



PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY

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# I BREATHE, YOU BREATHE, WE BREATHE: HOW A DAILY HABITUAL MOVEMENT APPEARS AS AN ACTION AND GROWS INTO A GESTURE THROUGH LISTENING

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A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground [...].

Arendt [1958] 1998, 71

For as Baudelaire said, in a palace 'there is no place for intimacy'.

Bachelard [1958] 2014, 50

## Introduction

When I can't fall asleep, I listen to my loved one breathing next to me. As I begin to listen, I think of breathing as one of the most natural movements, because if there is one thing I don't think about, it's respiration. On the contrary, I undergo the continual and physiological process of breathing. After each inhalation I expect and await exhalation. But when, while listening, a long pause emerges between inhalation and exhalation, panic takes over. Do I underestimate the force that keeps our bodies running? And why is that moment of non-breath so exciting? In this article I examine what might appear between inhalation and exhalation, the space of non-breath. What are the implications and consequences of this state of non-breath for what appears?

This is a question I recently posed to the Polish-Belgian choreographer Kinga Jazewska. As I asked the question, I quoted dance philosopher Laurence Louppe ([1997] 2010, 62): ‘Time within a non-breath becomes a line of tension as fine as it is continuous.’ In her reply, Jazewska described how she used breath and respiration in her choreography *Grey* (2017), her first full-length choreography, in order to create ‘suspension’. In this 45-minute choreography, Jazewska uses continuous movement to create the (im)possibility of stillness and to rule out surprises (Jazewska 2017a). As I describe in more detail below, her choreography extrapolates the movement of breath by letting the dancers dance their breathing. We might say that the dance foregrounds the tension between inhalation and exhalation.

In the first part of this article, I want to think about this non-breath in relation to Hannah Arendt’s idea of ‘spaces of appearance’. Can a daily and habitual movement like breathing provide the space to appear? Can the non-breath be considered a place of human plurality and the emergence of the self? Can our breathing act? And if so, do we speak (up) through our breathing? In the second part of this article, I argue that in Jazewska’s choreography, breathing functions as an action which not only reveals the non-breath as a space of appearance, but as a place of proximity. I characterise this as a place where I hesitate, but without disengaging. In the third part of this article, I consider this question of proximity in relation to the work of Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman and her films *Rendez-Vous D’Anna* (1972) and *Toute une nuit* (1983). Both films reveal a constant struggle of the characters to balance the public and the private, as they constantly negotiate and re-ally the border between the I and the other in order to act and appear. I read this renegotiation in relation to the work of Lauren Berlant on the affective components of belonging and the practice of intimacy. I conclude that a re-ally-sation between the public and the private no longer restricts itself to an appearing from private into public, as Arendt would claim, but that it reveals an unknown intimacy because ‘it poses questions of scale that links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective’ (Berlant 1998, 286). I explain how these re-ally-sations of the private and the public stimulate motions generated by breathing as an action through listening.

### Hannah Arendt and the non-breath as a space of appearance

#### What is (a space of) appearance?

Arendt introduces the notion of a space of appearance in *The Human Condition* (1958), and builds further on that notion in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). At the root of her thinking in *The Human Condition* she states that ‘the space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action’ (Arendt [1958] 1998, 199). This means that in order to talk about a space of appearance, multiple people need to be present and engaged with each other; if they disengage the space of appearance dissolves (Arendt [1958] 2015, 183) and only doubt remains (208). Because of this need for engagement, the Dutch translation of a space of appearance reads as *de plaats van ontmoeting*, ‘the place of encounter’ (Arendt [1958] 2015, 183).<sup>1</sup> It doesn’t suffice that people gather or stay around to keep a space of appearance in existence. As soon as their activities lack engagement—if they don’t speak anymore—the space of appearance dissolves.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt continues her thinking on appearance, pointing out that ‘appearance and disappearance are the primordial events’ because they ‘mark out time’: that is, the time between life and death marks out a space of appearance (Arendt 1978, 20). Here, it becomes clear how the space of appearance closely relates to natality, another key idea for Arendt’s thinking. As Margaret Canovan observes in her introduction to *The Human Condition*, it is due to natality, the continually coming into the world of new people and their ability to start new initiatives (Arendt [1958] 1998, xvii), that ‘the web of human affairs’ (204) and the space of appearance can be reconfirmed over and over again.

To Arendt, each individual life can only exist in relation to another, because ‘Being and Appearing coincide’ (Arendt 1978, 19). Each individual depends on the web of human affairs to appear, because ‘[n]othing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*’ (9, original emphasis). Appearance needs that audience who witnesses the coming into being in order to fully accomplish itself. This only happens when appearance conceals the ground of being and reveals the surface of the individual (37), or, in other words, when it combines its ontological characteristics with its phenomenal ones of the seen, the touched, the felt, the heard.

### The non-breath as a space of appearance

When listening the breathing of my loved one, the non-breath is a moment where I fully engage with my loved one as other. It defines the moment where I, as listener, await an inhalation or an exhalation and activates my senses of sight, touch, and hearing. The non-breath combines anticipation and expectation. Because of these expectations, the moment between inhalation and exhalation is one where tension is at play. The marked time in that moment is the time between life and death (Arendt 1978, 20). If we consider each breath as natality in miniature, then we can define the non-breath between inhalation and exhalation, or between exhalation and inhalation, as a space of appearance, the junction between our ontological being and our phenomenal selves.

For Arendt, appearance is constituted and recognized in three phases: an upward movement, a period of standstill, and a downward movement (22). She adds that the moment of standstill houses the ‘bloom or epiphany’ of the appearance. On a physiological level the non-breath marks a change of direction situated in the diaphragm. It is a minuscule moment of standstill where our ribcage rests between the alignment and arching of the spine. At a microscopic level the non-breath defines the moment where oxygen and carbon dioxide molecules change places in the alveolus-chambers (designmate 2015). During the non-breath between inhalation and exhalation, oxygen enters our veins while carbon dioxide exits, or the other way around between exhalation and inhalation.

In this physiological description of the non-breath, I discover a clear resonance between breathing and the three phases of appearing Arendt distinguished. First, inhalation: in an upward movement, my spine aligns my torso rises upwards. Second, non-breath: a miniscule moment of rest in the movement, the ‘bloom’ of my respiratory system, where oxygen and carbon dioxide swap places and a change of direction occurs in the movement of my diaphragm. Third, exhalation: my ribcage inflates and lowers in a downward movement. I ground my body. The cycle begins again with a non-breath, a miniscule moment of rest, a change of direction.

Translating this change of direction into Arendt's context of the space of appearance, I suggest that the non-breath is a change of direction toward appearance or disappearance. In such a change of direction inhalation announces appearance, while exhalation announces disappearance. The change of direction underlines the non-breath of a space of appearance, in which tension rises while time expands. This is most clear for the non-breath following an exhalation, because the lack of a new inhalation would result in (total) disappearance—that is, death. Taking this thinking further, a non-breath after an *inhalation* would imply that the stretch of time would lead not to disappearance, but to its opposite, something like 'over-appearance'. In Arendt's terms, this would be becoming all too public (Arendt [1958] 2015, 51): a becoming which loses all nuance and elaboration and remains the mere surface of certainties (Arendt [1958] 2015, 52). In the case of over-appearance, the element of semblance, which is present in all appearances, takes the lead; as Arendt would say, 'Semblance is the price we pay for the wonders of appearance' (Arendt 1978, 38).

In both previous cases—total disappearance and over-appearance—time in the non-breath is stretched to its limits, but when the respiratory tempo and rhythm are continuous, the non-breath houses a change of direction that sets in motion a process of appearance and disappearance. This characterization of the non-breath closely relates to Arendt's explanation on action, as I will explain in the next section.

### What is action?

Arendt defines action as a boundless and unpredictable praxis, which she situates in the context of the polis and the space of appearance in between humans (Arendt [1958] 2015, 175–179). To Arendt, to act covers a range of meanings: to begin, to lead, to rule, and to set in motion (Arendt [1958] 1998, 177). She intimately connects action to natality, because for her to begin means to begin as *somebody*, to come into being, to appear in the web of human affairs (Arendt [1958] 1998, 184; Arendt [1958] 2015, 162–163).

Just as she divides the phases of appearance into an upward movement, a moment of stillness and a downward movement, she also divides action into two phases. Firstly, its beginning, and secondly, that which is started is carried further (Arendt [1958] 1998, 189). The core of the action is situated in the beginning, in the actual initiative (Arendt [1958] 2015, 162), but only fully flourishes when set in motion. Connecting Arendt's two sequences, I suggest that action is housed exactly at the point where appearance flourishes: in the moment of standstill. Action blooms in the change of direction. In relation to breath, this would mean that action flourishes in the non-breath.

### Our first breath, our first action?

If action is related to natality, as Arendt argues, then a special significance must be given to our very first respiration cycle. At the moment a mother gives birth, everyone in the delivery room awaits the first scream of the newborn before fully acknowledging the birth. But what happens exactly? The scream of an infant, although awaited, remains unpredictable. It indicates the moment when the newborn completes the transfer from the private nest of the womb to the great wide open of the public world. The non-breath preceding the scream underlines how this moment is

laden with tension. It reveals the uncertainty about whether the beginning is successful. The scream from the top of our lungs marks our first initiative as an individual in this world. The non-breath following this scream is the moment where a newborn sets in motion a bodily praxis of developing autonomy, without knowing where it will take them. It is exactly at this moment they carry the beginning further and start the earthly life, a long-lasting process of inhalation and exhalation as a constant movement. Simultaneously the others present ask themselves, 'Who is this?' (Arendt [1958] 2015, 163), and expect a first reaction with the next breath. With this question the others acknowledge the uniqueness of the newborn and confirm the earthly law of plurality (Arendt 1978, 19). Through the first respiration cycle the newborn appears in between humans, the newborn acts, because their scream makes the breath sensible as a mechanism for beginning and becoming (Arendt 201, 175–179). From the second inhalation onwards, breathing evolves into mere unconscious labour, an activity to cope with the necessities prescribed by the biological process as a living organism (Arendt 1958, 98). The breathing does not immediately speak, but it keeps labouring in respiratory cycles, always the same (Arendt 1958, 98). The labouring respiratory cycles insure the newborn's living condition before enabling them to act again.

### When is an action able to act again? To speak?

According to Arendt, an action only flourishes when it speaks, when it sets something in motion (Arendt [1958] 2015, 17). My discussion of the respiratory cycles of a newborn traces a relationship between movement and motion. In her *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, Laurence Louppe defines motion as 'consciousness of movement: consciousness of the path, of all the paths [...] through the body' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 73). So, it follows that breathing can only function as an action when one is conscious of the movement of breathing, and of the pathway that carbon dioxide and oxygen take through the body.

Following Louppe, becoming conscious about the movement of breath means becoming conscious of weight, as according to her, 'All movement is defined by a transfer of weight' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 64). In the case of the infant, this would mean that with their first scream the newborn feels the weight of their body for the first time. The scream makes audible the infant's dialogue with their own body, matter, and 'inner fibre' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 69).

To return to the physiology of breathing, the transfer of weight happens between inhalation and exhalation at the moment of non-breath, at the change of direction, and therefore it is situated in the diaphragm. Or, to combine these insights with Arendt: breathing starts to speak from the diaphragm, which enables one to act again. In relation to Louppe this is a very plausible statement, as for her the diaphragm defines the birthplace of phrasing (Louppe [1997] 2010, 103). The non-breath becomes the speaking silence in-between two phrases, where the possibility of breathing as a speaking action can be felt.

With these thoughts on the non-breath as a space of appearance and breathing as an action, let us take a closer look at the choreography *Grey* (2017) by Kinga Jackzewska, who deliberately uses breathing to set her audience in motion and to create an experience of suspension.

## Jackzewska's *Grey* (2017): Can breathing as a habitual movement stimulate motion?

### The choreography

*Grey* is a choreography for three dancers taking place on a grey dance floor. Jaczewska tries to avoid symmetry, so the position of this floor slightly differs from the axis of the scene. A white grid of squares (1x1m) is taped on top of the grey floor. The three dancers inhabit the scene for forty-five minutes, stepping in and out of the grey-floored zone. None of them leaves the scene during this period of time. They are all dressed in shades of grey and green, and my eye is caught by the fluffy green jumpers worn by one of the female dancers. *Grey* has never been so green. At first, we hear the blowing of the air-conditioning system; somewhere in the beginning of the first section the system turns down and silence is more audible than before. In the choreography, Jaczewska builds the movement pattern from alternating between aligning and arching of the spine. Her movement vocabulary is situated between rising upwards and moving towards the ground, between inhalation and exhalation.

Each dancer's body reveals the subtlety of the breathing movement in and of the torso. The three bodies breathe slowly, alone and next to each other. One by one the dancers engage their bodies more profoundly in the choreography. I can see how they look at each other's respiration in order to tune in to the same rhythm. Once their bodies attune to the breathing of the others, they test different constellations:

- In the first, three breathing bodies stand on their own and show three different perspectives of shoulder movement. I get a front, back and side view at the same time.
- The second constellation shows one non-active seated body, one upright breathing body and one active seated body, where breath moves through the belly.
- The last constellation reveals the full palette of breathing bodies in one stage view. It gathers the same standing body breathing in the chest, a new active seated body that breathes from the diaphragm, and a third breathing body that lies itself down. When lying down the breathing moves around the body from the lungs to the toes. The belly slowly goes up and down. These different directions wave the softness of the body.

From here on the performers start to play with their breath, balance, and stability. They rise on their feet slightly from the ground, searching for balance. Balance demands their full attention. They focus on their own body. The breathing movement diminishes. Two of the three bodies softly touch each other. From there the soft touch grows into a force, pulling the body out of balance, without falling. Both bodies lean in, away, and towards each other. The tension expands, followed by a short acceleration. A rapid release brings us back to the breathing bodies and new constellations. But there is one difference: I remember how the playing bodies were breathing before.

Once more the performers reveal subtle breathing movements, exploring different directions. Jaczewska extrapolates these directions, as if the performers dance their own breathing. One of the performers calmly rises to the top of her toes until she reaches the highest point possible. Even

though she holds this position for only a split second, she looks light and almost floating. Immediately after she redirects the movement towards the floor. She holds the posture in a determined fight with gravity. Only in the force of gravity does the functioning of the floor become visible. The grey surface no longer constrains to being a 'surface of rebound' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 66), but shows itself as a surface that carries us. It 'reinscribes in us the experience of being held, when our gravitational architecture did not yet exist, when our supple and fluid spine flowed with the maternal support' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 66). In this position the transfer and holding of weight becomes *sensible*. Or as Odile Rouquet would say, 'The ground functions as her best ally against gravity' (Rouquet 1991, 79).

As an audience member, I clearly experience the transfer of weight from the top of the toe to the arms. With the extrapolation of these directions, Jaczewska magnifies the space between inhalation and exhalation, and the trajectory between the two actions. I experience the rise to the toes as inhalation. Air presses against the lungs, stretching them to their limits. Exhalation manifests itself in the movement towards the ground, a short release, which quickly becomes a struggle for oxygen. The trembling of the dancer's muscles visualises the awaiting of a new inhalation.

The relation between balance, breathing, and weight is not new in dance. Jaczewska's choreography draws on Doris Humphrey's observation that breathing is an essential dancing experience that relates to the transfer of weight, the effect of gravity, and the play between balance and imbalance (Utrecht 1998, 179). Humphrey states, 'To fall is to yield; to recover is to re-affirm one's power over gravity and one-self. Falling and recovering is the very stuff of movement, the constant flux which is going on in every living body all the time' (Humphrey in Main 2012, 17). In *Grey*, the performers' dancing of their breathing makes me conscious of my own breathing movement, revealing to me how with each exhalation I surrender my body to gravity. I reduce and minimize the inner spaces of my body. I tighten. When I inhale, on the other hand, I let the inner space of my body stretch and grow. My body rises and feels light because my vertebrae take distance from each other, and oxygen enters my blood circulation while carbon dioxide exits. Fresh air. New possibilities.

By the end of the performance, the dancers have taken the movements back into their chests. They speed up their breathing pace. As they accelerate, the volume of their exhalations rises. The energetic force of breath becomes audible:

Inhale ..... Exhale ..... Inhale ..... Exhale ..... Inhale ..... Exhale ..... Inhale ..... Exhale

Align ..... Arch ..... Align ..... Arch ..... Align ..... Arch ..... Align ..... Arch

The movement spreads out through their bodies: knees bend; arms follow the arching of the spine and shoulders, hands open and close. I witness the repetition of movement and acceleration. I long for the process to keep going. The breathing accelerates towards mere answer to the biological demand of a dancing body. I see and hear the fight of the body. Arendt tells us that the body is fighting the forces of its world (Arendt [1958] 2015, 9), and this fight appears in this encounter with



the dancing body. Their bodies become dedicated to sustaining themselves within the ruthlessness of repetition.

With this phrase of accelerating breath, Jaczewska reveals breathing as habit. Gaston Bachelard notes that when we return to an old house we used to live in, we may be surprised 'to find that the most delicate gestures, the earliest gestures suddenly come alive'. He writes, 'The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house' (Bachelard [1958] 2014, 36). But what about that even earlier house, the house of our body? A change of direction, and the intimate movements that go with it, suddenly and immediately come alive when returning to that oldest house, the house of the non-breath. The change of direction in the non-breath is one of 'the most delicate gestures' because it makes the silence in between inhalation and exhalation speak. Jaczewska, for her part, declares, 'Home is where you can listen to yourself because you don't understand the talks inside of the public transport'; it's 'an equal amount of departures and arrivals' (Jaczewska 2017b). Jaczewska seems to suggest that a closer listening to each other's breathing sets in motion a habitual movement, which in turn allows people to feel 'at home' because of its inherent change of direction.

### The delicacy of gestures: *Grey* in the light of Arendt and Louppe

According to Louppe a gesture consists of 'the visible emanation of an invisible corporal genesis' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 73). By letting the dancers dance their breathing, Jaczewska visibly exposes the invisible corporeality of inhalation and exhalation, which carries the full intensity of a body. The (danced) breathing movements in *Grey* are thus no longer mere movements, but gestures. During this fragment in the choreography, the breathing praxis engages the whole body. Due to the enlargement and extrapolation of the breathing movement, it seems as if the breathing slows down. The slowness functions as a magnifying glass and engages my breathing body in a corporeal awareness (Louppe [1997] 2010, 74). It triggers a sense of attentiveness to weight, to what is happening in the bodies of the dancers and how that relates to my own body.

When the dancers dance their own breathing, I recognize: an upward movement (rising to the toes on an inhalation); a standstill (holding the raised position during the non-breath); a downward moment (bringing the body to a parallel position with the floor on an exhalation); and another standstill (fighting gravity while holding the body's breath as long as possible). From this observation a striking resemblance occurs between this phrase in the choreography and Arendt's phasing of appearance.

What appears is the body as a breathing agent and, in particular, my own body as a breathing agent. For Arendt, the revelation of the agent is an inherent characteristic of an action (in her specific use of this term). Through the action the agent appears in the public domain and to the others. Action creates the condition for remembrance (Arendt [1958] 1998, 8). As a spectator I suddenly remember how breathing carries the possibility of being an action in itself. It is as if, by witnessing the non-breath of the dancers, I remember my first breath, through which I first appeared to others in public. As if I return home. The breathing crosses the boundary between dancers and audience. Only now am I fully able to engage with the choreography, because I tune



in to the breathing and overcome the distance between my own body and that of the dancers. I make myself at home in their dancing, their breathing. I allow the public in my private discovery of breathing as an action, as praxis.

Arendt claims that an action can only remain an action so long as it speaks (Arendt [1958] 2015, 163). Because this tuning of the breath is rooted in the risen consciousness of the breathing movement and the paths oxygen takes through my body—its organs, muscles, and veins—I can now state that if breathing speaks as an action does, it speaks without words and in gestures.

Thomas Kasulis call this communication with gestures 'intimation': 'The need to be explicit, the effort to explain, the urge to fill in the silence—all become muted in ever deepening levels of intimation where the slightest gesture or facial expression may express more than enough' (Kasulis 2002, 28). In the context of breathing, this leaves room to reveal dynamics of underlying intensities and tensions. The silence of the moving bodies becomes a polygot (Jaczewska, 2019), revealing how the breathing body allows the most private self and the public body to co-exist in proximity. The non-breath reveals itself as a gestural sphere: a place of proximity (Louppe [1997] 2010, 43) where I allow myself to hesitate which direction to take next without being overwhelmed or paralyzed by doubt.

The non-breath as place of proximity closely relates to what Jaczewska describes as a home: 'an equal amount of departures and arrivals, given that "away from" and "back to" refer to the same walls' (Jaczewska 2017b). Only by the choice to leave and to go back to a certain place can you make it your home. This means that in order to make the world their home, humans have to choose directions. The necessity of hesitation for a place of proximity and the threat of doubt underlines the delicate character of this gesture.

In *Grey*, direction is chosen through an accentuated inhalation. This is most obvious when a performer on the top of her toes suddenly inhales and positions her body parallel to the floor. With each exhalation the bodies of the performers thus prepare for a change of direction. Because of its inherent non-breath, breathing generates several possibilities to change direction. When breathing together, I am confronted with the others (the dancers) and I try to get a grip on my hesitation and the possible paths and lines in the web of human affairs. While breathing, we (the dancers and I) explore the space between us humans, the space of appearance. I reconcile myself with the reality of my own breathing and try to understand the web of human affairs.

Within the relation between audience and dancers in *Grey*, breathing functions as the trigger to remember the non-breath as a house. But to make it a home everyone constantly needs to choose direction, whether they continue together and remain engaged, or their paths split and become disengaged. If no one chooses a direction the non-breath remains a house and 'the warm substance of intimacy resumes its form' (Bachelard [1958] 2014, 48). But if one is able to hesitate, and afterwards choose direction, one will rediscover intimacy.

Because of the delicacy embedded in the change of direction, the non-breath is when I start to take care of my own breathing and tune in to breathing as an action. In this simultaneity of appearance

and tenderness towards the self, intimacy will start to change its form due to the co-existence of public and private. Exactly because of the co-existence of public and private, which is needed to hesitate about which direction to take, the renewed intimacy differs strongly from what Arendt defined as intimacy, namely a withdrawal from the public into private self-absorption (Arendt [1958] 1998, 45). For Arendt there was no co-existence between public and private, but she already anticipated a tension when she warned against the absorption of the private by the public. However, such an absorption has? occurred and intimacy indeed no longer means a withdrawal from the public, but a key to publicity, something it longs for (Berlant 1998, 282).

The renewed intimacy, which appears in the co-existence of the public and private, once again hides from view (Bachelard [1958] 2014, 88) but embeds a public quality and becomes highly sensitive in the non-breath. The rediscovered intimacy is what the non-breath 'speaks' about. But what do I sense?

In my experience of *Grey* the experience of being with others in public does not deny or usurp my most private feeling of 'home'. On the contrary, while breathing I allow both at the same time. The limits and borders dividing my body and the breathing bodies of the dancers become tangible. Due to the boundary-crossing characteristic of breathing as an action I experience a corporeal awareness of the border between private and public, and its functioning and its importance, but without re-installing it. With this reading of *Grey* I suggest that the drive behind action is no longer Arendt's question of how to appear in public, but how to rediscover intimacy and how to allow the 'delicate gesture' of the other.

### **(Re)discovering intimacy with Chantal Akerman: the re-ally-sation between the public and private**

In order to get a better idea of the rediscovery of intimacy, I take a closer look at the work of filmmaker Chantal Akerman, and in particular the way she uses the action of breathing to manifest a tension between private and public and existence. The 2012 survey of her work in MHKA (Antwerp) was entitled *Too Far, Too Close*, referring to how Akerman addresses the ambiguous relation between the self and the other (Roelstraete 2012, 7). The title of the exhibition seems to formulate the tensions embedded in a place of proximity due to the co-existence of public and private. In almost all of her works Akerman plays with the (dis)appearance of the self in relation to the other at moments of transgression or separation (ibid., 1); in these moments of crisis, it feels as if her characters try to get back in touch with themselves. In her book *To Be Born*, Luce Irigaray labels such a re-connection with the self as 'self-affection', and ascribes it to a realisation of one's limits (Irigaray 2017, 17). Where does the 'I' stop and the other begin, and where is the border between public and private situated?

In *Toute une nuit* (1982), Akerman shows us a dozen of characters in the daily recurring timespan between evening and morning. The film spends time with each of the characters, and as spectators we only encounter most of the characters once during the whole film. The film depicts different people dealing with the struggle to fall asleep or negotiating the urge to go outside, to flee into the

direction of the night, away from the other. Listening to *Toute une nuit*, I constantly hear changes of directions in the omnipresent sound of footsteps. To recall Jaczewska's description of home, the characters constantly walk 'away from' and 'back to' the 'same walls' in a feverish attempt to make the city, or the night, their home. If home is a place where you can listen to yourself (Jaczewska 2017b), making yourself at home in the world demands a change in direction. I re-watch one scene from *Tout une nuit*, where the change of direction is obviously manifested:

A man and a woman sit next to each other on a couch. Through the camera movement I enter their living room just as the man falls asleep. He loudly inhales and exhales. I hear his breathing only once. From then on, I see his chest move slowly up and down. Suddenly I hear his wife shuffle next to him, and my gaze switches towards her. Because of the previous deep sigh of her husband, I immediately notice the breathing movement of her chest. With each inhalation the movement becomes bigger. Several times between inhalation and exhalation she moves her upper body forward. The leather of the sofa is crushed. She hesitates. She deeply exhales, and with her last visible inhalation she stands up and leaves the house. The inhalation ending her hesitation actualises her choice of direction. She stands up, an action which wakes her husband, who says, 'Allons en ville? Allez danser?' ('Are we going to town? Are we going for a dance?' Akerman 1989, 00:19:48). With the accentuated inhalation they flee into the city and move towards the other.

But while wriggling on the sofa, the woman hesitates. The hesitation reminds me of the contradiction captured in Arendt's sentence, 'I can flee appearance only in appearance' (Arendt 1978, 23). The woman wants to flee from the walls of the house and from the habit of staying at home watching television. When going outside with her husband to dance, they allow their intimate lives into the public. Their change of direction combines both comfort and disruption. Exactly due to this combination I feel the tension and co-existence of the private and the public. With their change of direction, they pursue an action to make themselves at home in the world.

In another Akerman film, *Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978), the character of Anna is in between cities, searching to make herself at home in the world, and struggling with comfort and disruption. This struggle is shown during a scene in which Anna enters her hotel room, sits down on her bed, and makes herself comfortable. She undresses and lays herself down on her back. I watch the breathing of her naked body. After several breathing cycles she convinces herself to move towards the window. She opens the curtain. Silence. She stands still with her back towards the camera. She breathes. She hesitates. And then with a sudden inhalation she opens the window. I hear trains. They arrive and leave. At that very moment Anna allows the public into the private. Both co-exist.

The scene triggers a sudden realisation: Akerman frequently combines the image of breathing with sounds from the exterior. Often her characters visually underline this combination by opening or closing a window or a curtain. In the combination of a private image and a public sound, the private and the public become allied. Each time I notice the character's breath, they seem to reconsider the border between exterior and interior. They realise where they come from, where they are, and where they want to go. But this realisation only happens if they listen, if they enable themselves to re-ally self and other, private and public.

In contrast to the word *hearing*, which Arendt always seems to use in the context of a space of appearance, *listening* isn't a purely receptive mode. On the contrary, it demands attention and effort. Sound artist and philosopher Salomé Voegelin describes the relation between hearing and listening as follows: 'listening discovers and generates the heard'; it is 'a method of exploration' (Voegelin 2010, 4). Through listening I do not appear in the world, as is the case with hearing, but I enable myself and the other to appear from, through, and around that world. This is possible because listening reveals an intimation, a communication through gestures (such as breathing, opening windows, and walking) with the self, the other, and the world about their interrelation. Through listening I acknowledge the question of scale posed by intimacy that, as Lauren Berlant puts it, 'links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective' (Berlant 1998, 283). Due to its embodied re-ally-sation of public and private, listening transforms a space of appearance into a place of proximity. More than 'a place of encounter', this place of proximity can be defined as the realisation of a somewhere in order to go elsewhere.

### Epilogue

When watching scenes from the films of Akerman I witness how the characters re-ally the border between public and private in order to realise where they come from and where they go. I acknowledge their re-discovery of intimacy and their struggle to find balance between comfort and disruption. I am one of the witnesses through which they appear, but as an audience member, whatever desire I may have to be heard remains simply a desire. I remain the non-appeared audience.

In my experience of *Grey*, however, I am the one re-allying and realising where I come from, the 'unforgettable house' of non-breath. Through the danced extrapolation of the movement of breathing, I become aware of my own breathing movements and the paths of air through my body and life. I remember how my first breath gave me life and was responsible for my appearance into the world. The visual emanation of breathing as an action on stage enables me to set myself in motion, to re-ally. Through the breathing of the performers I make myself at home in their dancing. I describe the non-breath as a space of appearance, realised in a change of direction. This allowed the public into my private discovery of breathing as an action, a praxis (Arendt [1958] 2015, 175–179). For Arendt 'action' has a key function in the bringing into being of a space of appearance (Arendt 1958, 199). However, she argues, the action of creating a space of appearance isn't enough; the actions of the ones gathered need to *speak*.

But what about the need to listen? In this article, listening is revealed as the rediscovery of the intimacy that the non-breath speaks about. Listening becomes a process of intuiting and imagining intimacy as a re-ally-sation of the border between public and private, when both co-exist. It transforms the space of appearance into a place of proximity, where it is permitted—even necessary—to hesitate, without this hesitation meaning that one is paralyzed by doubt. By listening to *Grey*, I accept the invitation offered by breathing as an action towards contemplation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Dutch translation of a space of appearance into 'een plaats van ontmoeting' or a place of encounter incorporates movement and a limited temporality. Following the British anthropologist Tim Ingold it is exactly by movement that place delineates from space. The delineation follows the gestures performed by those who will / want to inhabit the space, without being stuck at it. The place of encounter isn't the space where inhabitants live in, instead it is a place where they knot their lifelines together, before heading towards the next place. The place of encounter in contrast to the space of appearance, is not the place inside which people appear, but a place through, around, to and from which they appear. (Ingold 2011, 148) It is the somewhere on their way to elsewhere.

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## Biography

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