

PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

IN OUR HANDS: AN ETHICS OF GESTURAL RESPONSE-ABILITY

REBECCA SCHNEIDER IN CONVERSATION WITH LUCIA RUPRECHT

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The following conversation aims to trace the role of gesture and gestural thinking in Rebecca Schneider's work, and to tease out the specific gestural ethics which arises in her writings. In particular, Schneider thinks about the politics of citation and reiteration for an ethics of call and response that emerges in the gesture of the hail. Both predicated upon a fundamentally ethical relationality and susceptible to ideological investment, the hail epitomizes the operations of the "both/and"—a logic of conjunction that structures and punctuates the history of thinking on gesture from the classic Brechtian tactic in which performance both replays and counters conditions of subjugation to Alexander Weheliye's reclamation of this tactic for black and critical ethnic studies. The gesture of the hail will lead us, then, to the gesture of protest in the Black Lives Matter movement. The hands that are held up in the air both replay (and respond to) the standard pose of surrender in the face of police authority and call for a future that might be different. Schneider's ethics of response-ability thus rethinks relationality as something that always already anticipates and perpetually reinaugurates possibilities for response.

Lucia Ruprecht: Rebecca, my first question addresses how gestures in your work travel through time, and how these travels are inflected by a spectrum of political agendas. In *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) you write about a 1990 piece by the Native American group Spiderwoman Theater called *Reverb-ber-ber-rations*. Thinking through this performance's subversive mimicry of

early twentieth-century modernist markers of primitivism, you invoke a definition of counter-memory “as the name of an ‘action that defines itself, that recognizes itself in words—in the multiplication of meaning through the practice of vigilant repetitions’” (1997, 168).¹ But you give a decisive gestural slant to this line of thought when asking whether “counter-memory [can] be an action that defines not only in words, but in the vigilant repetitions of a body or an object, as in the visceral ‘words’ of a performer’s gesture or the violent vibrations of a drum which repeats itself, doubling as both trash can and tom tom” (168). As becomes clear in your subsequent analysis, gestural performance in *Reverb-ber-ber-rations* does indeed constitute a late twentieth-century counter-memory, neither re-playing nor re-claiming, but “counter-appropriating” (170) colonial constructions of the native subject.

If *The Explicit Body in Performance* explores a “body in representation” which is “foremost a site of social markings [...] and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality” (2), your discussion of Civil War reenactments in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* dives into the puzzling obsession with the “originary, true, or redemptive body” (1997, 2) that is at the center of authentic reperformances of historic events. I would like to juxtapose the vigilant gestural repetitions of the feminist, queer, and racially marked performances that are at stake in *The Explicit Body* with the “live repetition[s]” of gestures in *Performing Remains* (2011, 37). You describe them as follows:

It is as if some history reenactors position their bodies to access, consciously and deliberately, a fleshy or pulsing kind of trace they deem accessible in a pose, or gesture, or set of acts. If a pose or a gesture or a ‘move’ recurs across time, what pulse of multiple time might a pose or a move or gesture contain? Can a trace take the form of a *living* foot—or only the form of a footprint? Can a gesture, such as a pointing index finger, itself be a remain in the form of an indexical action that haunts (or remains) via live repetition? (Schneider 2011, 37)

Can you comment on the temporality of gesture in these two settings, and on the potential for (re)performance to redress or preserve—or to both redress and preserve—cultural and political investments which are attached to specific historical situations?

Rebecca Schneider: It is truly a gift when, like errant travellers or returned hand waves, one’s own words come back to *pose* more questions. Thank you. In 1997, as you note, I was engaging the footsteps of Spiderwoman Theater and other feminist performance groups I was diligently studying. And, as you say, I was interested in thinking about feminist works that engage in acts of overt repetition—through gestures, in stances, and via explicit poses that seem to both replay and counter art historical acts of dismissal of women’s work in general and, in the case of Spiderwoman, the important work of women of color in particular.

I am grateful to you for drawing out the connection between my thoughts on Spiderwoman’s tactics of “counter memory,” a phrase from Foucault that I morphed, in that book, into “counter mimicry,” and my thoughts on repetition in *Performing Remains*. In 1997, for *Explicit Body*, I was trying to work

with the thought of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht in relationship to feminist work and I took inspiration from feminist theorists such as Elin Diamond in that effort. Brecht's theory about the ways in which performance can invite critical thinking insists upon the fostering of a "critical distance"—distance between the performer and that which the performer is representing or surrogating (sometimes termed distanced or alienated performance); distance between the audience and the performers so that the audience can think for themselves; and also *historical* distance, in that a time gestured toward, referred to, or reenacted on stage should be removed from the time of the critical spectator in the house. Each of these distances—performer from character, performer from audience member, and one time from another time—can help, Brecht argues, to foster an atmosphere for critical thinking about the economic and political circumstances of human sociality as well as the social and political circumstances of representational practices. To my mind this translates as: The overt manifestation of an interval generates room for critical engagement, historical thought, and the possibility for future change. In the logic of Brechtian alienation, a performer's gesture, indeed to use Brecht's terminology the "social *gestus*," of a situation is always already historical as well as always already pitched toward a future in which change might occur. Rendering replay explicit is an effort to ask one time to stand in critical relationship to another time, even within the shared time of a theatrical production. The space of repetition invites a critical opening for (re)experience, for analysis, for further engagement. In *The Explicit Body in Performance* I argued that Spiderwoman's ludic "tom tom," replayed as trash can, challenged a certain nostalgic representational apparatus that, unless interrupted, re-freezes the Native American at the point of settler-colonization circa 1890. The appropriated tom tom recurring as inappropriate trash can irrupts as a counter memory in a Foucauldian sense (oddly as the present irrupting onto the white imaginary past) and, in this case, counter memory takes place across the body as counter *mimicry*—counter-appropriating colonial appropriations. In Spiderwoman's work, the ways in which Native Americans have been primitivized in representation is *both* replayed *and* countered in critical performance. And of course this is a classic Brechtian tactic of the "both/and."

One interesting thing that arose for me in exploring 20th-century feminist artists who were critically replaying stereotypes—"striking the poses" that had arguably delimited them as women—was the manipulation of an interval for critical analysis toward the potentialities of an "otherwise." Between a reiterative gesture and its overt replay there could be, at the level of an errant detail or even in exactitude, a world of difference. In *Explicit Body*, the interval in repetition, opened by women replaying primitivism and sexualization across their own bodies (and, in the case of the feminist artists in that book, doing it agentically), beckoned possibilities for change even as it, simultaneously and perhaps paradoxically, partook of sameness. This is perhaps the classic "paradox" of mimesis.² But in response to your question I wanted to raise the issue of the interval here, because it is key to the matter of multiple temporalities that you pose, as well as to the way I am thinking of and with gesture. I take "interval" here to be the space or time that is opened, in repetition, between or among a singularity and its reiterations, both forward and backward and perhaps to the side in time (or space). Think of Andy Warhol's repetitions, for example, in his massive silk-screened Brillo boxes or Campbell's soup cans or Death and Disaster newspaper clippings. In such work one sees spatial intervals pronounced between seemingly identical images

as between commodities produced by mechanical reproduction on an assembly line—intervals that mark *both* sameness *and* difference. Deborah Kass's replay of Warhol in her massive silkscreens of Barbra Streisand also trade in sameness and difference through overt re-mimesis of Warhol's mimesis, played by Kass to pronounce a racialized and gendered difference (see Schneider 2001a). If Warhol's and Kass's silkscreens pronounce spatial intervals in seriality, but also temporal intervals between their iterations, we can also think of temporal intervals by calling to mind a film or a dance or a play replayed night after night after night. Here, samenesses *and* differences might register as various contingencies enabled by the temporal intervals between runs. But the scene is paradoxical at best. Think of a photograph passed hand to hand. Does the photograph remain the same and only the hands differ? Or are hands the same, and photograph the same, and only the time(s) different? Or is it the *act of passing* that remains the same, while hands and image alter over time and space? How can we account for an *act*, a choreographed movement of passing an object hand to hand, say, as the manipulation of intervals? The spaces between or among the hands and between or among the photograph and its different temporalities might be something we can think about by thinking about gesture (and choreography).

But I feel that I am running away with your question, rather than sticking to its terms. Let me reiterate. You asked me to "comment on the temporality of gesture in these two settings" in which, on the one hand, an interval of reperformance sets up an opportunity for critical difference and, on the other hand, where a gesture repeated across an interval (or multiple intervals) might be said to be indexical—indeed a living reiteration of priority. Might a living foot, stepping out, be evidence, say, of historical continuity if not—but possibly also—historical specificity? This is an excellent question and it may be only by recourse to the paradox of mimesis, already suggested above, that I can craft an answer.

In some ways my answer is simply that by virtue of the interval of repetition a living footstep, for example, may be *both*—both the same and different. To grant this we would have to be willing to concede that difference need not cancel sameness (and indeed, the insight of Deleuze on this point is that difference is the vehicle of sameness, just as sameness is composed of difference). Just because my living foot, stepping where feet have stepped before, is not the "original" footstep (as a footprint is considered to index), does not mean that a stepping foot does not index cross-temporal remaining. Even as "my" live foot, stepping out, say, is the vehicle by which difference can be pronounced (my foot is not your foot for example), it is also reiterative of long chains of actions—walking in a city, say, or crossing a threshold, stepping out across a limen—a foot held in a moment, anticipating a step, navigating, perhaps, a stone step, or a wooden threshold that asks it, like a "scriptive thing" (Bernstein 2009, 69) to "step" again. If we are only able to think in linear time, and only able to orient ourselves to an idea of the live as that which vanishes and does not remain, then we will never see the live stepping foot as at once living and artefactual. But if we are able to concede that difference *is also artefactual*—i.e., that feet will be *both* different *and* the same in their stepping and that this both/and is in fact what remains the same across time—we will be less limited in our ability to think about the tracks of performance-based "survival" across time.³ Where one time and another time might be said to coexist simultaneously, *as any gesture might be*

said to instantiate (I can say more on this anon), then the interval by which one time is not another time even as the times coexist, is important to think carefully about.

But first, how can we say that two times coexist? In some ways, the coexistence of multiple times is very simple. The stage may be only an overt instance of the manipulation of multiple times. Remember—as I write of in *Performing Remains*—the way that Gertrude Stein becomes nervous at the theatre because of what she terms the theatre’s “syncopated time” (65). The time on stage, she argues (she is at a performance of *Hamlet* of course) is not the same time as the time of the spectators in the house, and this coexistence of different times in one theatre, different times in one time, is what makes Stein jumpy. But Stein’s example is already perhaps more complicated than it need be, and syncopation is not necessarily simultaneity. To think about this further, I have been engaging with the idea of a hail. Let’s use an example of words first, understanding that words might also be considered gestures (as I hope my example will illustrate). Let’s imagine that I wave my hand and call to you, saying hello. Perhaps only a moment later you respond. You wave and say “hello.” The time of my hello is not the time of your hello. And yet, the two times are also imbricated, one in the other. When I call out to you, I extend time in one sense. My word is a gesture by which I reach across one time, into another time. And you, in responding, double back (though “back” may not be the only direction) across my time and respond to me. Our times become one time, one might say. Or might we say that the time of your “hello” carries, through reiteration posed as response, my time? Perhaps my “hello” has returned to me, as one time in another time. My word in your mouth. My wave in your hand. It might be possible to say, as well, that my “hello” opened an interval and carried one time (the time of my call) into a future where it might meet a response—in this case, your response. The time opened by the hail is unfinished and inaugurates or re-inaugurates relation. Your “hello” repeats my “hello” (and of course, as a word, my “hello” itself repeats an infinite number of precedent hellos or anticipates any number of future hellos both forward and backward and to the many sides that are the condition of its own possibility as a word, or a gesture, that will be recognized in or through reiteration).

I hope that I am not responding to your question too ploddingly, as the example of mutual, multiple hellos may be flat-footed and obvious—the basic condition of relational performativity. But it is interesting to me how often we forget the imbrication of one time with other times, or, put another way, how deeply we, as late moderns I suppose, are conditioned to acknowledge only the idea of a linear time that flows in a singular direction from past to future, as if liveness were only a matter of disappearing and not reappearing. The forgetting of multiple times is, as Judith Butler has argued, the condition of performativity in that performativity, to be “felicitous,” must forget its foundation in repetition in order to *appear* unitary and original (when I say “I do” I am only marrying you, not everyone who has already said or will say “I do”)—and yet... obviously, in saying “I do” I am entering into an institution of marriage that contains all of us who have ever said or will say “I do” so long as the institution shall live!

But I digress again. To return to your question—the possibility of difference and social change opened up by the interval of repetition or reiteration, is also the possibility of sameness. If the feminists of *Explicit Body* were in search of difference, and the battle reenactors of *Performing*

Remains were in search of sameness, the means are strikingly similar. For the feminists in *Explicit Body*, the difference was that they were reperforming their historical primitivization across their own bodies to take possession of the means to their delimitation. The intervals they opened by way of repetition were intended to inaugurate critical distance and reframe relation. As I hope I also illustrated in *Performing Remains*, many US Civil War reenactors, replaying historic battles, were also interrogating what they had received the Civil War to mean. Many of them believed, I argue, that they could “touch time” by playing it across their bodies (one time in another time) to access something history books themselves were gesturing toward by means of written words. In both cases, time is opened to touch and the vehicle of that opening is embodied, gestic repetition. Whether the desire was to ‘do it the same’ or, by doing it the same, to access difference, the gesture in and as repetition makes strange bedfellows of feminists and war reenactors. But for both, the body is a battlefield across which history takes a form to which, to cite Plato’s *Phaedrus*, it might be possible to say: “our feet bear witness” (2003, 6).

Lucia Ruprecht: I would like to return from feet to hands for a moment: your gesture of the hail is able to exemplify the coexistence of multiple times because of its fundamental relationality, in this case of two interlocutors who are greeting and answering each other. This relationality opens up the hail’s ethical dimension. In his *Towards a Relational Ontology: Philosophy’s Other Possibility*, Andrew Benjamin describes ethics as follows:

Ethics, as it emerges here, is not defined in relation to a single subject who comes to act morally. The subject within ethics is always relational. Moreover, the locus of ethics is not a link between a subject and future actions. Rather, the locus of the ethical is already at hand within the place of human activity and thus within what is called the “fabric of existence.” [...] What is meant by this latter formulation—“the fabric of existence”—is that existence is a weave of relations in which singularities are after-effects. (Benjamin 2015, 17–18)

Your own recent work emphasises the fundamental importance of gesture’s relationality, the fact that gesture “inaugurates” relation (Schneider 2016). It seems to me that Benjamin’s concept of “relationality” draws out the ethical aspects of this claim. Can you talk a little bit more about “inauguration” and what it might suggest?

Rebecca Schneider: I do think that gesture is relational in that gesture suggests an articulate movement or attitude of a body or a thing in relationship to other bodies or things, or even in relationship to the space around the body. Movement generated by or moving off of one body or thing and toward another (whether that other is copresent in time or not) might be suggested by the word gesture. But the movement implied by gesture may also be a movement held in suspension. That is, a gesture may also be a stance, a posture, a pose—a body striking a movement that may come to an articulate still. The suspension of gesture in a pose or highly structured movement sequence is what the performance scholar Eugenio Barba termed the “decided body,”

for example (Barba 2011, 16). A gesture, such as a gestic pose, might be a defined bodily articulation held durationally, and perhaps even pitched toward a future encounter (much as the statue of Marcus Aurelius on my campus here at Brown university gestures in perpetuity across a central green, hailing passers-by in relation not only to past and present empire but to each other). These kinds of gestures, commonly choreographed or directed in staged or codified performances (or indeed written in stone), are obviously relational in that a spectator or viewer is almost always assumed. But a gesture may also move in a “daily” mode and nevertheless be relational, whether or not that body comes to a standstill or is otherwise heightened as explicit performance. If I wave hello, for example, that gesture might be said to move off of itself toward another point (in time and in space). A gesture may then be a movement sequence that does not pause but changes a body in space and time, thus altering the environment of the body—the body, again, in relation to other bodies or to the body’s surround. A gesture may even, as in the hello example, jump between or among bodies in reiterative ricochet. A moving or articulate body is thus perhaps always relational in that the movement/stasis of the body (both/and) may be said to necessarily engage a broader scene in which the body is given to exist in space and time. That said, even a minor or unconscious gesture may be relational, and we can think here of the large body of work in psychoanalysis on the depth relationality of embodied tics, slurs, errors and breaks. Certainly, it is not a stretch to say that if my posture droops, or my head tilts, or my feet drag I may alter the environment of my social surround. These may not be conscious gestures, but they are gestic nevertheless, and contribute quite importantly to what Brecht termed, as I already discussed, the social *gestus*. Even our minor aspects of bodily comportment contribute to the fields of relation that we engage and navigate everyday—and the large body of work on “marked” bodies and epidermal schema (Franz Fanon) gives way to the depth of intersectional relations, welcomed or acknowledged or not, by bodies in everyday movement practices. This is to say that if bodies are caught in webs of relation, the movements made by those bodies will be relational as well. Gesture is relational, and the ethics of relations haunting our bodies in modes of reiteration make gesture a matter for ethical consideration.

What I am interested in thinking about, then, is the cross-temporal and cross-spatial aspect of gesture, or the ways in which gesture may be said to move off of one body and across other bodies in relation, both in time and in space. As a carrier of affect, gesture may be contagious, or always carry more with it than the intentions of an isolated gesturing body or thing. If we think of gesture as in any way contagious, or catchable, rideable, or even riding us, we might ask if gesture ever belongs only to one body or if it takes up its place as gesture *between or among* bodies. This might be to ask whether gesture is proper to the hand that is waving, or if, instead, gesture is that which might precede an articulation, and/or move off the hand and toward the relations it beckons, invites, or otherwise might provoke (whether it succeeds in such provocation immediately or not)?

What I have just been saying perhaps problematically opens “gesture” to all modes of relation between or among bodies—and this may be too wide a playing field for inquiry. With this line of thinking even a sentence or a word could be considered a gesture if it opens toward interaction, or if it suggests a line of argument or narrative to come (when the word or the sentence might meet the eye of a reader or the ear of a listener, for example). Indeed, any book or poem might

then be a gesture if it is *given* to be read, where the gesture of the book or the sentence exists in relations between the book and the reader, or among speakers and listeners in conversation. I mention this by way of situating my comment about gesture inaugurating relation, and what I'd like to do now is talk a little bit about how I came to the sentence you quoted: "gesture inaugurates relation." I will go on for a little while about text, but the aspects of bodies in gestic relation will return, I promise.

I was inspired to think of gesture as inaugurating relation at a conference in Paris where the dance scholar Macklin Kowal referred to Avital Ronell's work on "greeting" as Ronell reads Hölderlin's poetry as read by Heidegger. Returning to Ronell's text I found that she argues, after Heidegger and Hölderlin, that "Greeting *establishes* a relationality" (2008, 206). Though I took the word "inaugurates" from Kowal's reading of Ronell, in thinking about this further, and engaging Ronell with Marcel Mauss's work on gesture—in which Mauss argues persuasively that gesture is reiterative—I have since come to think that "inaugurate" is probably the wrong word, as that which is inaugurated in a greeting is also arguably recursive, or entangled in cross-temporality, as I suggested in my reductive example of our mutual "hellos." I am able to greet because the greeting recurs, and gesture in *this* sense not only moves off of discreet bodies toward other bodies, but does so via reiteration. Of course, in this line of thinking, Ronell's word "establishes" might also be the wrong word.

Recently, I have begun to wonder whether we might instead choose a word like "recycle" to remember gesture's fundamental reiterativity? Or perhaps the word "resurges"? I take the word "recycle" from Anita Gonzalez who argues, in the introduction to *Black Performance Theory*, that the "vocal physical expressive body becomes a conduit, or a cauldron, of expressive *potential* that recycles emotion, spirit, behavior" (2014, 6). Note that for Gonzalez, theory and practice are not necessarily distinct. "Performance theory," she argues, "can be delivered through a hand gesture or sketch, embedded in a lecture, or disseminated within the pauses of a sound score." Each instance of performance and/as theory (or theory and/as performance) "relocates" to manifest "articulate response" (6-7). With performance (whether as theatricality or as the sedimented sets of acts that compose everyday life), there can be no "proper" inaugurating original, but rather a ricochet or transfer or pass of reiteration that is nevertheless in each instance different, full of potential in each relocation.

Let us dwell with Ronell for a little while and possibly recycle something from her text, which itself recycles Heidegger recycling Hölderlin. In Ronell's essay "The Sacred Alien: Heidegger's Reading of Hölderlin's *Andenken*," a relation is "established" by a poem, when poems are thought of as greetings but also when a philosopher responds to or greets a poet in return. That relation, for Ronell, is "between texts and historicity." At first strictly following Heidegger following Hölderlin, Ronell writes that a poet's work is "shown to address some alterity and not posed by man for man" (2007, 208). And yet, she goes on to point out, "although it addresses some alterity and is not posed by man for man, the work, like being, nonetheless *places a call* to man and is therefore not without man" (208). Ronell then thinks deeply about what it means to call and respond, especially given that an aspect of cross-temporality is suggested in the paradox: "The response is what allows the

call to occur." And, a further paradox: "the Greeting first establishes a distance so that proximity can occur" (208). This is, then, also a theory of the interval, which is opened between or among us by our actions of call and response, of reiteration, of repetition and revision. And the interval—a distance inviting proximity inviting distance (much like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's or Jean Luc Nancy's theories of touch)—entangles us, cross-temporally, in human *and* nonhuman relation (for in Hölderlin's poetry, such as "Homecoming/To Kindred Ones," clouds and rivers are poets too, to whom Hölderlin himself responds).

For Ronell, the greeting (which is referred to as "gesture" throughout her text) does not originate with the poet (and let us say, for our purposes, she who gestures). Ronell writes: "Greeting does not originate with the poet as a flex of agency or spark of will. The one who *transfers* the Greeting must be responding to something, to a movement already inclined toward the poet-receptor" (2007, 214). Her complicated and indeed poetic text goes on to elaborate that greeting opens time to a "historical standstill" (and this reverberates with Walter Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit*) (214). The opening provoked by a gesture or call in anticipation of a response, or the response that founds (and holds) a call backward, forward, or to the side, is in fact an opening of history, or its suspension, for engagement anew, or *now*.⁴

What I am thinking about here, in thinking through Ronell about greeting, is that the opening that opens between or among us, in and as relation (re)inaugurated by gesture, occurs in anticipation of our response-ability. In this way gesture is not *merely* relational (as if relationality were even mere), but, as relational, reinaugurates possibilities or potentialities for response. Again and again we encounter the opportunity to respond to each other, across time, in time, and toward time (to come). For, as Ronell shows in close reading, such gesture as the Greeting "also brings about," in Hölderlin and again in Heidegger, "a mark of gender and race." Which is to say that gestures of call and response necessarily contain, even as they suspend, the irruptive materials of our marked histories that compose and recompose the "fabric of existence" or the "weave of relations" (after Andrew Benjamin, as put forward in your question to me) between and among us. How so?

I want to dwell just a moment longer with Ronell. In this essay, Ronell reads the moment in Hölderlin's poem when he beckons toward "brown women" who "walk." That is, the moment in his poem *Andenken* when "brown women" "walk" through the space of the page. And she unpacks Heidegger's difficulty with the "sudden incursion of the foreign feminine" as he struggles to respond to Hölderlin. Ronell writes: "Time gets opened up to a historical standstill, a temporal clip, engaging a gesture that also brings about a mark of gender and race" (214). Perhaps brown women appear for Hölderlin as figures at the rip in the fabric of (white progressive development) time — as primitivist and romantic as that may be. Enigmatic, possibly anamorphic, this walk of the brown women might be, of course, an exhausted white cultural re-irruption of historical specificity—the irruption of very specific (if unnamed as such) histories of capital-colonial-patriarchal relations. Whether they are tanned, labouring French country women or racialized "others," their brownness and their gender mark them, like clouds, as figures for romantic alterity that play and replay, even if they might, as in Ronell's revision, irrupt as "snags" (216), or counter-memories, across white European texts. As Ronell unpacks Heidegger's many fumbles around

“what to do with the brown women” (216), we might ask: Is there a way to respond differently to a call that keeps on calling (from Hölderlin, across Heidegger, across Ronell, to this text you hold in your hands)? Is there any way that what is continually re-opened in this *gesture*, this greeting marked “brown women,” is an opportunity to *think again, critically, about the histories that bring us together in our reiterative gesturing, which is to say, our historical and ongoing relations?*

Regardless of author’s intentions, such gestures, like greetings, precede and follow alike. Like “hellos,” they recycle. As Ronell asks the question recycling Heidegger recycling Hölderlin, the question becomes, again, “What to do with the brown women?” (216). Heidegger is clearly more comfortable with “the wind” that “calls” than with the brown women who may, in the logic of the poem itself, also be poets—that is, also be calling as they walk across the space of the page.⁵ Whether toward uncritical reproduction of what are unavoidably capital-colonial-patriarchal relations or toward possibilities for critical change, “What to do with the brown women?” holds volumes of history again at a standstill, calling, again, for us to ask after the ethics of response. If “What to do with the brown women?” is a question left hanging in Ronell after Heidegger, might we not, *still*, respond? If these are figures of the “sudden incursion of the foreign feminine,” even of the refugee (a figure that begins Ronell’s discussion), what do we do with that repeated historical incursion?

White and brown and many-colored women may rightly be tired, exhausted, by the continual re-suspension of “brown women” in a ricochet of greeting that nevertheless has repeatedly worked to re-silence brown women at some romanticized threshold between poetry and philosophy. And yet the opportunity recurs, like a question posed through Ronell rearticulating Heidegger rearticulating Hölderlin, and it has become, in *her* words, relocating Heidegger, a question which, like a gesture, might be a call toward a different answer: “What to do with the brown women?” History yawns again. And again.

And so, again: “What to do with the brown women?”

One response is surely, as in the call of Black Lives Matter: #Sayhername. (<http://www.aapf.org/sayhername/>). But we also call out: “Read her work.”

As I wrote above, for me, the idea of response-ability is embedded in an ethics of “call and response”—situated by Gonzalez and Thomas F. DeFrantz in *Black Performance Theory* as a “continual unfolding of experience” and a manifestation of global “black sensibilities” (2014, 8,11)—it is something that “gesture” might help us think through as we think about the ways in which relationality is always recycled. Even as history can be interrupted at a standstill in the intervals among call and response, that pause—in *the break* or *in the wake*—is where our relations re-sound, recycle, and potentially relocate. Recycling, whether recycling Hölderlin and Heidegger, or recycling DeFrantz and Gonzalez, is both reiteration and *movement*. Repetition *and* revision. Both/*and*.

As mentioned, contemporary theories of relationality authored by black feminists after Kimberlé Crenshaw’s important 1989 work on “intersectionality” and also in the wake of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s 1981 *This Bridge Called My Back*, suggest that the relations that irrupt between

and among us are a complex “weave” of intersecting relations generating a complex cross-hatch of identifications, marked by history, and always re-opening at the cross-roads, the bridges, of our interconnections. In the words of Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge:

Relational thinking rejects *either/or* binary thinking, for example, opposing theory to practice, scholarship to activism, or blacks to whites. Instead, relational embraces a *both/and* frame. The focus of relationality shifts from analysing what distinguishes entities, for example, the differences between race and gender, to examining their interconnections. The shift in perspective opens up intellectual and political possibilities. (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016, 27)

I cite this definition to suggest that interconnectedness, as a figure for relation, need not resediment us into binarized categories that endlessly replay a pre-determined drama of capital-colonial battles for “recognition” by which one (white) “self” is founded as a subject at the expense of a (brown) “other.” That is, the gestures that pass between us, and carry our histories across our bodies as always re-opening for engagement, need not resediment tired dramas of white male and white female privilege. Rather than a dyad of two in a battle for recognition, there may be a ricochet of calls and a ricochet of responses in any gestic intercommunication. And here I am indebted to Glen Sean Coulthard’s *Red Skins White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, a book that engages in call and response, or cross-temporal greeting, with Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks*. I wonder whether thinking with gesture, and the ways in which gesture carries bodies in relation across intersecting bodies, across intersecting texts, and across intersecting things, times, and spaces among (and not only between) us—can help us as we greet each other and lean, always again, toward ethical calls and responses, both anew and in historical re-irruption.

Lucia Ruprecht: The ways in which you extend the spatial and temporal relationality of call and response beyond an interaction between human beings, to also include “texts” and “things,” reminds me of Fred Moten’s term (recycling John Donne) “interinanimation” (2003a, 76, 192–210), which has such purchase on your argument in *Performing Remains*. How would you position gestural relationality with respect to this term? And how do the ethics of this relationality combine with the fact that it also “activates ideology,” as you have recently argued (Schneider, 2016)?

Rebecca Schneider: What I am thinking about, walking in the footsteps of black feminist and indigenous thought, are the ways in which gesture might be theorized as the opening, not of a call that mandates always only a predetermined response, but as the intervals, or breaks, beside and among us, as the opening for Collins’s “intellectual and political possibilities” (2016, 27). One feminist thinker to whom I have been indebted is Fred Moten, whose *In the Break* “wanders” in the ways of the black radical tradition (Moten 2003a; see also Cervenak 2014). We might read Moten’s use of the phrase “interinanimation” as a greeting, a response and a call, recycling the word as found in John Donne’s poem *The Ecstasy*. I go into that in some detail in *Performing Remains*, where “interinanimation” becomes a means to think about the ways in which cross-temporal

reenactments allow the live and the no-longer-live to cohabit, cross-interrogate, and pose old questions anew, or new questions of old. "Interinanimation" might also be a figure for gesture given that gesture jumps across bodies and across times to *both* reanimate (as I might step live into a footprint that appears to precede me) *and* render us in intimate, reiterable relation to the by-gone (the paradox of following what has gone before, as if, in the logic of "following," the past lay before us in the future—as I explore in *Performing Remains* in the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks). That is, "interinanimation" is a word I use, in that book, recycling Moten recycling Donne (and though Moten does not cite Donne directly, there is, I think, gestural resonance in the term), for thinking about the ways the dead play across the bodies of the living, and the living replay the dead. This is manifested in Donne's poem through the "interinanimation" of live lovers and sepulchral stone statuary. But in future work, I want to think about this in relationship to the "ecstatic," or states of being beside oneself, written about provocatively by such radicals as Euripides and José Esteban Muñoz and Judith Butler and Sylvia Wynter, among others (see Wynter 1990 and McKitterick 2006). However, engaging that line of thinking here might find us wandering far afield, or carry us away with the twister as well as the demonic. I will look forward to that for another time.

Instead, let me try to briefly take up the part of your question that concerns the ways in which gestural relationality "activates ideology." What I will say will probably open more problems and questions than neat answers, but perhaps an opening toward problems is itself in some ways a *gestural* response? That is, my comments may indicate some directions we might go into, out of, and around the fray that is historical repetition and gestural response.

In some ways, I have already posed a response to that question by addressing the way that greeting "also brings about a mark of gender and race" in our discussion of Ronell recycling Heidegger responding to Hölderlin. And Alexander Weheliye has reminded us in *Habeas Viscus*:

Relationality provides a productive model for critical inquiry and political action within the context of black and critical ethnic studies, because it reveals the global and systemic dimensions of racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjugation, while not losing sight of the many ways political violence has given rise to ongoing practices of freedom within various traditions of the oppressed. (2014,13)

Weheliye points to the "both/and" suggested by Collins—that history erupts in both violences and practices of freedom. We might see this illustrated in the BLM gesture of protest that arose in the wake of the killing of Michael Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson on August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri. That gesture, holding both hands up, was taken up by protesters across the United States and performed collectively as a gesture that is both a response and a call simultaneously. How so? The gesture is a response—a reenactment, or reiterative gesture, of the standard pose of surrender facing police, *and a call to a different future*. Both response and call. As we have already noted after Marcel Mauss, gesture is essentially reiterative. Gesture becomes gesture through and as repetition, recycling or resurgence. "Hands Up" indeed reenacts. But as a response, reenacted, it simultaneously becomes a call—a call to resist, to refuse to surrender, that is, to refuse the conventional signification of subjection the gesture *simultaneously* re-inhabits. Both

response and call simultaneously—both, at once, or both/and. Here, the gesture arrests the arrest in the interval of interpellation and, through explicit reiteration jumping across hosts of bodies, it provokes the possibility for difference.

BLM Hands Up arrests, quite literally, the habitual drama of arrest that, as we know, plays differentially across black bodies in public space. For Arendt, the “right to have rights” is simultaneously bound to rights to appearance in public space (in a drama that must be called a drama of recognition), and yet in the U.S. this is drama of appearance is complicated when appearing to appear as black.⁶ Appearing while black can get you killed. The very real violence of the “little theoretical theatre” Louis Althusser outlined in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” through the figure of the policeman’s hail “Hey, you there!” (1971, 163), is more likely to impact black bodies than white (who are, conversely, told to “move along, there’s nothing to see” (Rancière 2010, 37; see also Lepecki 2013). Appearing while black triggers the apparent rights of police to shoot and kill. To quote Christina Sharpe, in the wake of violence we encounter again and again “a past that is not past” but “reappears to rupture the present.” Black death is “a predictable and constituent aspect” of American so-called democracy in the wake of slavery and in the wake of the genocidal removals of indigenous Americans (2016, 7, 9). And *in the wake* we must commit to interrupting the againness of violence, turning it toward an alternative future by enabling, simultaneously, alternative pasts (or, pasts that might be resurgent, gesturing outside the capital/colonial frontier mentality of “development”). If the practice of colonial-capital white violence is reiterative, we have to take on reiteration *differently*, we have to engage with reiteration not deny it, but we must engage it *with a difference*. This is not the same as saying “never again.” This is instead to say that again and again we have the chance to respond differently. The terror of Black subjection is, in the wake of a past that is not past, an ongoing present subjection that is at once “deeply atemporal” (5) and, simultaneously, in relationship to historical time, as reiterative dramas of arrest and enforced recognition play out across moving/arrested bodies in repeating cycles of violence. Both/and.

Let’s look at it this way: Suzan-Lori Parks’ play *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* ends with the following line, spoken by “all”: “Hold it. Hold it. Hold it. Hold it. Hold it. Hold it. Hold it.” As Parks told Han Ong in an interview:

To me language is a physical act. [...] *Last Black Man* is such a double-edged sword. The end of it is, ‘Hold it, hold it, hold it,’ which means “Embrace,” and “Wait a minute,” at the same time. It’s both of those motions at once. (Ong 1994)

Both at once, both refusal and embrace, both motion and arrest, “hold it” resists resolution into one or the other but stands as and in difference. More, it opens an interval offered for repetition *with difference*. This might resonate with the words of Benjamin who wrote, straddling the thresholds of fascism:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to *recognize* it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. ([1940] 1969, 255)

Hold it. Hold it up. Moments of danger are everyday moments when black (when queer, when native, when female, when transgender, when immigrant *sans papier*, when young, when old, when poor when hungry when sick when disabled when Muslim when Jewish)—when straddling any number of the constituent, intersectional cracks that define and uphold white privilege. Seizing hold of memory—taking it in your hands and holding those hands up—hold it hold it hold it—asks something of the past and future that does not or will not resolve into conventional habits of “recognition.” Benjamin also wrote of the standstill, the hold it, as a “jump,” a “tiger’s leap”—hardly a standstill that stands still, but a standstill nonetheless. How can an act that “seizes hold of a memory” be simultaneously a standing still and a leap into motion? To my mind, here again gesture can help us think about the both/and in ways that refuse to sediment into simpler logics of representation.

If gesture activates ideology, as in Louis Althusser’s famous model in which a gestic hail by the police is the exemplary medium for subjection, then thinking through gesture becomes necessarily thinking through ideology and the possibilities for change in and through the play of relations in dominant and insurgent ideological struggles. In the interval always again opened by gesture, or recycled in the essentially reiterative relationality of gesture, might we “hold up” a moment for difference at the level of response-become-call-become-response? We can think of the hail explicitly as gesture, whether Althusser’s “Hey, you!” or Rancière’s “Move along!” Both “halt” and “move along” subject passers-by into the reiterative arrest/flow of dominant ideology. Thinking with gesture we might inquire, each as particular choreographers of our everyday, how engaging explicitly and corporeally in the intervals of our relations can open alternative opportunities in a moment of danger for a standstill tiger’s leap *if we take it*? This might be what Sharpe calls “wake work” (2016, 13). If we allow that gestures simultaneously reiterate the historical marks of dominance and oppression *and* open our hands to practices of freedom that usher forth alternatives, we would see the future as *in our hands* (see Morrison 1994, 30).

There is a great deal more to think about here than time allows. Let me just say that for Benjamin, the operation of “dialectics as a standstill” was still dialectic—the dialectic arrested in an interval. And yet the dialectic itself may hinder alternatives to the degree that it remains a model of “progress” and seeks to resolve contradictions—to synthesize thesis and antithesis into one. Coulthard has subtitled his book “Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition” (2014), as such politics play out a linear-time, development model of progress. Is the dialectic bound to a capital-colonial logic of recognition that continually resediments the privileges of the colonizing capitalist (Coulthard always couples the words colonial with the word capital and capital with colonial)? If so, when we “hold it”—when we enter the interval opened among us by any gesture, any greeting—we have to respond *differently* to the past that recurs. We have to find a different future for the reiterative violences of the irruptive past. If we think with/as gesture, as opposed to image or more generally representation, are we already thinking differently?

If we consider, with dance scholar Susan Foster, that protest actions are necessarily reenactments (2003)—as choreographies they are composed of both rehearsal and redo—then a protest is both a protest in the present, and a dragging of a past event into a temporally porous set of times where

deliberately erased or forgotten pasts might re-irrupt, or pile up, like wave upon wave upon wave. This tracks with Jack Halberstam's insights in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) and their reminder that so-called failed revolutionary actions are never wholly disappeared but lie in wait for re-response, re-call, or the again time of re-ignition. The logic of gesturing forth the past—reiterating—in the form of performative resurgence is the idea of making palpable the alternative futures that alternative responses to those so-called pasts might have realized, or, better, might *yet* realize. Coulthard has written movingly on this, recycling Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson and calling for the “emergent theory and practice of Indigenous *resurgence*” (2014, 153). The performative resurgence of indigenous pasts into the capital-colonial present is not a failed past submitted to representation, but an alternative future making claims on us, *greeting and refusing simultaneously*, in again time. In this way, reiteration is not representation but resurgence. Not image, but gesture. Not *likeness* but *is-ness*, folded in the fabric of call and response, generative of intervals that are not just between (as between one past and one future) but intervals among, beside, and with hosts of alternatives. Coulthard writes of the performative appearance of the indigenous so-called past as one that “does not require us to dialectically transcend Indigenous practices of the past” (2014, 154). Instead, and arguably against the dialectic, decolonization/decapitalization requires us to *hold it*, fluidly—in order to, now in Leanne Simpson's words, “reclaim the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems and lifeways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated” (2011,18).⁷ Performative acts that manifest the fluidity of gesture in/as resurgence often present themselves both “as if” and, simultaneously if paradoxically, “as is”—an ongoing “as is” of otherwise dismissed or violently erased alternatives to capital-colonial registers of the so-called real.

What we are discussing here, is perhaps actually in our hands. Again and again we encounter the ethical opportunity to respond to each other, across time, in time, and toward time (to come) differently through gestures that open the possibilities inherent in call and response. I would like, in future work, to think about what it means that in drawing on call and response, Ronell does not remark the recursive wake work of call and response as what Gonzalez and DeFrantz (and many others) rightly claim as a “manifestation of global black sensibilities” even as she admits that gestures carry and redistribute historical marks of gesture and race.⁸ I think it is important to acknowledge the diasporic tracks of culture ways, or lifeways of knowing that do not resediment empiric white cultural dyadic models, and I hope I have given a glimpse here of ways we might think of call and response as nondyadic but radically open to hosts of alternatives outside of or exterior to the “betweenness” of the rigid colonial model of recognition (Moten 2003b). To my mind, every moment of interpellation—like Althusser's call of the policeman's “Hey, you there!” opens an opportunity to turn response into call toward a different future. There is a lot more to think about here in thinking about gesture as hail, and hail as gesture. When we think about gesture as the intervals opened between us by calling and responding, how might we choose to move to the side, to let something other than the tired dramas of dominance and submission occur? When we think about gesture as the intervals opened between us, do we gain a different relationship to response-ability?

Notes

¹ This definition is taken from the translation of Michel Foucault, in Foucault (1977, 9).

² On this “paradox” see Lacoue-Labarthe (1982). One can credit many theorists and artists with trenchant analyses of repetition and difference. Think of Luce Irigaray’s work on mimesis (and see my later essay on “remimesis” (2014) for further thought on this), think of post-colonial theorist Homi Bhaba on mimicry and the colonized, of Gilles Deleuze’s *Repetition and Difference*, and the many feminist engagements with psychoanalytic theories of repetition. After completing *The Explicit Body*, the work of playwright Suzan-Lori Parks was also extremely important to me in terms of drawing on African diasporic traditions of “repetition and revision,” and in the later 1990s I began to study African and African-American engagement with repetition in greater depth. My essay “Solo Solo Solo” (2001b) and my subsequent book *Performing Remains* continued to be deeply indebted to such genealogies.

³ The word “survivance” should sound with the genealogy from which I borrow the term: Gerald Vizenor on Native American “renunciations of dominance” (2008, 1).

⁴ In *Performing Remains* I question the durationality of “now” to suggest that “now” need not be the modernist idea of a disappearing instant. Benjamin’s idea of *Jetztzeit* in his ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ describes a time that is open with revolutionary possibility, detached from the homogenous continuum of history continually written from the perspective of the victors. The “tiger’s leap” that articulates *Jetztzeit* in Benjamin is figured as a physical act (a stepping out, in “A Small History of Photography” or a leap in “Theses on the Philosophy of History”) of suspension that might be thought of as a gesture, human and/or nonhuman, that is *both* reiterative *and* arrests us at the threshold of habit, opening a possibility for critical difference, or response-ability.

⁵ On the wind as “calling” to poets, see Heidegger (2000, 111). Heidegger allows the “mariners” of *Andenken* to be Germania’s future poets, called by the wind, but does not extend that same “promise” (*verheisse*) to the brown women who nevertheless are similarly summoned in the space of the poem. This may be more Heidegger’s problem than Hölderlin’s, but it has been recycled to us through Ronell and, now, through my rearticulation. For me “gesture” occurs as a “means of passage” (Derrida 1988, 1), hand to hand, as we pass texts (or sounds or bodily movements or words) between us and, together, recycle their songs. See Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez on approaching writing as that which “moves across the page” when we “experience the text *at hand*” (2014, 10, 14).

⁶ For a discussion of the dynamics of Arendt’s thought on the “rights to have rights” see Seyla Benhabib (2004, 41–70), and in relation to “appearance” see Schapp (2011).

⁷ On fluidity see Simpson on the Nishnaabeg word “Biskaabiiyang” which means to look back. Simpson makes clear that Biskaabiiyang does not mean “literally returning to the past.” And yet neither does the past congeal into an image. Rather “resurgence” can mean “reclaiming the *fluidity* around our traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism” (2011, 51).

⁸ Diane Davis tracks Ronell’s investment in call and response to Levinas, and while this is entirely appropriate, what would it mean to simultaneously hear, in the redeployment of the “ethics” of the modality, resurgent lifeways of the colonized/capitalized (2007, xxvi)? What would it be to explicitly extend the resonance of call and response by listening for the footsteps of black women who walk, listening and walking with the diasporic tracks of the flesh trade?

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