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## Poetic Witness in a Networked Age

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When online videos mobilize protestors to occupy public spaces, and those protestors incorporate hashtags in their chants and marked placards, deliberative democratic theory must no longer dismiss technology and peoples historically excluded from the arena of politics. Specifically, political models must account for the role of repetition in paving the way for unheard and unseen messages and people to appear in the political arena. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of the Performative and Hannah Arendt's Space of Appearance, this paper assesses that critical and generative role of iteration. Repeating unheeded acts performs the capacity for those acts to be entered into discourse. The World Wide Web evidently augments such performativity with features such as accessibility, potential for 'viral' proliferation, and an endurance unlike non-networked acts. This paper eventually grapples with the hazards and risks of networked repetition (e.g. desensitization, trivialization, etc.) in order to propose a poetics of repetition to mitigate those dangers. Such poetics ultimately distinguishes the witness from the spectator.

## **Keywords**

Democracy, Internet, Exclusion, Repetition, Race

## **Disciplines**

African American Studies | Comparative Philosophy | Ethics and Political Philosophy

## **Comments**

Written as an honors thesis for the author's Philosophy major.

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Honors Thesis

Advisor: Professor Mullen

## Poetic Witness in a Networked Age

### **Abstract**

When online videos mobilize protestors to occupy public spaces, and those protestors incorporate hashtags in their chants and marked placards, deliberative democratic theory must no longer dismiss technology and peoples historically excluded from the arena of politics. Specifically, political models must account for the role of repetition in paving the way for unheard and unseen messages and people to appear in the political arena. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of the Performative and Hannah Arendt's Space of Appearance, this paper assesses that critical and generative role of iteration. Repeating unheeded acts performs the capacity for those acts to be entered into discourse. The World Wide Web evidently augments such performativity with features such as accessibility, potential for 'viral' proliferation, and an endurance unlike non-networked acts. This paper eventually grapples with the hazards and risks of networked repetition (e.g. desensitization, trivialization, etc.) in order to propose a poetics of repetition to mitigate those dangers. Such poetics ultimately distinguishes the witness from the spectator.

### **Paving the Way for Appearance**

Deliberative democratic theories, although operating through the processes of pluralism, recognition, and response, are often built on presupposing fields of recognition that determine what can be registered in the political arenas and what cannot. The problem of unheard and unseen people and acts seem inextricable to political models despite efforts to idealize a truly inclusive, communicative, and politically productive framework. Both optimistic democratic efforts and models that fall short are built on what Arendt calls the Space of Appearance, the foundational space of politics wherein political agents “[act] and [speak] together” (Arendt 198). In order to engage in such discourse, however, political subjects must appear to one another. Repetition, I argue, serves as an answer to this restrictive and marginalizing problematic – in that when one repeats the unheeded, they pave the way for those neglected people and acts to appear in the Arendtian space. Where the scholarship on publicity and politics converge, repetition offers a salve to the perennial issue of political theory: exclusion.

Although scholarship on publicizing has its modern foundations in Enlightenment thought, in 1962, Jürgen Habermas reinvigorated the debate with his sociological *The Structural Transformation on the Public Sphere*. The critical sociologist’s object of immanent critique was the normative concept of the “bourgeois public sphere” in which “private people come together as a public” in order to engage public authorities “in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically private but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor” (*Public Sphere* 27). The public sphere sets aside the social and economic status of its participants; Habermas writes that “laws of the market were suspended as were laws of the state” (36). Regrettably, the public sphere undergoes what Habermas calls “refeudalization” as the emerging institutions of the sphere (e.g. the press, etc.) become “complexes of social power” –

specifically governed by the propertied bourgeoisie (188). While exalting the rational and critical aspects of the public sphere, Habermas condemns its privatization. Habermas assesses how capital-driven mass media undermines critical publicity.

Contemporary critics of Habermas's ideal public sphere recognize its exclusive aspect. At the outset, Habermas disregards what Craig Calhoun and other thinkers call the "plebeian public sphere" (Calhoun 39). In other words, Habermas's theory presupposes the emancipatory supremacy of the bourgeois public sphere over its alternatives. Unlike the bourgeoisie, plebeians were less likely to be literate or have as much leisure. Those facts do not exclude them from forming discursive groups. Habermas himself reflects on these debates, and while maintaining that his concept is in fact a normative ideal, he accepts critique. In "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," written 30 years after *Structural Transformation*, Habermas concedes that "[i]t is wrong to speak of one single public" while suggesting that the bourgeois public sphere may nevertheless facilitate the rational arrival of egalitarian class theory (424-5). Moreover, he notes that Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the Carnival convinced him of the counter-effects of the exclusion from the bourgeois public sphere, the "inner dynamics of plebeian culture." The Carnival's periodic, creative "counter-project" accomplishes radical classlessness on the basis of material exclusion (427). Carnivals too underscore a different aspect of expression in which performance trumps rationality. Habermas confirms the existence of alternative publics separate and in reaction to the bourgeois sphere.

Markedly, publics based on embodied exclusion persist against the horizon of the public sphere. In his response to *Structural Transformation*, Michael Warner regards the normative bourgeois public sphere as a "utopia of self-abstraction," from which audience members "[adopt] a very special rhetoric about their own personhood." The public sphere, according to Warner,

operates upon a “principle of negativity” which claims that “the validity of what you say in public bears a negative relation to your person.” This principle brackets social and economic status; rationality replaces celebrity, money, and rank as bases on which to judge a public’s addressors. Outside of status, such abstraction enables members to “transcend the given realities of their bodies” (Warner 164). But there is a cost, for when other genders, races, and sexualities self-abstract, they forego and deny their identities; they depersonalize themselves and bracket the basis of their material subjugation. However, much like plebeian publics, embodied identities may also form publics separate from the public sphere. Gendered, racialized, and class-based publics – wrought from exclusion – occur.

Whereas Habermas formulates an idealized public sphere, Warner stresses already realized publics. At the outset, publics are different from communities and groups. The “primary orientation” of public addresses is always an audience of strangers (56); publics are “constituted through [the] mere attention” of strangers (87). One address (whether it be a speech, song, or text) does not create a public. Warner stresses how publics are sustained on a “reflexive” and historicized “circulation of discourse” (90, 96). Speakers, musicians, writers, and other addressors employ different genres and media which are available at the time. Publics operate with the technologies and methodologies of their day. Moreover, for example, musicians may respond to the ideas and justifications explored in a novel. Though, in its distribution, the reactionary song does not only address the novelist to which it responds but the impersonal insiders attending that discussion. For Warner, these kinds of publics are discursive arenas akin to the public sphere. Still, these “spaces of reasons” do not require total self-abstraction.

Alerting us to the spaces formed in pure antagonism to a “mass public” or public sphere constitutes Warner’s contribution to the scholarship of publicness. He views publics as “poetic

world making.” The “poetic and textual qualities” of addresses often trump their generalized, rational content (114-5). That these publics are world making refers to their operative and ongoing act of *poiesis* (creation). What we deem as realized public spheres are in fact publics that are dominant, generative worlds. Warner conceives of “counterpublics,” a nuanced rendition of Nancy Fraser’s idea of “subaltern counterpublics” (118). Whereas Fraser’s notion implies a public of counter-discourses that challenge the dominant public’s idea of personhood, Warner’s notion “extends...to speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public or to the hierarchy among media” (119). Challenging the dominance of prose over poetry might be an element of a burgeoning counterpublic. Many gendered, racialized, and class-based publics are counterpublics in that they are excluded from and set against dominant discursive arenas. Warner’s emphasis on poetic world-making speaks to more comprehensive counter-projects.

Counter to the Habermasian model of discourse, Iris Marion Young advances a more inclusive ideal with communicative democracy. Her all-compassing notion “indicate[s] an equal privileging of any form of communicative interaction where people aim to reach understanding” (Young 125). What Warner terms counterpublicity would fall under Young’s model as counterpublics attend to marginalized speech acts. Young, in fact, privileges greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling as essential to discourse beside rational argumentation (129). Thereby, the transgressive poetics of counterpublics are comprehended in this model. Moreover, participants in a communicative democracy need not set aside their embodied realities. Young’s concept contends against “the norms of deliberation [that] privilege speech that is dispassionate and disembodied...[and] presuppose an opposition between mind and body, reason and emotion” (124). Therein, Young speaks to the pertinence of bodily language but also one’s emotive language in communication. Young is mindful of how speech and bodily language are gendered

(123). Logically, her model extends its acknowledgement to regionalisms and vernaculars that may be dismissed as inappropriate registers for discursive speech. The only expectation for speech acts in Young's model is the aim of understanding.

Young's model seeks to resolve the problem of what should be called unheeded acts. Deliberative democratic models, as designs of discursive arenas, may misguidedly view the privileging of reason as the circumvention of power struggles. However, as Young clearly notes, "deliberation is competition" (123). Mediatized address always employs some mode of rhetorical or poetic flourish. Concision is such an example. Logical arguments can succumb into a question of which argument is most convincing. Moreover, logical argumentation can become a battle of which argument is impervious to disassembling. The competitive nature behind constructing the most non-fallacious, succinct attestation is a power struggle. Young's model instead focuses on understanding instead of logical supremacy. The root "heed," meaning "careful attention," is pertinent in assessing this issue ("heed, v."). As Warner has noted, speech acts may be invisible or "unheard" in certain publics. There may be instances of marginalized speech. However, Young's model necessitates a careful interaction with all modes of communication. Whether or not these speech acts are rendered accessible only grounds the pertinent logic of communicative democracy: that all communicative interaction is carefully acknowledged. Accessibility is necessary but insufficient. Careful attention, in a comprehensive sense, is key to Young's theory.

In actualized publics, the already attentive may lead the way towards communicative democracy through repetition. Young's model ends in an understanding that preserves difference. Participants in communicative democracies seek understanding not total agreement. Young notes that such preserved difference maintains the requirement of plurality that Hannah Arendt deems essential to publicity (Young 127). In actualized cases of marginalized difference

and unheeded acts, there exists challenges to publicity – particularly, the inability to be recognized and thereby enter into the discursive arena. Young’s model, after all, is ideal; actual publics are pluralized yet never perfectly inclusive. Recognition certainly must first be achieved before Young’s model can be reached. If one participant in a discursive arena notes the marginalization of a particular speech act or another participant, repetition may be a critical mode of address. In such a case, the object of criticism would be a particular public’s field of recognition, and through repetition as a genre of address, a participant engages in counterpublicity. If, for instance, publicity operates on a reflexive model of “read, reflect, and respond,” such repetition would be a response with the aim of broader readability. In other words, certain forms of repetition seek to occasion recognition.

Such critical repetition, like other modes of counterpublicity, transgress and thereby create new ways of seeing and being. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt describes the space of appearance, “in its widest sense,” as *polis*, or “the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly” (Arendt 198-9). Based on its plurality and reflexivity, a public is an arena within a space of appearance. Spaces of appearance may surely eschew certain speech acts and bodies. Arendt decries the injustice of such marginalization by then noting that “to be deprived [of the space of appearance] means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance” (199). Absence is the condition of not being real, legible, logical, nor rational in a particular discourse. Repetition invokes and thereby calls the absent into reality. This, however, does not diminish the original speech act; the absent, unheeded speech act is an explicit attempt at making one’s appearance. Unheeded acts and their echoes are critical to restrictive spaces of appearance yet generative to some degree.

Assembly, as a particularly embodied form of repetition, displays the generative nature of iteration. Marches, rallies, picket lines, and other such political gatherings are deeply embodied, collective demonstrations. Judith Butler, in her *Notes towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, argues that “the assembly is already speaking before it utters any words” (156). The gathering of bodies is a bodily repetition. Those assembling conform their bodies to the acts of gathering and possibly marching. Of course, chanting is an embodied linguistic act. Certain chants are literally a collective shout of the same speech act, such as “Black Lives Matter.” There are aspects of written repetition in the form of placards that may replicate a common calling card, such as “Free Tibet!” When dominant publics eschew particular politics or bodies to the point of total disregard, demonstrations are a form of counterpublicity.

However, the mere gathering itself is also a performative act. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler describes a performative as a “discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (*Bodies that Matter* 13). In this, Butler speaks to a long tradition of performative but especially Jacques Derrida’s concept of Citationality. In *Limited Inc*, Derrida argues that such naming is always a repetition:

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model if it were not then identifiable in some way as a “citation”? ... in such a typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance (Derrida 18).

The entire act of assembly is coded and repeatable. The intention of assembly does not hold supremacy over the act. Antiracists and racists can assemble. Intention, however, is pertinent in the iteration; intention precisely distinguishes an antiracist assembly from a racist one. When iterating unheeded acts, one may intend to indicate the epistemic injustice that is the deprivation of appearance. Butler casts her focus on such intention and crafts an imperative: politicize

citation (particularly, the citation of gender and sexuality). She acknowledges that “the performative is one domain in which power acts *as discourse*” (*Bodies that Matter* 225).

Thereby, the discursive power struggle is dominated in the iteration: the repeater merely states that “*this exists; this is real!*”

2011’s Occupy Wall Street Movement, through citation, prefigured communicative democracy. Particularly, the use of the human mic, which has its roots in 1980s anti-nuclear rallies, aims at directly engaging the problem of unheeded acts. The human mic is a technique in which listeners “hear the speaker, repeat the message for other listeners, and signal uptake to the speaker...[so that] the speaker can continually monitor which participants have heard the linguistic form of the utterance” (Steinberg 714). The human mic does not end in mutual identification or agreement but rather what Young views as understanding. Communicative democracy’s *telos* is the “successful expression of experience and perspective, so that other social positions learn” (Young 128). Such an understanding is not exhaustive but rather considerate towards the limits of each expression to fully express a participant’s argument, emotions, etc. R. Lila Steinberg does note that repetition may be subject to “change [in] grammatical or prosodic elements” in order to match the intention of the repeaters (e.g. “disagreement, emphasis, doubt,” etc.) (Steinberg 717). Such tonal shifts or aberrations in enunciation highlight the political nature of iteration and intention but also potentially the limits of speech acts.

The significance is that the speech act is heeded to some degree – indicating a shift from spaces of appearance in which certain acts are denied recognition. The human mic, in practice, presents the successes and failures of iteration. Occupy exemplifies how repetition can result in new spaces of appearance. Arendt considers spaces of appearance as temporal and conclusive in

the “disappearance or arrest of the activities” that brings the space into “being” (Arendt 199). Thereby, the performative, critical iterations aforementioned bring new *poleis* into being. However, when a human mic, for instance, is defunct, so is the space of appearance that it creates. Iterations of unheeded acts generate spaces in which such speech may appear and be real. As Butler and Young suggests, other bodily acts, such as body language, are often relegated from deliberative models. Moreover, Warner indicates that genres of expression (such as poetry and rhetoric) as well as whole material bodies ought to be included into discursive arenas in order to truly achieve any claim of comprehensiveness. When marginalized communities assemble, they create counterpublics; these arenas render participants real. Their bodily repetition, their collective gathering, generates their conditions for appearance, their conditions for reality.

Black American history includes many counterpublics who on behalf of their assemblage generate spaces of appearance in which they and their linguistic and otherwise bodily acts are recognizable, legible, and real. In his recent *Democracy in Black*, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. elucidates and exalts Black associational life – wrought out of exclusion – as the complex wherein Black Americans could live, love, and deliberate. Glaude specifically highlights the Black Church which “offered networks of interconnection across communities and states that enabled massive mobilization of people and resources to challenge racial segregation throughout the south” (Glaude 126). Assemblage, as bodily repetition, is a form of iteration that generates spaces of appearance in which counterpublics may form to engage in critical politics. The Black Church was specifically essential in the history of the American Civil Rights Movement as the primary institution where Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee mobilized peaceful protestors. Funk musician James Brown’s 1968

classic “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” itself encourages iteration with the goal of bringing the song’s eponymous speech act into appearance, into recognition, and thereby into reality.

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### **Bringing forth the Digital *polis***

Deliberative democracy theory must attend to how the internet has changed publicity and thereby democratic discourse. Even Michael Warner's foundational theories of publicity cannot speak to the affordances of networked communication. Editorship and publicity becomes more accessible online especially with the advent of social networking services. Users of these services can explicitly initiate, direct, and proliferate discussion and chains of discourse. Moreover, these communicative means no longer vanish from accessibility once the act concludes. Online, speech and embodied acts linger and remain. Thereby, not only should political theories but also Arendt and Butler's theories should be reassessed. The internet augments the concept of the *polis* and political iteration.

Formerly, civilian publication might have required the outlet of the press or a publication company which complicated political discourse. For instance, publicizing instances of racialized brutality has been essential to Black American counterpublicity. Ironically, publicizing the act of brutality has also been part and parcel of America's racist past. Such is the complicated nature of citationality. The main characteristic distinguishing both reproductive efforts is intention. Despite the historic hypervisibility of Black Americans, the Black subject has been abject from the discursive publics that systematize its subjugation (e.g. chattel servitude, racial discrimination in voting, etc). The slave was one of Arendt's hypothetical subjects deprived of the space of appearance (Arendt 199). At variance with Karl Marx, who once asserted the counterfactual "if a commodity could speak..." Fred Moten's seminal text on Black aesthetics, *In the Break*, assesses the musicality and vocality of the historically commodified (Moten 9). Moten seeks to uncover the phonography of photographs, such as the "nonneutralizable and irreducible sounds" of Emmett Till's funeral photograph (196); Till being a young Black

teenager subject to a lynching. Markedly, Till's mother, Mamie Bradley, asked for the media to publicize her son's brutalized body.

Moten argues for us to truly heed Mamie Till's funeral photographs with an open intentionality. He argues for a new form of spectatorship:

[We should] not only look at [Till's photograph] but look at it in the context of an aesthetics, look at it as if it were to be looked at, as if it were to be thought, therefore, in terms of a kind of beauty, a kind of detachment, independence, autonomy, that holds open the question of what looking might mean in general, what the aesthetics of the photograph might mean for politics and what those aesthetics might have meant for Mamie Bradley in the context of her demand that her son's face be seen, be shown that his death and her mourning be performed (Moten 198).

Moten centers the intention of Mamie Bradley's circulation. Precisely, he argues for careful attention to the potential agencies and resistances embedded in the address and its addressor, Till's photograph and his mother. Such spectatorship has the aim of recognizing or understanding the image and its source's intention (without necessarily reaching agreement). Such a spectator is the default archetype of Young's communicative democracy. Notably, Mamie Bradley's publicizing is not an argument but rather a form of storytelling: a curation of an image. Narratives "evoke sympathy while maintaining distance because the narrative also carries an inexhaustible latent shadow, the transcendence of the Other, that there is always more to be told" (Young 131). One who does not have exact experiences with Mamie Bradley can sympathize with her pain but can never claim absolute knowledge of such pain.

On July 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, the spirit of Mamie Bradley haunted Diamond Reynolds's decision to livestream the extrajudicial killing of her boyfriend, Philando Castile. More than time differentiates Mamie Bradley and Reynolds's performances of their grief, and yet their similitude is critical. Reynolds does employ an audiovisual image instead of a photograph. Moreover, Reynolds uses Facebook Live, a digital application which allows the user to livestream

audiovisual broadcasts and immediately circulate them on the social networking platform, Facebook. Maintaining the intentionality and agency of a documentarian in her live account, Reynolds notes the time, location, and context of the incident (Chappell & Domonoske).

Reynolds's documentation speaks to how digitality enters the conversation of communicative democracy, citation, and counterpublicity. The Web, in providing new means of communication, provides new means of counterpublicity. Nevertheless, many publicity theorists bemoan online discursive communities for a variety of reasons. Habermas, for instance, is skeptical of the optimism of scholars like Joshua Meyrowitz who view new media as breaking down socialized barriers and enabling deliberative egalitarianism. Habermas counters by arguing that such "leveling of differences [accompanies] impotence in the face of an impenetrable systemic complexity" ("Further Reflections" 456). Egalitarianism as a consequence of stringent systemic complexity is both hardly egalitarian and fraught with potential dangers. Warner himself decries the lack of "punctuality" involved in social media. Circulation is "highly continuous" ("24/7 instant access") as opposed to occurring periodically; public discourse on the other hand is a "temporal framework." The problem Warner presents is critical: how can online publics "connect localized acts of reading to the modes of agency in the social imaginary of modernity" (*Publics and Counterpublics* 97-8). Can modern individuals imagine agency when constantly buffeted by media? Impenetrable systems and incessant circulation are two possible complications with digital publics.

Warner has accurately anticipated our lived reality now. Warner's ideas predate the rise of what Nancy DiNucci called "Web 2.0" in a 1999 *Print* magazine article (DiNucci 32). The non-periodic, nonstop continuity of mediatized publishing and reading is part and parcel of our reality. Post-mid-2000s, social media networks and the proliferation of net-accessing

technologies (e.g. personal computers, smart phones, etc.) mediate not only our means of publicity but our entire lives. Since online commentating on politics and/or culture, online shopping, and online communication with family members are now norms, the web is for many the dominant means of accessing the spheres of politics, economy, and family. If, as theorists Nancy Baym and danah boyd argue, “social mediation blurs boundaries and pushes mutual redefinition between public and private,” the same applies for the categories of “online” and “offline” (Baym & boyd 322). Digitized publicity is ubiquitous. Warner paves the way for other speculations about its implications. Rather than being devastating critiques, Habermas and Warner’s analyses provide sobering and helpful way to view new media.

These problems are quite related, yet Reynolds’s documentation in particular begs Warner’s question. Warner’s problematic on how localized acts of spectatorship relate to agency recurs. Those who tuned into Reynolds’s feed saw racialized brutality in a transmitted immediacy. In “real time,” Reynolds publicized, and her followers watched. Facebook Live, Periscope, and other accessible livestreaming applications complicate the temporal framework which Warner deems is inherent to publicity. In such immediacy, there is little to no time to reflect and develop rational or poetic critique. Simultaneously, Reynolds documents and mourns; correspondingly, the viewer examines the situation’s context with the Castile’s dying body as the video’s centerpiece. If Reynolds takes up the responsibility of performing and circulating counterpublic discourse, what is the role of the onlooker?

Such responsibilities will likely be informed by the power dynamics associated with digital media. Socially-mediated publicness,” as Baym and boyd call it, creates a new relationship between dominant publics and counterpublics (320). Nathan Rambukkana considers what kind of “digital privileges” emerge in this new reality (Rambukkana 32). Rambukkana

implicitly asks what does the matrix of domination look like in a world where digital matrices mediate our lived reality? What does digital racism, sexism, and classism look like? Both existing forms of domination and resistance may find new expressions. How may one use the web to upend mediatized repression, exploitation, and lack of access? Digital affordances provide novel forms of access and (in)visibility, but are there cyberspaces of appearance? Do some experience the deprivation of such spaces? Quite obviously, one who does not have access to the internet may be deprived. However, what about the unheeded acts of the internet; the explicit performances that are marginalized and unheard? If citation, in a non-digital context, can serve as creating new, inclusive spaces of appearance, then citation in a digital context may relate fundamentally. Rambukkana, taking the cue of communication theorist J.D. Peters, argues that “the political role of communication media...[must be] to ‘unfix’ staid communication patterns, to refigure the public conversation about important issues and topics, [...] [and] to build better communication across and between cultural and subcultural spaces” (31-2). Post Web 2.0 not only adds nuance to (counter)publicity but also suggests new spaces upon which such publicity manifests.

Sociologist Manuel Castells explicates these new forms of digitized power and counterpower through his theory of Communication Power. Castells defines internet-based communication as “mass self-communication” due to its current grounding and pervasion of older forms of communication such as the press, television, and radio (*Communication Power* 65). Moreover, Castells stresses “self” in the notion because he deems “autonomy” as the production, circulation, and retrieval of messages over a network (*Networks of Outrage* 6-7). An individual’s network autonomy thereby is their capacities of engaging in publicity as a producer, curator, and consumer. As one platform of mass self-communication, social media operates

through a power complex that Castells simply calls “Communication Power.” Communication power is a quadripartite concept comprised of network-making power, networking power, network power, and networked power (*Communication Power* 42).

Twitter, as a social network platform, is a solid frame to illustrate Castells’ theory. The *arche* of each form of power is *network-making power*, or the “capacity to set up and program a network” on the basis of one’s “financial, institutional, legal, and technological means” (420). *Networking power*, Castells theorizes, as a “gatekeeper” power decides who is included in or excluded from a network (43). Twitter only suspends accounts that are spam, malware, “abusive,” or unlawful according to copyright and trademark law (*The Twitter Rules*). Twitter allows members to report other members on the basis of these rules. These reports make their way to a judicial group hired by the network to judge these complaints. Otherwise, theoretically anyone can enter the social network. The more people use Twitter the more *network power* Twitter possesses. Network power, in this case, indicates how much Twitter can impose its terms of conditions, or what Castells calls “protocols of communication,” on its participants (*Communication Power* 43-4). These explicitly top-down, vertical forms of power are also the power that constructs the platform on which digital publicity can emerge.

*Networked power*, on the other hand, implies a relationship between “nodes” over other “nodes,” rather than programmers over nodes. This is a form of power within the network – it does not necessarily imply an “outside” of the network. However, networked power, inside Twitter for example, may have implications for one’s social capital outside Twitter. Nonetheless, Castells identifies the networked power of communication networks as “agenda-setting, managerial, and editorial decision-making power in the organizations that own and operate multimedia communication networks” (419). Technically, on Twitter, no matter if one is a

journalist, actor, musician, CEO, or politician, the number of one's "followers" in a sense signifies their networked power. Twitter users exercising their networked power can take the form of opening up a chain of discourse about a particular event. Thereby, networked power resurfaces in digitized publics and counterpublics.

Social media networks feature a decentered power exemplified in Twitter's hashtag (#) function. Hashtags, first suggested in 2007 by Chris Messina, are powerful tools to anchor conversations, ideas, and groups (Messina). They operate to the extent that someone with few Twitter followers may still manage to direct a networked conversation. However, those with many Twitter followers may disseminate hashtagged messages, phrases, and images to a larger public. By 2013, Twitter successfully exported the hashtag to other popular social networks, such as Facebook, "Flickr, Tumblr, Google+, and...Instagram" (Warren). In other words, Messina's search-based hybrid inserted itself into the fabric of most social media networks. The hashtag becomes a constituent of Web 2.0's largest networks. Markedly, the hashtag is an explicit citation; its purpose is to be quoted. Rambukkana views hashtags as "hybrids in the taxonomy of types of information" in that they are both "text and metatext; information and tag; [and] pragmatic and metapragmatic speech." Their "deictic" nature affirms their citationality; their "indexical" aspect distinguishes them from non-digital citations. Although the "[hashtag] emerges temporally," Rambukkana argues that "it's a node of continued context cross media, conversations, and locales" (Rambukkana 30). Hashtags sustain chains of discourse but also are sustained indefinitely online.

Although hashtags are digital acts that explicitly announce, occasion, and indicate themselves, in the case of indefinite endurance, they are also *pars pro toto* for digital publicity. Deletion of digitally publicized text and image is never quite deletion. Posting or uploading

anything onto the internet fixes the item into the ever-lingering metadata composite that constitutes the World Wide Web. As new media theorist Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues:

Memory allegedly makes digital media an ever-increasing archive in which no piece of data is lost. This always-thereness of new media is also what links it to the future as future simple, as what will be, as predictable progress. By saving the past, it was supposed to make the future easier. More damningly, it was to put into place the future simple through the threat of constant exposure (Chun 154).

Metadata is the enduring trace of deleted digital media. Supposed deletion does not exhaustively limit recoverability. The archival aspect of digital publicity immediately transforms the contemporary into history. Chun elsewhere clarifies this argument by indicating how “older post[s] can always be ‘discovered’ as new; new post[s] [are] already old” (169). What, then, is obsolescence online? The hashtag, the shared video, and the podcast are all subject to digital “resuscitability,” what Chun calls “the undead of information” (171). Moreover, upon exposure and circulation, digitality enhances citationality. Human memory does not limit digital citation; people can forward the original messages, images, and acts and thereby avoid a Chinese Whispers dilemma (what Americans call the “telephone game”). Chun theorizes the internet’s repetitive circularity as a new temporality: an “ephemerality [that] is made to endure” (171). All forms of digital publicity are subject to enduring ephemerality.

Hence, the concept of the space of appearance requires a necessary update. Temporality grounds the space of the appearance. Arendt’s space of appearance concludes with the “disappearance or arrest of the activities” that bring the space into “being” (Arendt 199). Enduring ephemerality implies that both disappearance and arrest are now impeded. A blog post is not quite subject to the entropy that degrades a speech act or a written work into oblivion. If temporality has changed to some degree online, what may be said about spatiality? Before re-invoking the question of cyberspatiality, perhaps the appellation itself betrays a particular presupposition. Namely, the concept of cyberspace grounds itself on what new media theorist

Nathan Jurgenson calls “digital dualism.” Jurgenson complicates such dualism through the frame of subjectivity – or the possibility of a second self, a digital self. Jurgenson proposes another subjectivity, an “augmented” one, wherein “we are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities...but instead live in one reality...[as] a Haraway-like cyborg self comprised of a physical body as well as our digital profile, acting in constant dialogue” (Jurgenson). Whatever was once deemed cyberspace is now a kind of notational appendage to what was once deemed physical space. The divide is breached so often that the division as a concept has become obsolete. Digitality is shown to augment Arendt’s concept on the basis of Chun’s temporality and Jurgenson’s implied spatiality.

The digital publication of racialized brutality bespeaks digitality’s influence on Arendt’s concept. On July 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, New York resident Ramsey Orta filmed a video of officer Daniel Pantaleo choking fellow resident Eric Garner to death. Captioned with a hashtag of Garner’s final words, “I can’t breathe,” the video circulated social media networks. Garner’s arrest video shows the malleability of the indexical hashtag. “I Can’t Breathe” to some degree transcends its audiovisual source, becomes a hashtagged caption on social networks, and finds expression in the verbal chants, protest paraphernalia, and marked placards of the resulting assemblies (Taylor). All of which exemplify the citationality of Garner’s final speech act, his resistance in the face of public authority. With this said, due to circulation and proliferation of Garner’s speech act and Orta’s audiovisual image, the augmented space of appearance that emerges through the repetition of these acts does not subside with the conclusion of an assembly. As Castells notes, the advantage of an internet-based movement exists in its ability to circumvent “repression of [its] liberated spaces by maintaining communication among the people in the movement and society at large” (*Networks of Outrage* 229). Moreover, movement does not

subside with the lessened use of a hashtag. Garner's arrest video shows the malleability of the indexical tag. "I Can't Breathe," for instance, transcends its audiovisual source, becomes metatext in social networks, and finds material expression in the verbal chants and marked placards of the protest. The context, in other words, constitutes the caption, and people repeat Garner's final words as if to uplift his arrest and its systemic causes into public discourse. Even when people return home from the occupied urban street, these augmented fields of recognition endure.

Augmented spaces of appearance are increasingly the typical form of *polis* and political engagement. The internet spills into political publicity just as it seems to do with other aspects of life. These augmented spaces are largely brought to form via a digital publicity which implies a power dynamic which Castells clarifies. Networked power occasions the possibility for unheeded speech to get virally proliferated throughout the World Wide Web. Digital communication also implies enduring ephemerality which renders it difficult to repress and arrest activities online. Augmented spaces of appearance then enable enhanced modes of assembly, political engagement, and critical repetition.

### **Bearing Witness, Poetically**

Digitality does not grant critical repetition with a utopic lack of ethical impediments. The social media spectator who shares livestreamed racialized brutality does not occupy an ethically impenetrable position. Such a spectator generates an augmented space of appearance for the unheeded act which can be a critical function. Though, once a repeated act is legible and real, new problems manifest. Iteration can be politicized, weaponized, and thereby misappropriated. Moreover, once iteration renders acts legible by large publics, the function of repetition changes and may even become a form of anesthetization. In other words, just as it augments the critical functions of repetition, digitality can emphasize and accelerate the risks of repetition.

The risk of framing precedes repetition and lies within every act, unheeded or not. One of the reasons why Young celebrates storytelling as an essential aspect of discourse is that it is a form of evidence that is always-already lacking. Communicative democracy is inherently a pluralist framework that has the egalitarian aim of understanding without the utopic aim of mutual identification and agreement. Storytellers bespeak their own social positionality and experiences while retaining accounts “not only of [their] life and history but of every other position that affects [their] experience” (Young 132). Evidently, when Young uses the term storytelling, she refers to documentation as opposed to fictive imaginings. Storytelling can serve to enhance a listener’s understanding of how their actions may influence someone else’s reality. Such explicit situatedness also implies what Young calls its “inexhaustible latent shadow:” “the transcendence of the other, that there is always more to be told” (131). The testimony, a particular point of view, is a frame, and the ambiguous limits of frames must be retained when discussing storytelling and the iteration of such.

Photos and videos are frames amenable to citationality that avoid the pitfalls of memory-based storytelling but are also pervious to the risk of ambiguity. Young obviously has no issue with a lack of objectivity. The aforesaid situatedness of subjective experience is critical to understanding how particular actions, mandates, and initiatives affect others. Specifically, photographic and videographic media allow for explicit representations that speech and written forms of storytelling cannot. Mere eyewitness occasions an immediate skepticism that the photo and video do not. Testifiers can largely fabricate their stories in a way that photographers and videographers cannot. Whereas the testifier employs rhetoric and verbal embellishment to emphasize, emote, and interrogate, photos and videos can more directly sketch reality while also embellishing, emoting, and interrogating through use of artistic technique (e.g. zooming in for emphasis, etc.). Young again wishes to retain these persuasive and impressive elements as they are key to subjective account. Images, both static and audiovisual, are cited online and circulated through social media networks. Moreover, the original photographers and videographers may appear in their images in order to emphasize the image's source (e.g. Diamond Reynolds's livestream). In such cases, critical repetition may involve the circulation of both act and intention. Users forward the original statement, evading the Chinese Whispers dilemma, but may also forward the original actor's commentary on their act, their statement of their intention, which avoids misconstrual.

Yet, such an ideal situation is not always the case; such misconstrual of intentions is possible in digital citation. Digitality cannot directly buffer against misinterpretation. Images may not be sufficient enough for their intention. The actor may publicize an image that detracts from their intention – whether by explicitly or implicitly contradicting their intentions or, via framing, leaving out germane information that may validate or invalidate their intention.

Noticeably, these problematic are different than the marginalization and discounting that unheeded acts and actors undergo. Nevertheless, these issues are rather pertinent to the repetition of the unheeded act. If the act itself cannot accessibly portray its intention, repeaters may misconstrue and thereby misappropriate the unheeded act – another form of unheeding which would be hardly conducive to a communicative democracy.

Markedly, once an unheeded act is rendered legible in a space of appearance, the problems of repetition exceed mere misconstrual and misappropriation. Firstly, repeating heeded acts may serve to anesthetize them. Susan Sontag in her work *On Photography* reflects on two particular instances: the first sighting of an unheeded photograph of suffering and the repeated exposure to such images. Viewing a photograph that portrays some sort of injustice can be quite emotionally and physically poignant. Sontag recounts a childhood experience in which she first saw images from the Bergen-Belsen and Dachau concentration camps. The images impressed upon her to the extent that she “felt irrevocably grieved, wounded” and that “a part of her feelings started to tighten...went dead...[and] is still crying” (Sontag 20). Sontag’s experience perfectly displays how images can evoke visceral and bodily sympathetic responses. The first sighting of something that was previously invisible, impossible, or unimaginable has a potent impressiveness. Sontag then writes that “an event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs...but after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real” (20). Notably, digital publicity’s capacity to widely and immediately proliferate media may in turn work to desensitize acts. Lingering accessible, and capable of rapid circulation, repeated online acts may become stale and one with the woodwork – disappearance through omnipresence. The principle of diminishing returns that

Sontag describes it such that images of suffering can become trite and images of taboo can become cliché.

Ubiquity thereby is not the aim of critical repetition. The desensitizing aspect of ubiquity nullifies the purpose of critical repetition: to make unheeded acts a component of the space of appearance. Sontag demonstrates how ubiquity is rather a form of non-appearance. Axiomatic self-evidence is another form of ubiquity in which acts are so foundational to discursivity that they become unquestioned matters of fact. In democratic arenas, however, labeling certain acts as untouchable is dangerous. Science, for instance, cycles between several theories that are repeatable to the point of near-certainty. However, it is always possible that a scientific revolution can render a dogmatic principle obsolete. Critical repetition, in such a case, may challenge ubiquitous acts into a space of reasoning and criticism, and such re-litigation can be crucial in deciding whether or not foundational principles of discursivity are sound. Self-evidence, to some degree, can be the Achilles Heel of discursivity, and critical repetition can occasion re-evaluation.

If repetition can disappear certain acts, then repetition can be a form of marginalization. In 2016, following the publicizing of police brutality (incl. Reynolds's livestream), journalists and activists linked the widely shared videos of racialized police killings to 20th-century lynching postcards (Devega; Blay). The postcard practice was a form of private correspondence that featured a photograph of a lynching. For starters, lynching postcards are private addresses of public spectacles, and thereby, they are inherently different than that of publicizing brutality. Nonetheless, these articles do indicate an anxiety about repeating unheeded acts and their suspicion may be justified. Specifically, these critics cast their focus on the repeated circulation of publicized police brutality by all-day news television networks. The sensationalization of

press media has largely worked to transform its pieces of news into commodities. Thereby, the repetition of emotionally affective stories, images, and videos generates profits. As Sontag's anecdote suggests, unheeded acts are oftentimes evocative. Thereby, sensationalized press can transform, say, Diamond Reynolds's livestream, which features the brutalization and killing of her Black boyfriend, Philando Castile, into a vendible object – generating profits by publicizing suffering. On 24-hour news networks, the repetition is cycled; a news station may replay the audiovisuals of Castile's death throughout the day. Sensationalized press distinctly engenders the dual process of commodification and desensitization of acts.

Markedly, considering power dynamics ground discursive spaces, critical repetition implies the use and generation of forms of social capital. Re-invoking Castellsian networked power demonstrates how such capital affects the success of critical repetition. If an unheeded actor repeats another unheeded actor, there is little chance of the citation entering public discourse. A surplus of networked power augments the chance of acts reaching audiences. Even counterpublics are built on complexes of networked power, some participants have larger audiences than others. Repetition necessitates the use of one's networked power. One might argue that some may repeat certain acts in order to generate networked power and thereby capitalizing to some degree. Such a criticism merely outlines the framework of publicity. What then differentiates social profiteering from the financial profiteering of the sensationalized press? Perhaps, instead, both are dangerous and can potentially become forms of excessive mistreatment. When one repeats an unheeded act solely to rake in social or financial capital, the repetition becomes a form of exploitation; the act becomes commodity.

Another issue related to repetition is trivialization. For instance, #BlackLivesMatter very well may be the most persistent and significant political hashtag. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and

Patrisse Cullors share coinage of the hashtag, originally a response to George Zimmerman's acquittal for killing Black teenager Trayvon Martin in July 2013. Merely retweeting #BlackLivesMatter recognizes the original intention of expressing "outrage against police aggression and racist violence" (Rickford 35). Thereby, the hashtag and its associated campaign to publicize and work against racialized police brutality informs not only Diamond Reynolds's livestream but also Ramsey Orta's filming of Eric Garner. The Movement for Black Lives, a multi-organization, international campaign against systemic forms of racism, has employed the hashtag to the extent that the protest campaign has been called the Black Lives Matter movement. Critics have taken to mocking the movement's central hashtag through imitation; counters to "#BlackLivesMatter" include "#PoliceLivesMatter," "#BlueLivesMatter," and most frequently, "#AllLivesMatter." The latter has been uttered by politicians, celebrities, and others who disagree with the movement's tactics (Rickford 40). However, in its ubiquity, the hashtag has inspired trivializations; inanimate objects, animals, and other objects' lives now matter as a way to detract from a social justice movement's charge. In its proliferation, the Movement for Black Lives's hashtag has spawned imitations that trivialize the original tag's intent: an end to systemic racism.

Considering the risks of repetition, repeaters must carefully attend to how they echo unheeded acts. If, to Butler, Derrida, and other theorists of the performative, the reiterative act's intention has no supremacy over its form, perhaps the reverse is accurate. Such a suggestion to some degree revives Warner's assertion that publicity is "poetic world making" – to the extent that Warner highlights the importance of form and genre to the act. Disobeying conventions genre and form is a mode of transgression, and changing the form of acts may also serve to diminish possible indignations. Whereas Butler argues that we must politicize citation, one may

wish to enact that politicization by poeticizing citation. Such an imperative serves the purpose of both illustrating the importance of fully attending to unheeded acts but also attending to one's own reiterative acts. Such poeticizing is a careful kind of suppression and editing that seeks to repeat otherwise.

Attending to the specifics of police brutality may serve as an option instead of repeating visceral images of brutality. In May 2015, the African American Policy Forum (AAPF), co-founded by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, released the report "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Women" to outline the tenets of their "#SayHerName" hashtagged charge. In summation, anti-black racism and misogyny converge to create particularly egregious measures of police brutality. On July 13<sup>th</sup> 2015, the death of Black Lives Matter activist Sandra Bland provoked the Forum to update their report and proliferate their hashtag ("Say Her Name"). On July 18<sup>th</sup> 2015, prior to the release of the dashcam footage of Bland's arrest, a Movement for Black Lives contingent in Phoenix, AZ disrupted Bernie Sanders and Martin O'Malley's press conference at Daily Kos's Netroots Nation conference. Disrupters chanted "#SayHerName" and also demanded that both Democratic candidates echo the call (Bouie). Much akin to those who, instead of repeating the video of officer Daniel Pantaleo choking Eric Garner, repeat the victim final words, "I Can't Breathe," via placards, chants, and hashtags, few have taken to merely stating the particulars of these documented cases. In the case of Chicagoan Laquan McDonald's videotaped brutality, protestors chanted "sixteen shots" in reference to how many bullets officer James Van Dyke fired into McDonald – a poetic means of conveyance (Davey and Smith). Appealing to particulars is one such means of poeticizing repetition.

Alteration may also serve as an answer to Hartman's particular problem of invoking historical indignities. In Claudia Rankine's poetic collection *Citizen*, a lynching postcard, to

return to our aforementioned object of concern, closes a section of the book. The image is altered; John Lucas, Rankine's partner, modifies a famous lynching postcard by removing the bodies of lynched Black men (Rankine). What Lucas achieves is a change in orientation. No longer is the spectator of the altered photograph implicated in the spectacle of Black death. Instead, the viewer is directed towards the casual, festive racism of the white crowd. Therein, Lucas – as a poetic repeater – speaks to the horrid atrocities of the past but does so with a form that does not resuscitate the spectacle.

Poetic witness, or carefully attending to the form of critical repetition, is the solution to political theory's multifarious problem of unheeded acts. In a networked age, bearing witness to unheeded acts and people can backfire and further marginalize the neglected. A poeticized repetition serves to counter this regression by modifying the easily trivialized, desensitized, and exploited image or act. Poetic witness answers Hartman's question of how one may convey the terrible without reenacting the terrible. When Butler notes that "the effects of performatives...do not conclude at the terminus of a given statement or utterance," the critical theorist speaks to the lingering afterlife of the act within the Space of Appearance (*Bodies that Matter* 241). Poetic witness can be best described as carefully attending to the repeated act in light of its entrance into the contemporary, augmented *polis*.

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