concerning "the human." While the philosophical approach along the lines of the phenomenological-existential tradition asks the characteristic foundational question, "what is a human being?," or "what is the human condition?," I argue that Butler, in a pronounced challenge to this tradition, highlights and intervenes in the present norms concerning what is considered as human, instead of asking a foundational question. The question she asks is: "who is considered human?," and she asks this question with the aim of changing the norms governing the current practice.

My method of approaching Butler's position in this particular text is to pay attention to some of *the key concepts* and *conceptual maneuvers* that I see Butler engage within it. In other words, my interest is in what kind of action within the "politics of philosophy" is it possible to read into this particular text. In the following, I will first explicate briefly my approach of reading texts through the "politics of philosophy" which informs my analysis. In the main part of the article I will then focus on the two key philosophically charged concepts which I read Butler as working upon in this text in terms of politics of philosophy. These concepts are: "appearing," and "plurality." I will suggest that Butler engages in a move of *discharging* these concepts of their phenomenological-existential intensity which is dominant in the texts of Arendt.

The reading will produce my main argument: that through Arendt, Butler works through not only her troubled relationship with philosophy in general, but with the specific brand of philosophy which Arendt represents, which is

the modern phenomenological-existential tradition, and its central question of the human. This politics of philosophy as a renewed relationship to the philosophical tradition I also see as one of the most significant contributions of Butler's work as a contemporary interventionist intellectual.

"Politics of Philosophy" as an Approach

The Politics of Philosophy, an approach I have developed within two large research projects,[1] is premised by the assumption that a condition of plurality of philosophical traditions is currently alive in the intellectual field of contemporary feminist theory. Second, I contend that there is a contestation between theorists adhering to these traditions, which begins from different ontological assumptions that have existed over a period of centuries within the textual tradition of philosophy. In the contemporary debates these different strands have come to be accompanied by emotional and passionate attachments to certain concepts, which often function somewhat like attachments to different political parties. The result is a contestation discernable within texts through the agonistically charged, intricate deployment of key concepts deriving from the diverse philosophical traditions.

The methodology that I have developed to accompany the politics of philosophy approach focuses on conceptual contestation, instead of the more conventional approach towards the study of thinkers, which relies on argumentation and arguments. In addition, in concentrating on concepts I pay attention to exact words, instead of ideas in a more general sense. Importantly, this approach also takes into consideration affective attachments to particular concepts. The methodology is not designed to render results by application to individual instances in a technical manner, but calls for the study of the entire published works of particular authors, and it relies upon an artisanal, long term engagement with the philosophical political scene. This said, my observations on Butler's and Cavarero's views here are informed by long term reading of their work in its context, although the focus is on this particular book.

Within my Politics of Philosophy approach, my understanding of "politics" adheres to the notion of politics as action and conflict, very close to what Chantal Mouffe (1993, 2013) captures with the term "agonism," or Kari Palonen (2003, 2006) with "politicking." It implies that instead of focusing on institutions (parliaments, parties, laws etc.) as politics, "the politics" and "the political" much more refer here to a *mode* of *action*: it is the mode of controversy (agonism) that agents and issues enter into that politics consist of (Mouffe, 1993, 2013; Palonen, 2003, 2006, Rancière, 1999, 2001). In other words, when I speak of the politics of philosophy in contemporary feminist theory, I

refer to the agonistics in between theory writers around philosophical orientations. I see actors in the contemporary scene of feminist theory making *moves* and *manoeuvres* in a way comparable to politicians in a political game. In this particular political contest, it is concepts that are at stake.

Within the approach it is also crucial that concepts are not understood metaphysically. By concepts I do not refer to "ideas", and even less to some fixed ideas, as being more important than just ordinary ones, as is done often within philosophical approaches. Neither do I refer, as is common within contemporary social sciences, to "conceptualizations" of empirical findings. Instead, concepts are here understood very concretely as the combination of a word in a particular language and a particular meaning, which means that they are not ideas but that they appear in concrete texts. Even more importantly, the focus of analysis is on the *use* of a concept: what is done with a particular term in a particular context, in order to produce which effect. The approach, thus, differs from the traditional study of ideas, which is not always grounded concretely in words. It also clearly differs, for example, from studies of discourses and frames, because it focuses concretely on exact concepts.

It is fairly easy to see that the Politics of philosophy approach has a connection to both philosophical analysis and to the historical study of ideas, but it is neither. It contrasts with any standard historical and descriptive study of conceptual change, because the sense of the *political* is crucial in the "politics of philosophy" approach. The approach includes a heightened sensitivity to the fact that the same word can be used to imply different meanings and that political operations are constantly intentionally achieved through altered use of concepts. For the same reasons, it clearly differs from a linguistic study.

There is a number of precise methods which can be used to study the conceptual contestations within this approach of the politics of philosophy when actually doing research to study concepts and their use in texts. These methods emphasize spotting the key contested concepts, and studying their use in the texts concretely, including their frequencies, proximities to other concepts, analysing which concepts function as their counter concepts, identifying semantic fields, synonym, antonyms, paying attention to the grammatical forms in which they are used, and others. Particular political-philosophical manoeuvres can be identified and named, often with reference to the more conventional study of rhetoric: for example, frequent use, valorisation, avoidance, linking, framing, or redescribing. In the brief analysis of Butler's text here, I will suggest such a term to name a particular procedure: I will refer to "discharging" a concept of its philosophical intensity.

This brief overview is provided as a background for recognizing the kind of reading in which I engage in the following, which will exhibit some aspects of the Politics of Philosophy approach: I will pay attention to the philosophical parties involved, and to the contestation concerning the key concepts within

their use, as well as particular maneuvers. This also means that I am trying to dig out of the text something which is not explicitly there as a clear argumentation, but which I claim to be readable at the level of the use of concepts. I do this in order to show how Butler, in this book, takes part in the politics of philosophy within contemporary feminist theory through confronting Hannah Arendt's thought.

II Butler Meets Arendt

Butler's volume is a collection of articles, given originally as talks in various places, yet the chapters clearly provide a consistent argument. Although Arendt is not the stated topic of the book, I can see the entire book as being punctuated by Arendtian themes, and Arendt is mentioned frequently. I also see that Butler is not only troubled by Arendt, but also wishes to trouble Arendt's thought.

Butler writes of Arendt:

> *Something of what she says here is clearly true.* Space and location are created through plural action. *And yet, in her view,* action in its freedom and its power, has the exclusive capacity to create location. *Such a view refuses* that action is always supported and that it is invariably bodily." (73, emphasis added)

This extract illustrates Butler's tone of encountering Arendt in the entire volume: it is conducted in terms of "yes, … but; yes, … yet." It also reveals the main themes of the encounter, that is: concerted action; the power of action and speech; the dependency of action on support; and the bodily nature of action. These themes resonate strongly with the very first and most common feminist encounters with Arendt, which systematically criticize Arendt for distinguishing the public from the private too sharply, which they connect to Arendt's disavowal of bodily needs and bodily life (Rich, 1979; Pitkin, 1981; Brown, 1988; see Honkasalo, 2016: 12–75).

In accordance with these "sisterhood readings" of Arendt, as Julian Honkasalo's recent study of feminist reception of Arendt calls them, Butler writes:

> Arendt's view clearly meets its limits here, for the body is itself divided into the one that appears publicly to speak and act and another one, sexual, laboring, feminine, foreign, and mute, that generally is relegated to the private and prepolitical sphere. .. If some domain of bodily life operates as the sequestered or disavowed condition for the sphere of appearance, this becomes the structuring absence that governs and makes possible the public sphere. (86)

Butler emphasizes that in order for people to appear in the public squares, a lot needs to be satisfied: people must be fed, have shelter, and subsistence in their lives, and she also emphasizes that they are in the square as bodily beings. In other words, she joins those feminist readers who accuse Arendt of "forgetting the body."

Butler considers, although briefly, what Linda Zerilli has suggested in order to save Arendt from some of the accusations of "forgetting the body." Butler writes:

> Linda Zerilli has made an excellent argument that Arendt's reference to the body as the sphere of necessity is meant to mark the rhythmic patterns of transience, the fact the human artifacts come into the world and pass away, …

and that

> There is no flight from embodied existence understood as necessity without the loss of freedom itself. Freedom requires this reconciliation with necessity.
>
> In this perspective, the body imposes a principle of humility and a sense of the necessary limit of all human action.(47)

She considers the argument of Zerilli, which points to the fact that Arendt does not *forget* the body, but rather sets it as a powerful limit of action. However, she also quickly dismisses this insight as insufficient for the kind of analysis in which she is interested, writing:

> However, if we approach this question from the point of view of the unequal demographic distribution of precarity, then we would have to ask: Whose lives are cut short more easily?... How is that differential exposure to mortality managed? In other words, we are already within the political when we think about transience and mortality. (47–48)

This reasoning points to the aspect which most interests me in Butler's approach: the above commentary is one of the instances in which she turns from an interest in the universally human – human mortality, that is the fact that all humans die – to an interest in sociality, in social life, and changing social norms, which govern life, such as unequal demographic distribution of precarity. Philosophically speaking, what is at stake here is the role of the existential view of the human as a being between birth and death. Instead of focusing on this common existential ground of the human condition, i.e. mortality, Butler turns her attention to differences in politics and norms, and to the politics concerning norms, which lead to different conditions of mortality for different populations.

As Sanna Karhu's study (2017) has recently pointed out, norms occupy an exceptionally central place of interest in Butler's thinking. In addition I argue, Butler's interest amounts to a particular relationship to the philosophical questions within the phenomenological-existential tradition. This relationship is oriented towards trouble, and even more than that, to completely questioning the quest for a universal abstract human perspective, which is the backbone of this particular philosophical tradition, and around which the questions asked within it revolve. The same difference in philosophical orientation between Butler on the one hand and Arendt and Cavarero on the other hand, comes forth, I argue, when we look at Butler's approach towards the two crucial Arendtian existential concepts, "appearing", and "plurality," in *Notes Toward the Performative Theory of Assembly*.

Appearing

Appearing, while it is important in political public squares, is also a concept that carries enormous philosophical weight in Arendt's work. Appearing is an extremely crucial notion in the entire philosophical tradition of phenomenology, which is, in a way, already evident in the term "phenomenology," given that phenomena appear to us. Phenomena can be experienced and sensed, but for this brand of philosophy, the appearing of phenomena is also more of a metaphysical matter. To put it very simply: appearing, in the tradition of Husserl's phenomenology, in which Arendt is deeply embedded as a student of Heidegger, is much more than experiencing the external world through the senses. Rather, appearing relates to ontology: appearing is that through which that what is, is. That what is, is as much as it appears to consciousness, to an abstractly conceived subject, which is as if "we," the humans, as the perceiving subject. This implies that being is not appearing, for example, to other species which have a different apparatus of sensing, or to God. Appearing relates, instead, to something that is often also called transcendental consciousness, as that which constitutes, for us, that which is/appears to us. The modern phenomenology and existentialism of Husserl and Heidegger – which is the philosophical home terrain of Arendt – entertains, as Foucault (1974) noted, a double human: the transcendental mind, that is the consciousness that constitutes the object to which the object/world/ or the thing in itself appears, and the human sensory apparatus through which this appearing happens[2].

As Arendt writes in the first sentence of the first chapter of her *The Life of the Mind*:

> The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. Nothing could appear, the word "appearance" would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist – living creatures able to acknowledge, recognize, and react to […] what is not merely there but appears to them and is meant for their perception. In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being and Appearing coincide*." (Arendt, 1978: 19)

Arendt's point of connection to the tradition of appearing to a human-like-mind is primarily through Heidegger's version of it, which equally emphasizes that the "human", this generalized subject, is only and always available as singular beings. Characteristic to the human in general – in Heidegger's more abstract terms the *Dasein* – is singularity and temporality, that is, this Being has a limited time: it is born and it dies. As we known, for Heidegger, dying is particularly emphasized, whereas, for Arendt, it is more significant that a singular existent appears when it is born. (Arendt, 1958: 177–179; Taminieux, 1997: 56–88; Villa, 1996: 152–153; Cavarero, 1995: 60). The appearing of a singular existent in birth is also emphasized by those feminist readers of Arendt who emphasize her notion of natality, and among those scholars, Adriana Cavarero is the most prominent.

Caverero emphasizes the Arendtian notion of "who," closely connected to appearing of a singular, temporally limited, human being. (Arendt, 1958: 179–181; Cavarero, 2000: 20, 71–73, 88–89). Instead of "what" a person is, which would be a list of a person's characteristics, the "who" of a unique individual is something that shines forth, appears, in the space of appearance created in between humans through action and speech. Politics, for Arendt, is the privileged area of freedom where this most profound humanity of a singular human being shines forth – precisely in action and in speech. Humanity, so to say, becomes manifest, that is, appears, in this way.

As Cavarero writes of Arendt:

> … appearing is indeed not the *superficial* phenomenon of a more intimate and true "essence". Appearing is the *whole* of being, understood as a plural finitude of existing. This goes above all for human beings, who have the privilege of appearing to one another, distinguishing *themselves* in their in-born [*in-nata*] uniqueness, such that, in this reciprocal exhibition, a *who* is shown to appear, entirely as it is. .. (Cavarero, 2000: 20)

Considering that "appearing" as a term carries exceptional weight in the work of both Arendt and Cavarero, it is interesting how it is used by Butler in this volume. Firstly, even a superficial reading makes it clear that Butler does not point to the philosophical dimension of the term: in this book, "appear-

ing" is used as a word which functions in everyday language: people come to the public square to appear to each other, to see each other, and to sense each other, and to be seen and heard; "appearing" does not imply the shining forth of a singular existent's in-born uniqueness in this text. One could read this as a sign that that the author is not familiar with the deeper meaning of the term, or ignores, or trivializes its philosophical dimension; however, it can also be read as pointing to an intense relationship to this philosophical register, and it can be further studied, and gains in meaning with a second observation, concerning the modes of use of "appear" by Butler in this text.

A close study of the text reveals that instead of using the term "appear" in proximity to and together with terms such as "uniqueness," "existent," "finitude of existing," or "essence" as Arendt and Cavarero do, Butler uses the term "appear" in her volume consistently, and most frequently in the combination: "right to appear", and in proximity of vocabulary such as "recognition" "regulation", "legal", and "proscribed." For example, Butler writes:

> … if we say that we believe all human subjects deserve equal recognition, we presume that all human subjects are equally recognizable. But what if the *highly regulated field of appearance* does not admit everyone, requiring zones where many *are expected not to appear* or are *legally proscribed* from doing so? Why is that field regulated in such a way that only certain kinds of beings *can appear as recognizable* subjects, and others *cannot*? (35, emphasis added)

She also uses it in expressions such as, "field of appearance that is regulated by norms," and "forms of power that qualify who can and cannot appear." This usage connects the term to social life: appearing turns into an issue of social and political recognition in these statements.

I read this usage of the term as a particular philosophy-political move. Instead of *not* using this key concept, "appearing", and instead of engaging in explicit argumentation about its content in Arendt's work or in Cavarero's work, Butler *uses* this concept actively, as if connecting with Arendt and Cavarero, and yet, she actively changes the meaning with which this key concept is used. The effect is a discharging of its phenomenological-existential intensity.

This takes place, for example, in the first chapter in which Butler considers the conditions of appearing, as an issue of "right to appear," and takes ups transgender appearance in public space, that is, the right to appear in public as a transperson, writing:

> So it seems we need to think about the kind of claim that transsexuality is making, one that is linked to the *right to appear in public*, to exercise freedom of this kind, and that is implicitly linked with every other *struggle to appear* on the street without the threat of violence. (53, emphasis added)

She also considers strongly the role of media in public appearing, asking the reader to consider those who prefer not to appear, who engage in democratic activism in another way, "negotiating the need for protection and the demand to take a public risk" (55). While clearly considering the conditions of political activism in places where it is strongly restricted and risky, she also pays attention and reconsiders the norms of democratic public appearance, writing:

> Indeed, it is important not to impose U.S. based norms of hypervisibility on those who have other ways of making political community and of struggling for their freedom (56)

In the end of the first chapter, Butler brings together the concepts of "space of appearance" and "rights" quite strongly, thereby joining together two Arendtian themes, the metaphysics of appearing, which in Arendt is not connected to norms, such as rights, and another Arendtian theme, the "right to have rights."

> In Arendtian terms, we can say that to be *precluded from the space of appearance,* to be precluded from being part of *the plurality that brings the space of appearance into being*, is to be deprived of the *right to have rights*. (59, emphasis added)

These discussions by Butler assume the "space of appearance" / "sphere of appearance" as a norm-governed space, which is open to interventions concerning those norms, and these discussions perform themselves as such an intervention. The Arendtian dimension and emphasis of the philosophical human condition, and of singular individuals appearing as human "who"s in the space of appearance created in between them, is absent in this discussion: "appearing" as a concept is instead shifted into a terrain of norm-governed social life, and the emphasis onto these norms. A similar move concerns another key concept, "plurality."

Plurality

As we know from the work of Taminieux (1997), Villa (1996), and Honig (1993), Arendt proposed an important challenge and revision of Heidegger's existentialism. While Heidegger concentrates on the life project of a singular human, and on the self-relationship of this singular being, referring to the famous *Sorge* that springs from one's awareness of one's evident own end, Arendt's most original thought is that the singularity of a human being always comes in the condition of plurality: a human being – as a singular being – is always already among others, and this is constitutive of the human condition[3].

(Taminieux, 1997: 1–16, 92; Villa, 1996: 118) Humanity does not come forth in a solitary reflection of singularity, as Heidegger would theorize, but in plurality, in "action in concert", among other human beings; not in private life, but in public, political action[4]. A singular human being appears in speech and action with respect to others, in the scene of politics, in the public space which politics creates between them[5]. For Arendt, human being is born into plurality and appears to others; it is singular within a plurality.

Aristotle famously defines the human being as the rational animal [*Zoon logon ekhon*], (more precisely an animal which speaks, or has words). The task of being able to tell what is distinctly human haunts much of the philosophical tradition in general (Oliver 2009), but distinctly modern phenomenology and existentialism. The human is considered to have particular sensory abilities of sight, hearing, touch; as living on the earth in an upright position; speaking, using language; using tools, constructing dwellings, and working on its living conditions with tools; the human is an animal with hands. Both Husserl and Heidegger reflected on all this a lot, though often using more abstract terms than "humanity", such as transcendental consciousness, or *Dasein*.

When Arendt joins this tradition by adding the condition of plurality to Heidegger's idea of the singularity of the human, she revisits, in her modified way, another Aristotelian definition, which states that the human is a communal animal [*zoon politicon*]. For Arendt, human being is born into plurality, and appears to others; it is singular in a plurality. And the singularity of human being in plurality appears, manifests, and unveils itself, not in solitary thought, but through speaking and through action, which starts new processes in the condition of plurality. When emphasizing the human being as a political animal, Arendt profoundly contests the better known Aristotelian definition: it is not rationality primarily that defines the human being, instead it is acting in plurality, that is, acting as singular in a space created between people acting in concert.

Again, we see that, for Arendt, plurality and public space are more than meetings of people in the squares for political action; plurality is also a metaphysical category. It is profoundly linked with the idea of the human in its generality, as expressed in the *Life of the Mind*:

> Since *plurality* is one of the basic existential conditions of human life on earth – so that *inter hominem esse*, to be among men, was to the Romans the sign of being alive, aware of the realness of world and self, and *inter homines esse desinere*, to cease to be among men, a synonym for dying – . (Arendt, 1971: 74, emphasis added)

Adriana Cavarero's thought follows Arendt in this metaphysical dimension. For her, appearing in plurality, which starts with the first appearing of a new

human being from and to the mother, grounds the fundamental relationality and dependency of the singular and unique human being (1995: 60; 118; 2000: 21; 2000: 89–92). She writes:

> … existing consists in disclosing oneself within the *scene of plurality* where everyone, by appearing to one another, is shown to be unique. They appear to each other reciprocally – first of all in their corporeal materiality and as creatures endowed with sensory organs. Put another way, the language of the existent assumes the bodily conditions of "this and not another" in all of its perceptible concreteness. Starting from birth, from the "naked reality of our originary physical appearance," each of us is *who* appears to others uniquely and distinctly. (Cavarero, 2000: 20–21, emphasis added)

Cavarero emphasizes that a unique singular existent is always born to a mother and that this first relationship to a mother establishes a first relationship of dependency (1995: 60, 118; 2000: 21; 2000: 89–92), which is the foundation of the mutual relationship of dependency between humans, and hence is related to living together, ethics, sociality, and politics. For Cavarero, the emphasis on birth and the role of mother, and the human "natality" in general, is a feminist issue as such, but in her reading, natality also founds a particular view of relational ethics, and expands into a political attitude.

Butler shares Cavarero's ethical and political emphasis of relationality, but she does not engage with the idea of natality, which is only mentioned twice in this book, and with reference to Cavarero (76, 204). The ethical and political implications: the relationality, dependency, and the vulnerability of human beings, are also extremely important for Butler, but on different grounds than for Cavarero, and this, I argue, is related to Butler's and Cavarero's difference in politics of philosophy.

The difference is evident when we look closely at the use of concepts in this book with a focus on "plurality." An analysis of Butler's use of the term "plurality" in this text reveals that Butler uses the term with reference to Arendt, but not in the meaning of a human condition. She does not connect it to basic existential human conditions related to "birth", or the "natality" of humans, and neither does she write of plurality as the scene where human "uniqueness" appears. Most importantly, instead of "birth" or "appearing to others," Butler uses "plural" and "plurality" exclusively in connection to "action." More precisely, Butler uses the term "plurality" in binding it together with "concerted and collective action," an exact phrase she uses a lot, and together with the phrase "plural action." In addition to "action" and "acting in concert," also the term "democracy" appears in the vocabulary close to "plurality." Butler writes, for example:

> In revolutions, she [Arendt] told us, there is a certain *acting in concert, or plural action*. But could she allow the plural movement of bodies to articulate the "we," that *plurality considered so essential to democracy*? How would we understand public assembly as a political enactment that is distinct form speech? (155)

And in chapter six, in which the topic is Adorno and the notion of resistance:

> If resistance is to enact the very principles of democracy for which it struggles, then resistance has to be *plural* and it has to be *embodied*. … For this purpose, we must reconsider for our times the performative consequences of *concerted action* in the Arendtian sense. (217–218, emphasis added)

"Plural" and "plurality" consistently appear in the form "plural action" and in proximity of "concerted action", and almost synonymously with it. In other words, Butler is not writing of plurality as a human existential condition; instead, she shifts the use of this philosophically powerful word to concern concrete political action. Moreover, she is interested in action, which is not individual, but collective, and the term "plural" is a sign for that.

> At issue for us will be the question of how politics changes when the idea of abstract rights vocally claimed by *individuals* gives way to a *plurality of embodied actors* who enact their claims, sometimes through language, sometimes not. (157, emphasis added)

Butler also shifts from writing of a plurality of individual actors to the issue of communities as actors. In the proximity of "plural action" and "plurality" -vocabulary, such terms as "the people," "political self-determination", "popular will" "indigenous people", "popular sovereignty", "the plural subject" "the crowd" appear (in particular in 160–181). Nevertheless, she would not consider such collective bodies as single subjects as such, a crucial issue, which she has been on her agenda since *Gender Trouble* in which the issue of "women" as a collective subject and agent of politics was the topic (Butler, 1998; Pulkkinen, 2000; 2008; Zerilli 2005. As she emphasizes on

> …popular movements struggling for self-determination … Moreover, we have to be able to think of such acts as plural action, presupposing a plurality of bodies, …, who do not together constitute a single kind of a subject. (164)

She also uses the term "plurality" in proximity with terms such as "groups", "minorities", "nations", "cultural forms," "populations," and "heterogeneous." In Chapter three, which discusses the ethics of co-habitation with respect to Palestinians and Israel and the ethical guidelines based on the view, that we cannot choose with whom to cohabit the earth, Butler writes:

> … we must devise institutions and policies that actively preserve and affirm the unchosen character of open-ended and *plural* cohabitation (112, emphasis added),

This chapter provides a view to how the main environment of the Arendtian term "plurality", which relates to human singular beings in their generality, changes in Butler's text into something that concerns cultures and populations. "Plurality" appears frequently in proximity of "cultural," for example.

> One reason Arendt refuses to separate the Jews from the other so-called nations persecuted by the Nazis is that she is arguing in the name of a *plurality* co-extensive with human life in any and all of its *cultural forms*. (113–114, emphasis added)

and

> This same notion of unchosen cohabitation implies not only the irreversibly *plural* or heterogeneous character of the earth's *population*, and an obligation to safeguard that *plurality*, but also a commitment to an *equal right* to inhabit the earth and so a commitment to *equality* as well. (114)

The latter extract shows how Butler also locates "plurality" close to the vocabulary of rights and equality, that is, to the social and legal realm, and out of considerations of existential conditions *per se*. Most surprisingly, the analysis of this text shows that Butler constantly links together the notions of "plurality" and "equality." Arendt's views on equality are notoriously complex, but Butler presents the view:

> If freedom seeks to exceed that unfreedom that is its condition, then we destroy *plurality* and we jeopardize, in her [Arendt's] view, our status as persons, considered as *zoon politikon*. … .. individual life makes no sense, has no reality, outside of the social and political framework in which all lives are *equally* valued. (112, emphasis added)

Equality quite clearly refers in Butler's use not only to political equality, as it would in Arendt's thought, which distinguishes political and social equality (Brunkhorts, 2000), but much more generally also economic and social equality. This is another shift which moves "plurality" out of the Arendtian definitional, philosophically timeless, omnitemporal, realm of "human beings" to the social and political realm, which is changing. This is yet another dimension in how Butler crucially extends the metaphysical vocabulary's use, discharging these concepts' philosophical contents and moving them to the area of concrete social and political struggles.

Conclusion

Butler deals with the two philosophically charged concepts of Arendtian thought, "appearing" and "plurality," in a similar way in her text. While in Adriana Cavarero's work, both concepts reappear charged in the same philosophical way as they are in Arendt's work, a different, and very specific, type of philosophy-political transformation happens to these concepts in Butler's use in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*: Butler does not oppose the concept of "plurality," any more than the concept of "appearing;" neither does she engage in arguing about what it means, or what Arendt means by it, or what is should mean. Instead she uses it frequently, with noticeable connection to Arendt and to Cavarero, and with subtle operations discharges it of its specific philosophical content, filling it instead with several other meanings. The kind of politics of philosophy which we encounter in Butler's texts is doing rather than explaining or arguing; it is a direct performative engagement with political thought, and very characteristic of Butler's textual approach, which constitutes a particular kind of practice of rhetoric. It might be referred to as rethinking Arendt's notions; nevertheless, I would suggest that the main point in this rethinking is discharging their metaphysical content.

As a politics of philosophy, the discharging is exercised through a double move: there is a strong recognition of the vocabulary of existence, and simultaneously an active maneuver of replacing it through the language of sociality. This occurs in an exemplary way in the following passage in this book:

> For when bodies gather as they do to express their indignation *and to enact their plural existence in public space*, they are also making broader demands: they are demanding to be recognized, to be valued, they are *exercising a right to appear*, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life. (26)

What happens here? In the first part of the sentence "to enact their plural existence in public space" repeats Arendt's and Cavarero's formula, and the rest of the sentence then replaces it with a move consisting of a comparative, the word "broader", which shifts attention towards "rights" and social regulation.

These shifts constitute a politics of philosophy, which I see taking place in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, in particular in relation Adriana Cavarero, whose work powerfully recharges the Arendtian philosophical concepts within contemporary discussions of feminist theory. With regard to Cavarero, Butler's contribution provides a distinction in two senses: it both gives recognition to Cavarero's work, and points to a clear difference in philosophical orientation. In a profound way, Butler is asking the philosophical questions in a different way.

I consider it important to recognize that these conceptual shifts in key Arendtian concepts in Butler's texts do not occur simply because Butler would not be aware of the philosophical dimension of the project of modern phenomenology as a philosophy of the transcendental human subject. Rather, I would see them as being part of Butler's own philosophical project to trouble the foundational idea of the abstracted "human being," and to trouble the focus on the question of "what the human is." A couple of times (134, 209) Butler emphasizes this explicitly in the text, writing: "It is not a matter, in my view, of finding out what 'the human' really is" (134). More importantly, in the rest of her work, I would argue, a similar politics of philosophy is present in her use of the key concepts of the foundational human, existential philosophy. In her work, instead of the human being between birth and death, Butler speaks of "human life"; instead of "appearing" she talks of "the right to appear;" and instead of asking "what is a human being?", she asks "who counts as a human?" "who can appear?" (Butler, 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2015).

Butler's starting point is a sociality-based view of norms, laws, and regulations governing human societies, and she actively refuses the foundational questions concerning the human *in abstracto*. Instead she concentrates in taking part in the constant change of the norms, laws, regulations, and practices which define humanity here and now, and she does this with interventionist intentions. I consider this to be a crucial philosophical choice (see also Pulkkinen, 2010: 29).

The most frequently visited topics in *Notes Toward the Performative Theory of Assembly*, at least in terms of appearing and plurality, reflect Butler's interventionist approach. One topic is transsexuality, and another one is public political action in places where political action is severely restricted. Butler speaks of the struggles for the right to appear in public, to appear on the street without the threat of violence; and she clearly wants to consider political action it in its diversity, not only as the dominant version in western democracies, including people engaging in their political action from prisons, and people just standing still, and not speaking.

I think the choice of these two themes, which both deal with current challenges in social and political norms and regulations, reflect Butler's philosophical emphasis. This is an emphasis that engages the textual tradition of philosophy in interventions in the here and now, and disentangles this philosophical tradition from the omnitemporal foundational human, which appears as the crucial phenomenological-existential perspective for both Arendt and Cavarero.

Endnotes

1 In 2006–2011, I directed the research team "Politics of Philosophy and Gender" (PPHiG) which worked as one of the three teams of an Academy of Finland Center of Excellence called ,"Political Thought and Conceptual Change." Many of the early career researchers active in this team were also included in my subsequent Academy of Finland academy professor's project 2011–2016, entitled "Politics and Philosophy in Feminist Theory." Collectively, they involved a total of fourteen researchers, many of whom studied thinkers, thoughts, and concepts. In the course of these projects my own approach has evolved, and while the research involved in these projects has not been following a strict program or common method, aspects of my "politics of philosophy" approach is present in some of the work. For example, with Antu Sorainen, we studied the history of the use of the gendered political concept *Sittlichkeit/sedlighet/siveellisyys* in Finland (Pulkkinen & Sorainen, 2011), and the politics of similar concepts was analysed also by Anna Elomäki (Elomäki, 2009, 2012). Yet other examples are Jacek Kornak's study on the history of the concept "queer" (Kornak, 2016), and Heini Kinnunen's forthcoming dissertation, which is an analysis of the concept of "the public sphere" in the use of Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Frazer and Iris Marion Young.

2 Foucault (1970) famously writes: "Man, in the analytic of finitude, is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, since he is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible." (318). To understand what he means, see in particular the sections "The Empirical and the Transcendental" (318–322) and The Cogito and the Unthought (322–328). Foucault points out in this large scope analysis of the role on the human ("the Man"), among other things, that "… phenomenology – even though it was first suggested by the way of anti-psychochologism, or, rather, precisely in so far as, in opposition to anti-psychologism, it received the problem of the a priori and the transcendental motif – has never been able to exorcise its insidious kinship, its simultaneously promising and threatening proximity, to empirical analysis of man; it is also why, though it was inaugurated by a reduction to the *cogito*, it has always been led to question, to *the* question of ontology. The phenomenological project continually resolves itself, before our eyes, into a description – empirical despite itself – of actual experience, and into an ontology of the unthought that automatically short-circuits the primacy of the "I think". (325–326).

3 Taminieux (1997) expresses this: "Whereas Heidegger is focused on being-toward-the end and on the anticipation of one's own death, which as a certain impossibility is the most individuated possibility, Arendt puts the burden of individuation on what she calls "natality," conceived not as mere emergence of *zoé* but as a capacity to initiate something unforeseeable and exceptional. Whereas Heidegger divorces individuation from any interaction as a result of the anticipation of one's ownmost death, Arendt inserts it within human plurality. (16) More extensively on this difference, see Taminieux, 1997: 56–88.

4 Taminieux also writes: "We can notice an analogous reply and retort to Heidegger in Arendt's notion of appearance. Appearing is phenomenon. For Arendt as well as

for the Heidegger of fundamental ontology Being is Appearing. But it is one thing to say, as Heidegger did then, that the being of *Dasein* can appear to it inasmuch as it transcends every being, it is another thing to say, as Arendt does, that to be truly human is to appear. In the first case what is at issue is the ownmost can-be of *Dasein* appearing to it exclusively, inasmuch as relinquishing all intercourse with beings it transcends itself toward Being. In the second case, what is at issue is a form of publicly manifested excellence, which presupposes liberation from everything strictly private. The same formula "Beign is Appearing" lends therefore itself to two antithetical readings. The formula designates for Heidegger, the wrestling of *idion* (private) from *koinon* (public), for Arendt, that of *koinon* from *idion*." (Taminieux, 1997: 92).

5 Villa writes: "Heidegger's identification of the everyday with publicness (*Öffetlichkeit*) leads him to see the achievement of authentic disclosedness as contingent upon an inward turn: only the individual's confrontation with his own groundlessness or mortality is enough to shatter the tranquility of the everyday. Arendt is obviously hostile to this turn to the self; yet this does not prevent her from appropriating Heidegger's general description of human existence and the distinction between authentic and inauthentic disclosedness. Arendt takes up this distinction, spatializing or externalizing it is such a way that the public real – now the arena of agonistic politics – is seen as the proper venue for authentic disclosedness, the realm in which the 'Da' of *Dasein* is illuminated." (Villa, 1996: 130).

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