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Towards a New, Macro-Sociological Theory of Performance

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Abstract: This essay provides an outline and a history of the theory of performance. This new macro-sociological theory reconfigures the concept of ritual into a more complex model of social action as lying in the continuum between the analytic poles of successful and failed performances. I argue that the more complex and segmented social and cultural structures become, the more the elements of performance become defused, and the harder it is for individual and collective actors to refuse them and achieve successful performances

Over the last two years, an overlapping group of professors and graduate students has been developing and debating a new, macro-sociological theory of performance. During a telephone conversation with Bernhard Giesen in summer 2001, after I had completed the first draft of a paper on performance, "Cultural Pragmatics" (Alexander 2003), my friend and colleague mentioned that "performance represents the next frontier", or something to that effect. I was delighted and more than a little intrigued, since I had just completed the first draft of a lengthy paper on exactly that topic.

Giesen and his German research group had been working on topics related to rituals and performances for many years. So had my students and myself. Our subsequent communication not only helped to establish the worthiness of the topic but clarified the different approaches that we were taking to it. What follows is, then, "one man's" approach to a theory of performance, and a history of that theory.

My own interest in performance as a theoretical topic began with an effort to account for the findings and arguments that Jason Mast generated in his 1999 UCLA Masters Thesis, "National Rituals in Democratic Societies: Monicagate as Failed Ritual". Building upon the stated and unstated implications of my earlier account of how Watergate became a purging ritual in American democratic politics (Alexander 1988), Mast had asked why

a similarly powerful and unifying civic ritual had failed to unfold during the “Monicagate” impeachment crisis focusing on U.S. President Bill Clinton.

In my effort to respond to Mast’s discussion of what he called a “failed ritual”, I reluctantly concluded that it is necessary to discard “ritual” as a foundational concept, even in the kind of late-Durkheimian or “strong program” cultural sociology to which I have for so long been dedicated. Instead of focusing on ritual, sociological theory must develop a complex theory of the elements and dimensions of macrosociological performance.

Depending on how these elements come together in particular empirical instances, one can say that an individual or collective actor’s performance is more or less successful. Insofar as the goal of a social action depends on affecting the perceptions of other actors, it involves to that degree a performative action. Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation. This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere; it is the meaning which they, as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe.

Rather than declaring that an action is or is not a ritual, it seems better to use the language of variation: the more successful a social performance is, the more likely it is to achieve ritual status. Ritual status means, first, that the ontological reality of the performance is taken for granted. Second, it means that the audience observing the performance identifies strongly with the goals and values of the performative actor, and that, at the same time, the members of the audience experience solidarity with one another.

Such success represents the boundary conditions, or the outer limits, of social performance. It is a condition that actors rarely achieve but one that they continually hope for. Because he took his cues from early, simplified forms of social organization in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim succeeded in bringing symbolic action back into the center of sociological theorizing but he failed to appreciate the fact that symbolic action in complex societies only rarely achieves a ritual form.

In contrast to Durkheim’s nostalgia for the ritual-like processes that centered earlier societies, it is necessary to develop a purely analytical conception of social performance. We can conceptualize empirical social performance as moving between two hypothesized conditions, or poles—complete failure and complete success. Social performances move back and forth along this continuum. It is the dynamic movements that comprise the focus for performance theory.

Such a purely analytical model of social performance constitutes yet another effort to crystallize the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity. It emphasizes both cultural logics (texts) and socio-logics (contexts). It brings together idealism and pragmatism, semiotics and action theory, creating a new beast called “cultural pragmatics”. In specifying cultural pragmatics, my model of social performance explores six dimensions, each of which can be conceived of as a cause: (1) Collective representations, which can be subdivided between background symbols and foregrounded scripts; (2) Actors; (3) The means of symbolic production; (4) Mis-en-Scene; (5) Social power; (6) Audiences.

Each of these elements can be investigated without respect to historical time, for each is contained in, or implied by, social performance from the beginning of human societies. Yet this analytically differentiated model can also be discussed in an historical manner. For it seems obvious – and this has often been remarked upon in different vocabularies and in partial ways – that the analytical components of social performance have become empirically differentiated over time. In the earliest and more homogeneous forms of human societies, which Elman R. Service called bands (1962), collective representations were not thought of as having been invented but were imagined as just being there, as having always existed. People from everyday life played out the roles defined in these religious myths, never thinking of themselves as actors. The means to project these performances were not difficult to find, and their staging was more or less the same from one time to the next. Audiences were not separate, but participated in the performances. Critics representing the ideological evaluations of independent powers did not exist.

This cultural and structural fusion of performative elements explains why rituals were so frequently achieved in earlier forms of societies, and why Durkheim could get away with equating beliefs and practices and how he could define early religious society as a church.

All this changed in good time. As social structure become more differentiated, segmented, stratified, and large-scale, and as culture became more abstracted and autonomous from elites and social organization, scripts became written down, theatre emerged, and religious, aesthetic, and ideological specialists began to argue about the authenticity and effectiveness of texts and performances. The means of symbolic production became difficult to gain control over, and the efforts to do so increasingly provoked major conflicts among social powers. The staging of social performances, whether religious, artistic, or social-dramatic became complex and

demanding of specialized skills. Audiences became differentiated into “publics” and fragmented by class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and region. Performances were increasingly “misunderstood” by those to whom they were directed. Power came to be mediated by social movements whose aim was to rivet social attention by producing persuasive social dramatic force. Authenticity emerged as an existential and philosophical challenge, and the notion that social performances were fraudulent symbolic manipulation became the order of the day.

Whether performative success is a desirable moral outcome is a different question entirely. Does failure or success conform to the expectations and demands of normative theory? This depends on the particular normative theory, on the one hand, and the particular performance, on the other. Antidemocratic theories sometimes embrace rituals *tout court*, as a means of maintaining vitalism, organic integration, authenticity, perfection, salvation, or enlightenment. Nietzsche is a good example of such a moral embrace, especially in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which tragically decries the end of Dionysian festivals and rues the day when myth and ritual gave up their hegemonic place to reason and artifice. Democratic normative theory, by contrast, has tended to be suspicious of rituals, as the notion of social contract and the emphasis on rationality and reflexivity suggested. Yet there are times when even democratic theorists have recognized the importance that successful social performance can play. Even Rousseau believed that republican principles need to be sustained by civil religion.

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Critics as Mediators of Authenticity: Eichmann in Jerusalem

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*Abstract: In this paper, I seek to investigate the way critics attribute authenticity and artifice to actors in social performances. Critics occupy a crucial yet ambiguous position within the structure of social performances. They share characteristics with the audience in that they are targets of social performances and with the actors in that they have to stage their own interpretive performances. Hannah Arendt's report on the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and Shoshana Felman's reinterpretation of the same trial in *The Juridical Unconscious* offer typical examples of critics' advocacy of refusion with and defusion from social performances. As a comparative analysis of Arendt's and Felman's interpretive strategies shows, critics often have a similar conception of properties that signify the authenticity of actors, even as they may associate different actors with these properties.*

In his model of social action as cultural performance, Jeffrey C. Alexander (forthcoming) states that in order to succeed, social performances must achieve the cultural extension of the displayed meaning from performance to audience, as well as produce the psychological identification of the audience with the actors. In other words, a successful performance requires that the audience consider the symbolic content of the performance valid and perceive the actors' intentions as authentic. Critics who mediate between performance and audience play a significant role in promoting or hindering the effect of authenticity in the audience. In the following, I will seek to investigate in two critics' works some properties which are shown as proof and widely perceived as signs of actors' authenticity. The two critics, Hannah Arendt and Shoshana Felman, offer opposing interpretations concerning major actors' authenticity in the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. However, as will be seen, they refer to the same kind of characteristics as markers of authenticity and artifice.

In the first section I will briefly consider the position of the critic in the structure of contemporary social performances. The second section introduces the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel as a set of social performances. The third section discusses Hannah Arendt's attribution of authenticity and artifice to some major actors in the trial of Eichmann. The fourth section examines Arendt's and Felman's opposing interpretations of a key episode in the trial in order to investigate further the properties that are widely seen as signs of authenticity and artifice. Conclusions will be briefly drawn in the last section.

1. Critics as Mediators of Social Performances

In most contemporary social performances, the relatively autonomous group of critics play a key role. Critics comment on the validity of the content displayed and on actors' authenticity and thus mediate between performance and audience. On the one hand, they are part of the audience: like other members of the audience, they observe the performance and judge it in terms of its authenticity and the validity of its content. They differ from regular members of the audience, however, in that they hold distinct cultural power. They display their interpretation of the social performance and judgment on the actors to wide groups of audience and thus considerably affect the latter's perception. They constitute yet another factor which the producers of the performance must take into account. Their attribution of authenticity to the performance might convince groups in the audience that are otherwise indifferent, whereas their attribution of artifice might distance segments of audience which could otherwise tend to identify with the actors in question. As such, critics play a crucial role in determining the outcome of social performances.

In fact, the ambiguity of the critics' position within the structure of social performance is multiplied at many levels. Not only are the critics like the audience in that they are observers of social performances that aim at projecting a social meaning and creating their identification with the actors. Critics are also like actors in that they must perform successfully in order to project their own interpretation to the audience. It would be naive to assume that audiences in contemporary societies readily adopt the particular interpretation of performances advocated by the critics. Quite to the contrary, critics must construct effective scripts and enact them skillfully, using the available means of symbolic production. The audience must be convinced that the critics are authentic actors and that the content of their

critique is normatively and factually valid. Moreover, critics do not remain unchallenged themselves. Not only do other critics offer alternative interpretations of the same social performance commented upon by a critic; a critic is also often subject to the “critics of the critic” who may challenge the validity of her interpretation or her authenticity.

Thus, we find that critics occupy an ambiguous position among the elements of social performance. They do not simply mediate between the performance and the audience: They are part of the audience themselves, at the same time as they are actors of “interpretive performances” subject to similar criteria of performative success as those that they apply to their objects of critique.

Few cases disclose this ambiguous yet powerful role of the critics of social performances as distinctly as that of Hannah Arendt and her controversial account of the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel. In this account, originally written for the *New Yorker* magazine and later published as a book under the title *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt [1963] (1994) found the performance of the Israeli attorney general and of some key witnesses calculated and artificial, while attributing authenticity to certain other actors, most notably the judges. Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was a controversial interpretation of the trial, which has influenced many people’s understanding of the trial across decades, while itself being often criticized and answered with counter-interpretations. Addressing Arendt’s account directly, Shoshana Felman’s (2002) *The Juridical Unconscious* offers such a counter-interpretation of the trial.

In the following sections, I will seek to explore some interpretive strategies used by these two critics in their “interpretive performances”, i.e., the symbolic processes through which the critics attribute authenticity or artifice to the actors and thus promote or discourage the refusion of the audience with a set of social performances.

2. Trial as Performance

The trial of Adolf Eichmann took place in 1961 in the House of Justice in Jerusalem. It was made possible through the controversial kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann, the high Nazi officer responsible of the transportation of the European Jews to the concentration camps, from Argentine by the Israeli Secret Service. Even prior to its beginning, the trial generated a major controversy over the breach of Argentine’s national sovereignty and

over the question whether it was legitimate for a national court of Israel to judge and punish Eichmann. The trial itself took four months, from April 11 to August 14, 1961. The guilty verdict and the punishment, death penalty, were announced four months after the last session, on December 11-12, 1961. It was the first trial ever to be televised in its entirety and was a center of attention for both the Israeli and world audience while the proceedings continued. The Eichmann trial was a crucial turning point in the construction of the collective representations of Holocaust that are widely held today, both in and outside of Israel (see Alexander 2002). It had major cultural and political consequences that last up to this day, which might explain the contemporary persistence of the discussions concerning this trial.

Looking at trials as analogous to theatrical dramas is not a novel idea. Richard Harbinger (1971) has written that two dramas take place in each criminal trial. The courtroom drama is a legal combat that takes place between the prosecuting attorney and defense attorney. Framed within the courtroom drama as a play within the play is the crime drama. It concerns the story of the crime in question, constructed in different ways by the defendant, witnesses, and the attorneys, and involves the defendant and sometimes witnesses as actors. In the Eichmann trial, the crime drama involved the whole picture of Holocaust as a Jewish trauma, and as such was not primarily concerned with Eichmann's individual crimes. The judges, who were to come out with the decision concerning Eichmann's guilt and punishment were not the primary audience of the prosecution. The social performance was rather directed to the different publics who watched the trial in the courtroom and through the mass media.

The two critics whose interpretive strategies I will examine below both compared the Eichmann trial to theater. In her influential –and equally controversial– account of the trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt interpreted the trial partly as a “show” crafted by the Israeli government of the time. More recently, Shoshana Felman, in *The Juridicial Unconscious*, discussed the Eichmann trial as a “theater of justice”.

While Hannah Arendt criticized the production of the trial as a space of performance and characterized the Israeli attorney Gideon Hausner's performance as artificial and contrived, Shoshana Felman, writing 39 years after Arendt, sought to rearticulate the emotional and existential truth revealed in the trial. Arendt held that Ben-Gurion pursued in the trial specific political goals for the state of Israel through the construction of a col-

lective representation of Holocaust. For her, this orientation of the trial constituted the distortion of the institution of justice by political power. The design of the trial as a drama, rather than a strictly legal procedure concentrating on Eichmann's case alone, was a deviation from the ideals of justice. Thus, her characterization of the trial as a show has a primarily critical intent.

While Shoshana Felman does not want to undermine Arendt's "dissident legal perspective" (Felman 2002:110), she offers a more positive reading which sees the dramatic features of the trial as reflecting and reenacting the traumatic experience of the Holocaust. According to Felman, the centering of the trial on the survivors' testimony was important in that it allowed the articulation of the victims' narrative and made the private and secret stories of Holocaust public (Felman 2002:113). Felman's conceptualization of the trial as a theater of justice aims at underlining the resistance of traumatic experience to conscious and direct expression. The dramatic moments of the trial, including the famous breakdown of K-Zetnik, were instances that challenged and redrew the boundaries of the legal discourse and institution.

The comparative analysis of the two opposing interpretive performances that follows will reveal the categories and interpretive strategies that critics use in promoting or criticizing actors in social performances. It will be seen that the properties that are shown as signs of authenticity by these two critics vary little, while their association of specific actors with these categories is different. The development of Felman's interpretation of the trial in direct reference to Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* positions Felman also as a "critic of the critic". Arendt thus perfectly exemplifies the multiple dimensions of the critic's position as a key element in the structure of social performance. She was part of the audience in the trial performance, engaged herself in an interpretive performance with her influential account of the trial, and is herself subject to critique by other critics.

3. Authenticity versus Artifice: Refusion and Defusion in Arendt's Account

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt characterizes the trial as an artificial show produced by the Israeli government:

[T]he trial never became a play, but the show Ben-Gurion had had in mind to begin with did take place, or, rather, the "lessons" he thought should

be taught to Jews and Gentiles, to Israelis and Arabs, in short, to the whole world. These lessons to be drawn from an identical show were meant to be different for the different recipients. Ben-Gurion had outlined them before the trial started, in a number of articles designed to explain why Israel had kidnapped the accused (Arendt [1963] 1994:9).

The major actor of the state within this trial performance was the Israeli attorney general Gideon Hausner. Throughout her account, Arendt characterizes Hausner as an epitome of artifice by presenting several properties as irrefutable signs of his lack of authenticity. The first of these is the *dependence* of Hausner on an actor behind the scenes and ultimately to political power. In her account, Arendt presents Hausner as a puppet whose strings are held by the Israeli prime minister Ben-Gurion:

Ben-Gurion, rightly called the “architect of the state”, remains the invisible stage manager of the proceedings. Not once does he attend a session; in the courtroom he speaks with the voice of Gideon Hausner, the Attorney General, who, representing the government, does his best, his very best, to obey his master (Arendt [1963] 1994:5).

According to this interpretation, Hausner is not who he claims he is. He claims that he represents the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust,¹ but he actually represents political power. Political motivations, rather than a historic search for justice, lies behind the contrived discourse used by the Israeli prosecutor in court. Hausner’s words are not the sincere expression of his thoughts and feelings; they are carefully chosen words calculated to achieve a certain effect in the audience towards the political goals of the Israeli government.²

¹ In his opening argument, chief prosecutor Hausner identified himself as the voice of six million Holocaust victims: “When I stand before you here, judges of Israel, in this court, to accuse Adolph Eichmann, I do not stand alone. With me at this moment stand six million prosecutors. But alas, they cannot rise to level the finger of accusation in the direction of the glass dock and cry out *J'accuse* against the man who sits there. For their ashes are piled in the hills of Auschwitz and the fields of Treblinka ... Their graves are scattered throughout the length and breadth of Europe. Their blood cries to Heaven, but their voice cannot be heard. Thus it falls to me to be their mouthpiece and to deliver the awesome indictment in their name (quoted in Felman 2002:114)”.

² As Shoshana Felman has pointed out acutely, for Arendt the courtroom drama took place between the judges and Hausner, rather than between the prosecution and the defense.

A second sign of artifice Arendt reads in Hausner's performance is an excessive *willingness to perform*. Her presentation of this property as a sign of the lack of authenticity is best seen in the contrast Arendt draws between the judges and the attorney general. Arendt characterizes the judges as natural actors, while she identifies Hausner as a "showman":

At no time is there anything theatrical in the conduct of the judges. Their walk is unstudied, their sober and intense attention, visibly stiffening under the impact of grief as they listen to the tales of suffering, is natural; their impatience with the prosecutor's attempt to drag out those hearings forever is spontaneous and refreshing. ... their manner toward the accused always beyond reproach. They are so obviously three good and honest men that one is not surprised that none of them yields to the greatest temptation to playact in this setting—that of pretending that they, all three born and educated in Germany, must wait for the Hebrew translation. Moshe Landau, the presiding judge, hardly ever withholds his answer until the translator has done his work ... Months later, during the cross-examination of the accused, he will even lead his colleagues to use their German mother tongue in the dialogue with Eichmann—a proof, if proof were still needed, of his remarkable independence of current public opinion in Israel (Arendt [1963] 1994:4).

This long excerpt is a clear illustration of the attribution of authenticity to actors that seem to lack a concern for performing. Arendt presents the judges as authentic actors, whose gestures are natural expressions of their feelings, whose acts are spontaneous and lack self-awareness, and who perform their duty without a concern for pleasing the audience. In other words, Arendt holds that the judges are *not performing*, but are being who they are.

To these epitomes of authenticity, Arendt juxtaposes the artifice of the Israeli attorney general. Hausner is constantly *performing*: He tries to create a dramatic effect through his exaggerated rhetoric. His actions are calculated to produce a certain effect on the audience and take place under constant awareness of and a desire to please the audience.

From the very beginning of her account on, Arendt identifies Hausner with political power, while she identifies the judges, especially the presiding judge Landau, with justice. "Gideon Hausner, ... representing the government, does his best, his very best, to obey his master. And if, fortunately, his best often turns out not to be good enough, the reason is that the trial is presided over by someone who serves Justice as faithfully as Mr. Hausner serves the State of Israel (Arendt: [1963] 1994:5)".

Arendt's descriptive categories are typical expressions of refusion with and defusion from actors in performances. Lack of concern for the audience, spontaneity, independence, and naturalness are seen as properties of authentic actors. Theatricality, calculation, and excessive concern for the sympathy of the audience, on the other hand, are perceived as characteristics of actors whose performances are artificial and contrived.³

The lack of the willingness to perform serves even more explicitly as a criterion of actors' authenticity in Arendt and Felman's different interpretations of K-Zetnik's testimony.

4. "The Most Dramatic Moment of the Trial": K-Zetnik's Testimony

Testimony by Holocaust survivors was at the center of the Eichmann trial. Adolf Eichmann talked in 34 sessions, while 62 sessions were devoted to the testimony of 90 survivors of concentration camps and of 10 other witnesses, selected by the prosecution from the hundreds that volunteered. The public telling of the individual stories of suffering was crucial in order to generate the psychological identification of the audience. An interview with Gavriel Bach, an assistant prosecutor in the trial, shows that the prosecution had made a deliberate effort to enable psychological identification of the audience through the testimony of survivors:

We decided to present at least one live witness from every country, to describe, and bring home, and to show people really what happens at the human level. Because, you know, documents and figures, and even heaps of corpses ... there comes a moment when these things don't signify anything anymore (*The Trial of Adolf Eichmann* 1997).

The dramatic climax of the trial, if one may point to one, was the testimony of the Israeli writer K-Zetnik. K-Zetnik was a survivor of Auschwitz and had established himself as a well-known author with his books on life

³ "Action will be viewed as real if it appears ... the product of a self-generating actor who is not pulled like a puppet by the strings of society. An authentic person acts without artifice, without self-consciousness, without reference to some laboriously thought out plan or text, without concern for manipulating the context of her actions, and without worries about that action's effects (Alexander, forthcoming)."

in Auschwitz. When the prosecutor asked him the reason he took the pen name K-Zetnik, K-Zetnik answered the following:

It is not a pen name. I do not regard myself as a writer who writes literature. This is a chronicle from the planet of Auschwitz. I was there for about two years. Time there was different from what is here on earth. Every split second ran on a different cycle of time. And the inhabitants of that planet had no names. They had neither parents nor children ... They did not live, nor did they die, in accordance with the laws of this world. Their names were the numbers 'Kzetnik so and so' ... They left me, they kept leaving me, left ... for close to two years they left me and always left me behind ... I see them, they are watching me, I see them— (quoted in Felman 2002:136).

When the prosecutor intervened and inquired whether he could ask some questions, K-Zetnik continued speaking “in a hollow and tense voice, oblivious to the courtroom setting, as a man plunged in hallucination or in a hypnotic trance (Felman 2002:136)”. Judge Landau interrupted him again: “Mr. Dinoor, please, please listen to Mr. Hausner; wait a minute, now you listen to me!” K-Zetnik stood up from his chair and “collapsed into a faint, slumping to the floor besides the witness stand (Felman 2002:136)”.

Tom Segev wrote about this scene: “It was the most dramatic moment of the trial, one of the most dramatic moments in the country’s history (quoted in Felman 2002:232)”. Following its occurrence, this scene was repeatedly shown on television. K-Zetnik’s fainting and collapse constitute perhaps the most widely remembered images from the Eichmann trial.

Hannah Arendt and Shoshana Felman offer opposing readings of this episode in terms of K-Zetnik’s authenticity. However, the two critics refer to the same signs of authenticity and artifice in their different interpretations. Felman’s post-performance construction of the script assumes that the time and place of the courtroom merged with that of Auschwitz in K-Zetnik’s imagination. K-Zetnik’s testimony was based on the theme of two radically different planets: Auschwitz and the world where the courtroom is located. Once K-Zetnik started to say repeatedly that he sees those leaving to their death, he seemed to enter a state of trance, not responding to the chief prosecutor or the judge. Felman read his trance as his imaginary transfer to Auschwitz where he saw those inmates in front of his eyes leaving for the gas chambers. The setting of the trial, with its formal structure and strict rules, was reminiscent of the rule-boundedness of the concentration camp in particular and of the bureaucratic Nazi organization in gener-

al. The witness was interrupted first by the prosecutor and then by the ordering voice of the judge. His collapse, in this script, results from K-Zetnik's inability to take to be in the planet of Auschwitz once again.⁴

K-Zetnik's sudden collapse and loss of consciousness also enacted for Felman the dead body that had been described many times in the stories of other witnesses. This time, death was not only discursively described, but bodily enacted before the audience who watched K-Zetnik's collapse in the courtroom or in front of their television:

... the dramatic, Benjamin says, is a beyond of words. It is a physical gesture by which language points to a meaning it cannot articulate. Such is K-Zetnik's fall outside the witness stand. It makes a corpse out of the living witness who has sworn to remain anonymous and undifferentiated from the dead ... The witness's body has become within the trial what Pierre Nora would call "*a site of memory*". ... The site materializes in the courtroom memory of death both as a physical reality and as a limit of consciousness in history (Felman 2002:162-3).

This script constructed by Felman describes her refusion with the performance and promotes the refusion of her readers with it. Felman interprets K-Zetnik's testimony and collapse as the genuine expression of his experience as a survivor and sees in it a condensation of existential and historical meaning. Arendt's "counternarrative", however, expresses and promotes defusion from the performance. Her reading of K-Zetnik's testimony and collapse constitutes perhaps the most cynical moment in her whole account:

How much wiser it would have been to resist these pressures altogether ... and to seek out those who had not volunteered! As though to prove the point, the prosecution called upon a writer, well known on both sides of the Atlantic under the name of K-Zetnik – a slang word for a concentration camp-inmate – as the author of several books of Auschwitz that dealt with brothels, homosexuals, and other "human interest stories". He started off, as in many of his public appearances, with an explanation of his adopted name. ... He continued with a little excursion into astrology: the star "influencing our fate in the same

⁴ The transfer to Auschwitz was not only the theme of Felman's post-performance construction of the script, but also that of the Israeli poet and journalist Haim Gouri's, who covered the trial for the Israeli daily newspaper *Lamerhav*: "What happened here was the inevitable. [K-Zetnik's] desperate attempt to transgress the legal channel and to return to the planet of the ashes in order to bring it to us was too terrifying an experience for him. He broke down (quoted in Felman 2002:137)".

way as the star of ashes at Auschwitz is there facing our planet, radiating toward our planet". And when he had arrived at "the unnatural power above Nature" which had sustained him thus far, and now, paused for the first time to catch his breath, even Mr. Hausner felt that something had to be done about this "testimony", and, very timidly, very politely, interrupted ... Whereupon the presiding judge saw his chance as well: "Mr. Dinoor, *please, please*, listen to Mr. Hausner and to me". In response, the disappointed witness, probably deeply wounded, fainted and answered no more questions (Arendt [1963] 1994:224).

Arendt's last sentence clearly exhibits a disbelief in the authenticity of K-Zetnik's performance, including his fainting. Arendt presents K-Zetnik as a person after public attention--he writes "human interest stories" and is used to perform in public appearances. Thus, once more she refers to the willingness to perform as a sign of artifice.

Arendt further holds that K-Zetnik does not have the capacity "for distinguishing between things that had happened to the storyteller more than sixteen, and sometimes twenty, years ago, and what he had read and heard and imagined in the meantime (Arendt [1963] 1994:224)". Thus, the meaning he displays, in Arendt's view, is not the genuine expression of his experience at Auschwitz. By refusing to see his performance as a genuine expression of his experience in Auschwitz and characterizing him as "too willing to perform", Arendt presents K-Zetnik as an inauthentic actor.

In the last chapter of *The Juridicial Unconscious*, Shoshana Felman seeks to counter Arendt's promotion of defusion from the performance. Her arguments against Arendt only reconfirm the findings of the last section on the attribution of authenticity and artifice. The first point on which Felman challenges Arendt's interpretation concerns the voluntariness of K-Zetnik's testimony. For Arendt, the fact that K-Zetnik himself volunteered to appear in the court is a sign that he has an excessive desire to perform before an audience.

Rather than challenging Arendt's logic, Felman offers evidence to the contrary:

Contrary to what Arendt presumes, Dinoor did not volunteer to share his "tale of horror" on the witness stand but, on the contrary, was an involuntary and reluctant witness. As a writer, he had always shunned of public appearances. In consequence, he had at first refused to testify. He had to be pressured by the chief prosecutor to consent (reluctantly) to appear before the court (Felman 2002:143).

Felman emphasizes the “involuntary and reluctant” nature of K-Zetnik’s testimony in order to demonstrate his lack of willingness to perform and lack of concern for the audience. Thus, according to Arendt and Felman’s common understanding, those who are too willing to perform are not authentic.

Against Arendt’s refusal to attribute authenticity to K-Zetnik’s performance, Felman presents a second irrefutable sign of authenticity in the form of medical proof. Whereas Arendt quickly dismisses K-Zetnik’s collapse as a theatrical act (“[i]n response, the disappointed witness, probably deeply wounded, fainted and answered no more questions”), Felman follows the aftermath of the collapse: “An ambulance was called and rushed the witness to the hospital, where he spent two weeks between life and death in a paralytic stroke (Felman 2002:137)”.

The paralytic stroke serves as proof that K-Zetnik’s collapse was the result of his deeply felt emotions. As a breakdown accompanied by loss of consciousness and followed by paralytic stroke is viewed as beyond one’s conscious control of his expressive tools, it is seen as the undeniably true expression of K-Zetnik’s inner state. The collapse, the genuineness of which is proved medically, is a corporeal sign of the correspondence of K-Zetnik’s inner feelings and the outer signs that he generates. Thus, K-Zetnik’s breakdown comes to prove him as an authentic actor.

5. Conclusion

In his exposition of the model of cultural performance, Jeffrey Alexander suggests that the success of a social performance depends on the audience’s belief in the validity of the displayed symbolic content and in the authenticity of the actors’ intentions. As Arendt and Felman’s opposing interpretations of the Eichmann trial demonstrate, the debate on the authenticity of actors is often of as great import as the debate on the descriptive and normative validity of the content of the communication. Critics often refer to certain properties in the performance of the actors as proof of their authenticity or artifice. The interpretive act of the critics consists not in inventing these signs of authenticity and artifice—they are in fact culturally given—but in detecting these signs in the performance of actors and judging their authenticity accordingly.

I sought to show above that the two critics who interpreted the trial in opposing ways nevertheless referred to the same properties as irrefutable signs of authenticity. Both critics assume that authenticity requires a corre-

spondence between inside and outside, i.e., between the feelings, thoughts, intentions and experiences of the actor on the one hand, and his words and expressions on the other. For Felman and Arendt alike, an actor that is dependent on another power is not authentic. An authentic actor is driven by his own sentiments and not by that of another power. Furthermore, a strong willingness to perform, the calculation of the performance's effect, and the desire to capture the audience are seen as signs of artifice. Authentic actors are not concerned with performing; they are natural, spontaneous, and committed to their cause.

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