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‘Much Deeper than That’: Hegemonic Emotional Experiences and Affective Dissidences in Martin Crimp’s In the Republic of Happiness (2012)

British Theatre in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis, Affect, Community

Description of the research group “Contemporary British Theatre Barcelona” (CBTBarcelona) and of the project “British Theatre in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis, Affect, Community” (FFI2016-75443, MINECO/FEDER)

The research group “Contemporary British Theatre Barcelona” (CBTBarcelona), recognised by the Catalan research agency AGAUR (2014 SCG 49 and 2017 SGR 40), has as its main field of research the outburst of theatrical energy and creativity that has, since the early 1990s, decisively contributed to widening the parameters of British theatre. Headed by Prof. Mireia Aragay (University of Barcelona) as Principal Investigator and with a team comprising scholars from the universities of Augsburg, Glasgow, Jaume I and Prague as well as Barcelona itself, the group has completed four research projects since 2002 (three national, one international) and is currently conducting its fifth one, “British Theatre in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis, Affect, Community” (FFI2016-75443, MINECO/FEDER). As indicated by the title, the project investigates the topics of “crisis”, “affect” and “community” in relation to the work of both established and emergent British playwrights in

the 21st-century, taking as a starting point the “affective turn” that has recently taken place in the humanities and in theatre studies. The two principal outputs of the research project will be two essay collections on the topics of “affect” and “crisis”, co-edited by Mireia Aragay, Cristina Delgado-García and Martin Middeke and by Clara Escoda, Enric Monforte, José Ramón Prado and Clare Wallace respectively. As a result of the previous research projects, the group has published the volumes *British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and *Of Precariousness: Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st Century Drama and Theatre* (De Gruyter, 2017), as well as the special issue “Theatre and Spectatorship” of *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (May 2016). For further information on the research group, please see <http://www.ub.edu/cbtbarcelona/>.

“Deeper than That”: Hegemonic Emotional Experiences and Affective Dissidences in Martin Crimp’s *In the Republic of Happiness* (2012)¹

The popularity of therapeutic cultures and discourses of self-help, together with the founding of happiness studies as an academic field, make it possible to speak of a “happiness turn” (Ahmed 2010, 3) in the humanities². In the context of the global financial crisis, and of the ensuing precarity it generated, however, it has become increasingly difficult to define happiness in dominant, capitalist terms, and as linked to the dominant narrative of “advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope” (Halberstam 2011, 89), which has been seen to bear “less and less relation to how people can

live” (Berlant 2011, 11). This has given rise to “critiques of happiness” that ask questions about the “happiness wish”, showing happiness is being used “to redescribe social norms as social goods” (Ahmed 2010, 2) and is “part of the regulation of affect conducted within the operation of power” (Butler 2008, 49).

In the Republic of Happiness, Crimp’s first musical and one of his most complex plays to date, published after *The City* (2008) and which came in close proximity to his adaptation of *Gross und Klein* (*Big and Small*) (2012) and the opera *Written on Skin* (2012) can be considered

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² As feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed asserts, “Happiness Studies is now an academic field in its own right: the academic journal *Happiness Studies* is well-established and a number of Professorships in Happiness Studies exist” (Ahmed 2007/2008, 8).

to have been written under the auspices of a “crisis in the materialistic culture of happiness” (Lipovetsky 2007, 232)³, and to dramatize the “pressure exerted by the ideal of personal fulfilment in the ways of perceiving and judging our lives” (Lipovetsky 2007, 323). In the Republic of Happiness has been variously considered as a play that “invest[s] the musical with a more daring and even political significance” (Rousseau 2013, 4), which invites spectators to pay attention to the “self-reflexive associations of signifiers” (Aillot 2016) and coded expressions of consumerist discourses, and as a dystopia that alerts of the “pains of individualism” (Sierz 2012)⁴. In this light, and in reference to the epigraph from Dante’s *Divina Commedia: Paradiso* that opens “Part Three” – “Tu non se’ in terra, sì come tu credi” (“You are not on Earth, as you believe”) – it has also been read as a parodic satire that “makes recourse to the structure of The Divine Comedy in order to represent and also bring to a point of crisis the impossibility of self-realization of an individual [Uncle Bob] who is axiologically driven by the exaltation of the self” (Méndez 2017, 16; emphasis in the original)⁵.

This paper claims that *In the Republic of Happiness* contributes to the aforementioned debate and critique of happiness by dramatizing different “affective scenarios” (Berlant 2011, 9) of consumer capitalism, which suggest the “instability, fragility, and [...] cost” (Berlant 2011, 2) of the dominant happiness discourse, understood in consumerist, neoliberal terms. At the same time, the play presents “failure” (Halberstam 2011, 87) as a counter-hegemonic mode of non-conformity and critique, and through an affective mise-en-scène, it seeks to reinvest the spectators’ bodies with an increased “capacity to act, to engage, and to connect [...] [; with] aliveness and vitality” (Clough 2007, 2), thus disrupting the obviousness of the affective underpinnings of neoliberal consumer capitalism, and the “distribution of the sensible” (Rockhill [2000] 2006, 4) promoted by late capitalist societies

of control or of “spectacle”. Ultimately, the play seeks to invite spectators to imagine different ethical paradigms of individual and collective happiness defined in terms of “possibility” (Ahmed 2010, 222) and “becoming” (Greig and Seigworth 2010, 3; emphasis in the original), instead of as a “duty” (Ahmed 2012, 10)⁶.

I propose, however, that the play’s political force lies above all in its affective view of resistance, which Dominic Cooke took to its full expression in his production of the play for the Royal Court in 2012⁷. As shall be seen, as opposed to the consumer capitalist view of an isolated, individualistic self, which the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero has theorized as the “vertical” (2011a, 195), neoliberal self inherited from modernity, *In the Republic of Happiness* invites spectators to conceive of subjectivities that “inclin[e]” (Cavarero 2011a, 195) towards the Other. This article draws on Lauren Berlant and Sarah Ahmed’s affective analyses of happiness in contemporary society, which consider it as a “cluster of promises” (Berlant 2011, 12), and as something that is measured according to our proximity to certain objects, and transposes them into the key of drama. Arguably, Ahmed’s claim that happiness is mediated into an image of the “good life” that opens up specific mechanisms of subject (self) regulation, and Berlant’s similar understanding of the present as a “mediated affect” (Berlant 2011, 4), can crucially contribute to illuminate aspects of contemporary theatre and performance practice and of *In the Republic of Happiness* in particular.

In the Republic of Happiness is divided into three parts, “The Destruction of the Family”, “The Five Essential Freedoms of the Individual” and “In the Republic of Happiness”⁸. Part One, which opens with a naturalistic stage setting, presents a family during their Christmas meal that is interrupted by the visit of Uncle Bob, who has come to say good-bye as he and his wife Madeleine

³ For want of an English translation of Gilles Lipovetsky’s *Le bonheur paradoxal* (2006), from now on, the translations from his book are mine. In French, [Autant de phénomènes qui apparaissent comme le signe d’une [crise de la culture matérialiste du bonheur [...] la pression nouvelle qu’exerce l’idéal d’épanouissement personnel sur les manières de percevoir et de juger notre vie] (2007, 232-223).

⁴ From now on, the translations from Julien Aillot’s article are mine. In French: “le spectateur est ainsi amené à être attentif aux associations-réflexes de significants qui font idiomes [...] [faisant entendre les discordances de ce discours consumériste]” (Aillot 2016).

⁵ The translation from Albert Méndez is mine. In Catalan: “[L]’obra és un sàtira paròdica ambientada en el context tardo-capitalista] que recupera l’estructura de la *Divina Comèdia* a fi de representar i posar en crisi la impossibilitat de realització d’un individu mogut axiològicament per l’exaltació del jo”.

⁶ See Anthony Neilson’s *Narrative* (2014) or Rory Mullarkey’s *Pity* (2018) for other plays that explore the faultlines of contemporary, neoliberal definitions of happiness. *Narrative*, which was commissioned by and ran at the Royal Court from 5 April to 4 May 2013, is about how the Internet is changing our modes of perception. At a given moment, Neilson has one character say that “it’s the times as well: everyone’s told they’re entitled to nothing less than perfect happiness. Soon as that initial state of bliss wears off, they move on” (Neilson 2014, 258). *Pity*, which ran at the Royal Court Theatre from 12 July to 11 August 2018, directed by Sam Pritchard, is a satire that bitterly critiques the privatized, individualist understanding of happiness and well-being.

⁷ *In the Republic of Happiness* was first performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs on 6 December 2012, directed by Dominic Cooke, where it ran from 6 December 2012 to 19 January 2013, with Michelle Terry and Paul Terry as its protagonist couple, namely, Madeleine and Uncle Bob. It was one of the last projects Cooke took on while still in post as Artistic Director of the Royal Court (Angelaki 2014, 312).

⁸ Interestingly, in each part of *In the Republic of Happiness* Crimp seems to revisit a different style in his dramaturgy. In an interview with Aleks Sierz, Crimp recognizes crucial affinities with *The City*, and clarifies that “the fact that the play is being staged at Christmas is not a coincidence” (Crimp 2012b) as he wanted it to follow on from *The City*, “of which the last scene is a Christmas scene” (Crimp 2012b). Thus, whereas in Part One Crimp is “carrying on from where [he] left off at the Christmas moment” (Crimp 2012b), and, like *The City*, he plunges spectators into an apparent naturalism that slowly deconstructs itself, the middle section of the play foregoes the use of specific characters altogether, and has affinities with *Attempts on Her Life*” (Crimp 2012b). Finally, the third part, which is more minimalistic and is set in an empty, echoing space, could be said to return spectators to Crimp’s affective experimentations with light and emptiness in his postdramatic triptych *Fewer Emergencies* (2005).

are leaving for another country. Part Two is composed of five speeches, and the characters' names disappear as the cues are randomly attributed to the actors. In speeches one and five, for instance, called "The Freedom to Write the Script of my Own Life" and "The Freedom to Look Good and Live Forever" respectively, speakers are convinced that they "make [them]selves what [they] [are]" (Crimp 2012a, 41) and that they "write the script" (Crimp 2012a, 43) of their lives⁹. Finally, Part Three dramatizes Madeleine and Uncle Bob's relationship in the foreign country they were about to leave for in Part One, where they seem to have become the heads of a late capitalist, consumerist republic where Madeleine hopes to "mould" (Crimp 2012a, 85) the citizens by singing them the "100% happy song" (Crimp 2012a, 85).

In Part Three, which presents Uncle Bob and Madeleine as heads of a late capitalist "utopia", where both happiness and connectedness are imposed and understood in terms of a technology-ridden, consumerist "society of control" (Massumi 2015, 19) or of "spectacle" (Debord [1967] 2004), Uncle Bob has doubts with regard to the type of society they represent, and performs as a failed man. By presenting Uncle Bob as a "depressed" (Cvetkovich 2012) or failed individual who inhabits the margins of the dominant emotional and normative regimes, the play seeks to interpellate spectators as "response-able" (Lehmann [2006] 2007, 185) witnesses of the underlying contradictions of the dominant model of happiness. Indeed, by staging "negative affects" (Ngai 2005, 3), such as anger, despair and vulnerability, the play seeks to "interrupt the flow of meaning" (Massumi 2015, 8) and "bring about a reconfiguration" (Massumi 2015, 9) of power in relationships. Ultimately, it invites spectators to explore "ways of connecting to others and to other situations" (Massumi 2015, 6), so that a new understanding of happiness can emerge.

The starting point for *In the Republic of Happiness*, indeed, was the awareness, in Crimp's own words, that society "makes us feel angry and vulnerable even when we are materially prosperous" (2013b). As he adds, "the US/UK model of *laissez-faire* liberalism insists that individuals are entirely responsible for their own destiny – while at the same time fabricating needs which – notoriously – can never be met" (Crimp 2013b). Indeed, the play portrays a society where technology, consumer choices, marriage

and family are considered to be axiomatically associated with happiness, even when what Berlant calls the fantasy of the "good life" (2011, 2), after the 2008 financial crisis, is showing signs of attrition. As she puts it,

the fantasies that are fraying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy. The set of dissolving assurances also includes meritocracy, the sense that liberal-capitalist society will reliably provide opportunities for individuals to carve out relations of reciprocity that seem fair and that foster life as a project of adding up to something and constructing cushions for enjoyment. (Berlant 2011, 3)

In this light, Part One of *In the Republic of Happiness*, which presents the mother, father, grandparents, and the two daughters, Debbie and Hazel, who are having a Christmas meal, strongly questions the "happiness wish" (Ahmed 2010, 2) and, instead, pictures a society that is characterized by precarity and inequality. As Crimp has put it, his aim was to portray a situation of "generational entropy" (Crimp 2012b) or downward social mobility – "the grandparents are the wealthy middle class, who both had good professional standing and a steady income, but their children have moved down the social scale" (Crimp 2012b).

In this respect, in "What Does the Ideal of Happiness Mean", Darrin M. McMahon argues that "happiness has emerged in recent years as a major preoccupation of our time, at once the goal of individual lives and the sole horizon [...] of our modern democracies" (2010, 469)¹⁰. However, he asks himself what the meaning of our relentless search for happiness is, "if not an avowal of our present discontent?" (McMahon 2010, 486). In his turn, in *Le bonheur paradoxal* (2006) Gilles Lipovetsky adds that in our society "the market rules ever more, there are more incitements to live better; the individual becomes more prominent, there are more demands for happiness" (2006, 307)¹¹. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that, to the extent that happiness is defined in terms of the abundance of material and technological goods, anxiety, loneliness, and self-doubt also simultaneously increase.

As shall be seen, *In the Republic of Happiness* radically questions the neoliberal understanding of happiness

⁹ As Crimp put it in an interview with Dan Rebellato, "the play began with the middle section, which dramatizes a mentality rather than a situation" (Crimp 2013a). Ironically, Crimp added that what inspired him to write the middle section was Andy Warhol's comment that "in the future everybody will be able to think what they like, and everybody will think exactly the same" (Crimp 2013a). Crimp also mentioned that, when the question arose as to how to stage this middle part, Crimp and Cooke decided "it would have to be about the relationship with the audience" (Crimp 2013a), and they made the actors sit differently each night, and all the actors say all the lines, but depending on where they sat. In Crimp's words, "one night it was four men and four women sitting side by side, and it created strange, different meanings" (Crimp 2013a).

¹⁰ See McMahon (2006) for an exhaustive explanation of the evolution of the concept of happiness, and the appearance of its modern meaning. As he puts it, the modern view of happiness as a right everyone can aspire to developed with the Enlightenment, and it was Protestantism, which "emphasiz[ed] that God's original intention for human beings was that they should be happy here on earth," (McMahon 2010, 476) which first made a "sin" of sadness. The Enlightenment view of happiness, of which the 21st century is a clear inheritor, and which, according to him, clearly favours the spirit of capitalism, understands happiness as "an individual responsibility and choice – subjective, not objective, to be won by personal initiative" (McMahon 2010, 482), and is therefore fraught with problems.

¹¹ "Toujours plus de marché, toujours plus de stimulation à mieux vivre; toujours plus d'individu, toujours plus d'exigence de bonheur" (2006, 307).

and seeks to deconstruct the link between “happiness and power” (Ahmed 2010, 11), showing that “hierarchies of happiness may correspond to social hierarchies that are already given” (Ahmed 2007-2008, 11). Instead, it shows that happiness functions as an affective, “world-making device” (Ahmed 2007-2008, 11) that brings a very specific, (neoliberal) world into existence.

“Everything a Human Being Needs”: Affect, Norms and Power

In the Republic of Happiness shows how affects are mediated by neo-liberal ideological frames into expressions of narcissism and distance from the Other, thus constructing the “vertical” (Cavarero 2011a: 195), individualistic subject of neo-liberalism. As Berlant asserts, “affective responses may be said significantly to exemplify shared historical time” (2011: 15), and affects’ strength comes from the ways they register “the conditions of life that move across persons and worlds” (2011: 16). Indeed, as shall be seen, as opposed to the consumer capitalist view of an isolated, individualistic self, which the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero has theorized as the “vertical” (2011a: 195), neo-liberal self-inherited from modernity, the play invites spectators to conceive of subjectivities that “inclin[e]” (Cavarero 2011a: 195) towards the Other.

In the article “Inclining the Subject: Ethics, Alterity and Natality”, Cavarero asserts that, from Kant, to Hobbes and Descartes, to Canetti, the modern self has been constructed as “transparent or opaque, enthralled by the dream of its own autonomy and integrity” (2011b, 16). Cavarero draws on Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958), and mobilizes Arendt’s definition of “inclination” against the traditional Western ideology of individualism through a focus on relationality and dependence. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt regards human beings as equal, and sees birth or natality as “the naked fact of our original, physical appearance” ([1958] 1998, 179), that is, as standing for an essential human condition. As Cavarero explains, taking the new-born as emblematic of the fundamental fact of human vulnerability, Arendt asserts that human beings are “constitutively exposed one to the others, beginning with the initial phase of this appearance: birth” (Cavarero 2011a, 199). Ultimately, therefore, Cavarero expresses the necessity to redefine the subject as being “inclined” (2011b, 17) towards the Other and, moving away from feminist critics who have valued interdependency over dependency, such as Carol Gilligan (1982) or Joan

Tronto (1993), she chooses the unbalanced, unilateral inclination as a new ethical paradigm.

In Part Two, Crimp dramatizes the “mediated affect[s]” (Berlant 2011, 4) of late capitalism through a very poetic song that sings, precisely, of the desire for connection and intensity in a mediated, technological and consumer society. In this song, which is not attributed to any specific character and is located between the first and second speeches of Part Two, a performer explains that s/he’s getting ready to leave “into space” (Crimp 2012a, 46). S/he seeks to convince her/himself, however, that s/he will not be alone so long as s/he has “the latest touch-screen telephone / plus all the different apps and leads” (Crimp 2012a, 46), yet soon admits that it is “cold out there!” (Crimp 2012a, 46), even though she has “a private oxygen supply / –lungs that inflate– a heart that bleeds –/ [...] everything a human being needs” (Crimp 2012a, 46). The intensity and desire for connection denied in late capitalist society are thus solely and poetically projected onto the heart, which, despite its artificiality, “bleeds” (Crimp 2012a, 46) in order to express the affects that are not acknowledged in consumer, late capitalist societies.

Cavarero’s inclining subject resonates with Nancy’s notion of a subject that leans outside itself, “over that edge that opens up its being in common” ([1986] 1991, 4). In *La Communauté Désœuvrée/The Inoperative Community* (1986), Nancy reacts against the advent of neoliberalism subsequent to the failure of Soviet communism, and sets out to question the idea of a homogeneous community, characterized by “common being”, as opposed to “being-in-common”. However, he also questions the traditional theory of individualism, in that it takes the individual as a self-contained, self-sufficient being, when s/he is, he claims, “merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community” ([1986] 1991, 3). And, he adds, “the individual can be the origin and the certainty of nothing but its own death” ([1986] 1991, 3)¹². Thus, Nancy describes the “singular being” as one who, as opposed to the individual, accepts its own finitude, and the community of singular beings as an ethical paradigm. On these terms, “being ‘itself’ comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, and, if you will [...] as *community*” (Nancy [1986] 1991, 6; emphasis in the original). In consequence, we are all exposed to others, “always turned toward an other and faced by him or her, never facing myself” (Nancy [1986] 1991, xxxvii–xxxviii).

As shall be seen, Uncle Bob, who, in Part Three, addresses Madeleine as a “dispossessed” (Butler and Athanassiou 2013, 3), vulnerable subject, can be said to represent just

¹² In the same line as Cavarero, as shall be seen, Nancy claims that “such an incarnation of humanity, aggregating its absolute being beyond relation and community, depicts the destiny willed by modern thought” ([1986] 1991, 5). Like Cavarero’s notion of inclination, he claims that a community cannot be made “with simple atoms. There has to be a clinamen. There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other” ([1986] 1991, 3; emphasis in the original). Affect, which is produced as part and parcel of a process of relating whereby beings exist at all, is thus this “glue” or clinamen Nancy and Cavarero claim is constitutive to the human being.

this “singular being”. In *the Republic of Happiness*, thus, seeks to redefine the self not in terms of “vertical[ity]” (2011a, 195) and possession, but in terms of the acknowledgement of our ontological vulnerability, and the “inclination” (Cavarero 2011a, 195) towards the Other.

“What Have You Not Got?”: The Materialistic Culture of Happiness

Part One of *In the Republic of Happiness*, which introduces spectators to a family during their Christmas meal as it is interrupted by Uncle Bob’s visit, presents dominant, late capitalist understandings of happiness which define it in individualistic and consumerist terms. Indeed, the characters in the play show an understanding of happiness that is, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it, “through the shops, and the more exclusive the shops the greater the happiness reached. Happiness means acquisition of things other people have no hope of acquiring” (2008, 26). As Madeleine also puts it to Uncle Bob in Part Three, “I think you’ve forgotten how happy you really are. [...] Because what do you want? What have you not got?” (Crimp 2012a, 83).

In this vein, during the lunch, and despite the precarity and insecurity the characters reveal as endemic to late capitalism, the grandmother also offers a definition of happiness that is permeated by market values:

I still like to sit in the back of a taxi and be driven through the streets –especially at dusk in summer with all the smells of plants and restaurants coming in through the window– and all the childless young people in the light summer clothes swarming on the pavements outside the shops and bars. I like to watch the meter running. I like to think ah these two minutes in a taxi have already cost me what that man emptying the bins will take more than an hour of his life to earn –and oh the extra stink of a rubbish bin in summer! Yes on nights like that the taxi is glorious and the fact I’m paying for my happiness makes my happiness all the sweeter –and the fact that other people are having to suffer and work just to pay for such basic things as electricity makes it even sweeter still. (Crimp 2012a, 13-14)

For the grandmother, the fact of paying for her happiness as she wanders through the streets in a taxi is what enables her to identify that moment as a happy one. Happiness

is clearly experienced in capitalist terms, as tied to luxury and exclusivity, and in opposition to lives that are considered other, and correspondingly less happy, such as that of the man who empties the bins. Her speech demonstrates Ahmed’s views on happiness as “promised through proximity to certain objects” (2010, 29), and shows how “happiness and unhappiness are distributed and located within certain bodies and groups” and are “what you get for being a certain kind of being” (Ahmed 2007-2008, 11). The mundane difficulties that excluded “Others” undergo enhance Granny’s moment of happiness just as does the fact that she is paying for her happiness. In Julien Aillot’s words, “[s]uch a scandalous reply [on Granny’s part] can be read as ironically promoting an equitable redistribution of wealth, by contrast to an unbridled capitalism” (2016)¹³.

As shall be seen, such view of happiness is subverted in the text through the use of song, and was further deconstructed in Cooke’s 2012 production through an affective deployment of the *mise-en-scène*. It is at this point that Uncle Bob, the mother’s brother and the daughters’ uncle, breaks into the Christmas meal, as he thought “[he] would just suddenly appear” (Crimp 2012a, 19). Like an agent of subversion, and breaking with the act’s apparent naturalism, he begins a speech against the family, and explains that he and his wife Madeleine are leaving to another country. Madeleine describes it as a place where she is “flying first class” and where she just has to “swipe a security pass / To swim in the milk of thick white stars” (Crimp 2012a, 37). Right after this speech, Madeleine begins to sing a deeply melancholic song that laments the impossibility of achieving depth in relationships as well as in relation to one’s own feelings, showing that “to tie happiness to individualist neoliberalism is a utopia, from which not only isolation, but also dystopias spring” (Angelaki 2017, 138). As she puts it,

**Some people you lose
Some people you keep:
Yes I’m a family friend
But I don’t go deep
(no I never go deep)
[...]**

**Yes I’m often in pain
there are days I weep
like a nymph by a stream–
but it doesn’t go deep
(no it never goes deep)
[...]**

¹² In the same line as Cavarero, as shall be seen, Nancy claims that “such an incarnation of humanity, aggregating its absolute being beyond relation and community, depicts the destiny willed by modern thought” ([1986] 1991, 5). Like Cavarero’s notion of inclination, he claims that a community cannot be made “with simple atoms. There has to be a clinamen. There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other” ([1986] 1991, 3; emphasis in the original). Affect, which is produced as part and parcel of a process of relating whereby beings exist at all, is thus this “glue” or clinamen Nancy and Cavarero claim is constitutive to the human being.

¹³ In French: “On peut entendre une telle réplique, scandaleuse, comme promouvant ironiquement et implicitement une redistribution équitable des richesses, par contraste avec un capitalisme débridé” (2016).

As a family friend it's my duty to say
 I'm leaving you now –yes– I'm going away–
 But if I was tempted to come back some day–

went into the room
 where your kids were asleep
 and pushed pins in their eyes–
 then I wouldn't go deep
 (really –trust me– I never go deep)

[...] You're not to imagine I don't want to sing

[...] that I've got no soul
 That my heart can't leap
 When the bud unfolds–
 Just it doesn't go deep
 (no it never goes deep)

I've booked my ticket: I'm flying first class
 To a cool place thin as a pane of glass
 Where I just have to swipe a security pass
 To swim in the milk of thick white stars.

It's a new kind of world
 and it doesn't come cheap
 and you'll only survive
 If you don't go deep
 (so I never
 no I never
 no I never go deep) (Crimp 2012a, 36-37)

Madeleine sings about a psychic and social state of affairs where the “society of control” or of “spectacle” isolates individuals from their own feelings and from society, as it bombards them with more fabricated, material desires and consumerist imperatives. As Byung-Chul Han has put it in *The Society of Transparency*, unlike in disciplinary societies, in the “society of control” individuals “are intensely connected and communicated amongst each other” (2013, 89), as it is precisely such communication that guarantees transparency to power. In this context, “exhibitionism and voyeurism feed the networks” which have become the new, “digital panopticon” (89). In such a society, neither joy nor “pain”, as Madeleine sings, ever “go deep” or can be deeply felt as they have become mediated states. As can be seen through the adjectives she uses to describe her future life, Madeleine's understanding of happiness is also, like that of the grandmother, based on owning a privatized, highly individualist world of material comfort.

In this song, Madeleine laments the emptiness that an understanding of happiness as uniquely based on success and individualism leaves in the individual. This dominant, late capitalist model of happiness and of subjectivity was particularly subverted in Cooke's original stage production, through Crimp's and Cook's affective *mise-en-scène*. As Madeleine sang, in Cooke's production for the Royal Court Theatre the stage was progressively flooded by a backdrop of intense red light, thus creating a highly dramatic, poetic stage picture. Set against Madeleine's light blue dress, the

darkling red light seemed to emphasize the desire for feeling, passion, and vulnerability denied by the “vertical” (Cavarero 2011a, 195), neoliberal subject Madeleine represented. The dark red light evoked the suppressed affects of connection and intensity which are obfuscated by the late capitalist construction or “moulding” (Crimp 2012a: 85), as Madeleine puts it in Part Three, of the “vertical” (Cavarero 2011a, 195) subject. The scene functioned as the unconscious or mirror image of the “Hard. Clear. Sharp. Clean” (Crimp 2012a, 35) Madeleine believes she must aspire to.

The music, the image and the words all created what Hans-Thies Lehmann calls a “synaesthetic perception” ([2006] 2007, 87) which invited spectators to postpone the attribution of meaning, asking for their perception to “remain open for connections, correspondences and clues at completely unexpected moments, perhaps casting what was said earlier in a completely new light” ([2006] 2007, 87). It, therefore, sought to create the conditions for spectators to ask themselves questions regarding the late capitalist imperative to be happy, such as whether, as shown by Madeleine, the search for happiness “might not entail its own undoing” (McMahon 2006, 15) and “our modern commandment to be happy [...] its own forms of discontent” (McMahon 2006, 15). Spectators were thus interpellated by the intense red light that sought to reveal to them the underside of the late capitalist, “happiness dream”, and to lead them to question the type of subjectivities required to fulfil it, urging them, precisely, to “go deep” (Crimp 2012a, 37).

In Cooke's production, as in the play in general, happiness was, instead, linked to ethics, and the acknowledgement of vulnerability, as suggested by Madeleine when she claims she “went into the room / where your kids were asleep / pushed pins in their eyes / then I wouldn't go deep”, presumably so that they wouldn't be able to see the state of the world, and might continue to be happy. Such an affective *mise-en-scène* thus sought to bring to the surface the affects that late capitalism represses and denies, such as intensity of connection and solidarity, and to induce spectators to a “change in capacity” (Massumi 2015, 4) which might lead them to find “different ways of connecting to others and to other situations” (Massumi 2015, 6).

Power, Affects, and New Political Subjectivities

Part Three, which presents Madeleine and Uncle Bob in the late capitalist, consumerist utopia they left for in Part One, dramatizes the loneliness, isolation and violence of the neo-liberal self, and the limitations of what Cavarero calls the “vertical” (2011, 195) subject of individualism, by presenting Uncle Bob's “negative affects” (Ngai 2005, 3) of anger, sadness and vulnerability. At the same time, by presenting Uncle Bob as a dispossessed subject who confronts Madeleine's “spectacular” and affective use of power with a more intense, bodily relationship, appearing as “inclined” (Cavarero 2011a, 195; emphasis in the original) towards the Other,

Part Three offers a new notion of happiness and subjectivity.

As mentioned earlier, in Part Three, Madeleine and Uncle Bob have become heads of a republic where both happiness and connectedness are imposed and understood in terms of a technology-ridden, consumerist “society of spectacle”, and where true contact is replaced by simulation and mediation. Uncle Bob gives “lectures” (Crimp 2012a, 82) to the “citizens” (2012a, 82) and Madeleine wants him to sing the “hundred-per-cent happy song” (Crimp 2012a, 85), which describes a dystopia where the earth has “burned to ash”, yet insists that “we’re the happiest that human beings / have ever so far been” (Crimp 2012a, 89). Indeed, this “society of spectacle” is conveyed through Uncle Bob’s song and speeches, which mould the “citizens” according to Madeleine’s desires. It is only after Madeleine prompts him the lines “sotto voce” (Crimp 2012a, 89), however, and as the stage directions repeatedly indicate, that Uncle Bob is able to carry on with his song, thus making his doubts regarding the society they embody clearly visible. As Uncle Bob puts it,

Madeleine: Into the microphone

Pause. The music continues.

Uncle Bob speaks haltingly into the microphone.

Uncle Bob: Here’s our 100% happy song

it’s got a few words

but it doesn’t last long.

Hum hum hum

Hum the happy song.

Pause. The Music continues.

We make up the words as we go along

Each word is right

Nothing we sing is wrong.

Hum hum hum

Hum the happy song.

Madeleine: (*sotto voce*) We smile when / It’s white.

Uncle Bob:

We smile when it’s white, we smile

when the pear-tree’s green–

we’re the happiest that human beings

have ever so far been.

Hum hum hum

Hum the happy song.

Pause. The Music continues.

The earth –plus Mum and Dad–

the bedside lamp –the state–

have... have...

Madeleine: (*sotto voce*) have burned to ash.

Uncle Bob:

Have burned to ash–

Yes everything’s just great.

Hum hum hum

Hum the happy song. (Crimp 2012a, 88-9)

Uncle Bob’s and Madeleine’s republic represents the neo-liberal governance of the present moment, which “invests –politically, psychically, and economically– in the production and management of forms of life: it ‘makes live’ [...] while shattering and economically depleting certain livelihoods, foreclosing them, rendering them disposable and perishable” (Butler and Athanasiou 2012, 31) –in other words, radically and unequally precarious¹⁴. In this context, Uncle Bob’s “hundred-per-cent happy song” (Crimp 2012a, 85) is designed to create an affective response of acceptance in the “citizens” of his republic. Madeleine and Uncle Bob’s “hundred-per-cent happy song” thus represents the “affect modulation” (Massumi 2015, 32) of power, which has taken the place of “old style ideology” (Massumi 2015, 32), thus proving, as Frédéric Lordon also defends, that politics is an “*ars affectandi*” (2016, 35). As Madeleine herself puts it, the song is “moulding” (Crimp 2012a, 85) those “hundreds and hundreds of gleaming eyes [that] are locked” (Crimp 2012a, 85) onto Uncle Bob’s (Crimp 2012, 85).

Given this state of affairs, as Massumi argues, meaningful resistance, or “alternative political action does not have to fight against the idea that power has become affective, but rather has to learn to function itself on that same level –meet affective modulation with affective modulation” (2015, 34). It is in this context that Uncle Bob, who is seen to have doubts with respect to the lectures and what he “[is] to say” (Crimp 2012a, 79) to the citizens, introduces a series of “negative affects” (Ngai 2005, 3), such as self-doubt, vulnerability and dispossession, in order to confront Madeleine’s “verticality”. It is specifically through Uncle Bob’s monologue that the play interpellates spectators as “response-able” (Lehmann [2006] 2007, 185) witnesses of the destruction of solidarity and self-awareness in neoliberal, late capitalist societies:

Uncle Bob: What lectures? Where are the citizens? Why aren’t they thronging the staircase? Or using small plastic cups to drink coffee? Why can’t I hear the small plastic cups crackle? Is it I’m going deaf? You talk about the world but I listen and listen and I still can’t hear it. Where has the world gone? What is it we’ve done? –did we select and click?– mmm? Have we deleted it by mistake? Because I look out of that window and I don’t know what I’m seeing just like I’m opening my mouth now, sweetheart –look at it– look –opening it now– here –my mouth– now –look at it– and I don’t know what’s coming out –is this what I’m saying or is this what you’ve said I’m to say? How do I know? When will I ever remember? And of course I’m happy but I feel like I’m one of those characters Madeleine crossing a bridge and the bridge is collapsing behind me slat by slat by slat but I’m still running on –why? What’s holding me up? (Crimp 2012a, 84)

¹⁴ In an interview with Dan Rebellato, Crimp confirmed this, claiming that Part One of *In the Republic of Happiness* represents the institution of the family, Part Two the institution of the individual, and Part Three the institution of the state (Crimp 2013a).

Uncle Bob presents himself as a “depressed” (Cvetkovich 2012) or failed individual who inhabits the margins of the dominant emotional and normative regimes and confronts Madeleine with the “negative affects” (Ngai 2005, 3) denied by the dominant, late capitalist definition of happiness. Through the metaphor of the collapsing bridge, he laments the absence of affects of connection and solidarity in late capitalism, as well as of ethical structures that can sustain individuals. Thus, he portrays a landscape of the destruction and precariousness brought about by the late capitalist state, and of the disconnection from their politicians, on the part of individuals, who are no longer “thronging the staircase”. His performance is especially subversive because it presents failure “as ‘a hidden history of pessimism in a culture of optimism’” (Halberstam 2011, 88), or as the negative, repressed affects that “lie quietly behind [Madeleine’s] story of success” (2011, 88)¹⁵.

His speech seeks to interpellate spectators regarding the atomization of the subject in late capitalism, which violently erodes forms of community, equality and solidarity in favor of radical consumerism and inequality¹⁶. Uncle Bob’s affective labour is a “performative, theatrical or aesthetic approach to politics” (Crimp 2012a, 34) and, according to Massumi, the most effective form of resistance given power’s affective character¹⁷. And indeed, his appeal to vulnerability clearly destabilizes Madeleine, as she seeks to divert his attention by suggesting they could take “a trip” somewhere (Crimp 2012, 86)¹⁸. As Massumi puts it, affective expressions like anger or laughter –and Uncle Bob’s monologue might be pronounced in anger, since Madeleine asks him not to “shout” (Crimp 2012a, 85)– “are perhaps the most powerful because they interrupt a situation” (2015, 8). And he continues,

[...] They interrupt the flow of meaning that’s taking place: the normalized interrelations and interactions that are happening and functions that are being fulfilled. Because of that, they are interruptions of something that doesn’t fit. Anger, for instance, forces the situation to attention, it forces a pause filled with an intensity that is often too extreme to be expressed in words. [...] In that sense it’s brought something positive out –a reconfiguration [...] The overload of the situation is such that, even if you refrain from a gesture, that itself is a gesture [...] [A]ll the possibilities are present, packed into the present moment. (Massumi 2015, 8)

In the theatre, disruptions such as these may open spaces for intersubjectivity amongst spectators, “producing relational space-times [...] that try to shake off the constraints of the ideology of mass communications” (Bourriaud [1998] 2006, 166). Indeed, in situations such as these, the spectators’ thought takes place “in the body, through a kind of instantaneous assessment of affect, an assessment of potential directions and situational outcomes [...] That affective loading and how it plays out is an ethical act, because it affects where people might go or what they might do as a result” (Massumi 2015, 9–11). Arguably, from this point of view, through these subversive affects, Uncle Bob is seeking to establish contact with the “citizens”/spectators, which may enable for new forms of subjectivity and community to come into being. Even if, in the play, power relations are reconstituted according to the status quo just a little afterwards, spectators might indeed seize on such affective moment and recognize it as a situation of ethical possibility.

In Cooke’s production, the stage was designed as a poetic space that was offered as a possible vehicle of transformation for spectators, triggering their imaginative search for new ethical paradigms. Part Three, indeed, takes place in “[a]n enormous room. Daylight. Large windows suggest a

¹⁵ In the original 2013 production, Crimp and Cooke emphasized Madeleine’s “verticality” through the physical interaction they kept on stage, and through the details of the *mise-en-scène*. Cooke himself has claimed he sees Madeleine as “a kind of embodiment of capitalist individualism – always promising fulfilment and salvation to Bob, but withdrawing it when he gets close” (qtd. in Angelaki 2017, 150).

¹⁶ Uncle Bob and Madeleine’s republic ironically epitomizes neoliberalism, since it has become increasingly individualist, unilateral and “independent” to the point that it has become a republic of two, and the citizens have disappeared. Aillot asserts that the title of the play itself, *In the Republic of Happiness*, is transgressive in itself, since it “presents an ideal of happiness that has been recuperated by politics, and is associated to a regime; the republic. The nominalization of the adjective ‘happy’ and its transformation into a proper noun turn happiness not into an ideal that must be achieved, but into a fixed concept carved in marble” (2016). In French: “il présente un idéal de bonheur récupéré par le politique, associé à un régime: la république. La nominalisation de l’adjectif ‘happy’ et sa transformation en un nom propre font du bonheur non plus un idéal à atteindre, mais un concept figé, gravé dans le marbre” (2016).

¹⁷ See Andy Smith’s *Commonwealth* (2012) for another play that also seeks to tap into the affective potential of the theatrical situation to offer spectators “hope” (Smith 2015, 59) and “chances to resist” (Smith 2015, 59), given the “things that affect all of their lives” (Smith 2015, 59; emphasis added). *Commonwealth* is narrated by a speaker who directly asks spectators to imagine a similar community to theirs and “think about how we are together” (Smith 2015, 58), thus also trying to have an incidence on spectators’ bodies and capacity to act.

¹⁸ Their dialogue at this point clearly resonates with Richard and Corinne’s conversation in *The Country* (Crimp [2000] 2005), where Richard seeks to divert his wife’s attention after her denunciation of his behaviour by suggesting they could “drive somewhere” (359). As in *The City* (2008), in *In the Republic of Happiness* it is a woman who occupies a position of power. In this sense, both plays aim to reconsider the gender politics of *The Country*, which takes a more pronounced female bias, and are exercises in self-questioning on Crimp’s part.

green landscape –but the landscape is indistinct. The room is completely empty– except, perhaps, for what looks like an abandoned office-type desk. Uncle Bob is alone. He listens” (Crimp 2012a, 77), in a stage picture that is very reminiscent of the “scenarios, dreamscapes, or frescoes of the skull” (2011, 97) spectators encounter in Crimp’s plays, according to Martin Middeke. Crimp and Cooke, indeed, turned the stage into a Magritte-like painting dominated by white walls and echoing emptiness, which suggested to spectators that they found themselves within the consciousness of Uncle Bob, that is, within the “vertical” (Cavarero 2011a, 195), individualist, neoliberal subject, and, as shall be seen, it interpellated them to search for a new ethics grounded instead on “dispossession” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 3).

It is in this context that Uncle Bob seeks for a more physical relationship with Madeleine, asking her to look at his mouth (Crimp 2012a, 84), or, as Madeleine despondently says, “thrash[ing] and reaching for between [her] legs” (Crimp 2012a, 83). The emptiness of the *mise-en-scène*, and Uncle Bob’s yearning for Madeleine and his openness to her, indeed, suggested Nancy’s “singular being” and the need for the “unilateral ‘inclination’” (Cavarero 2011a, 195) towards the Other as the basis for a reconstruction of happiness, ethics and of community. Ultimately, then, the dramatization of Uncle Bob’s monologue and his performance of failure is part and parcel of a search for a new ethics grounded on “dispossession” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 3) and vulnerability.

Conclusion

In the Republic of Happiness enacts a critique of the late capitalist “happiness wish” (Ahmed 2010, 2) as based on a materialistic or consumerist ideal, and dramatizes the loneliness and emptiness of such neoliberal understanding of happiness and subjectivity. Through Madeleine’s song in Part One, and by introducing Uncle Bob’s

“negative affects” (Ngai 2005, 3), it seeks to interrupt the “distribution of the sensible” (Rockhill [2000] 2006, 4) promoted by late capitalist societies of control or of “spectacle”, thus inviting spectators to reassess the dominant notions of happiness. At the same time, Cooke’s radically poetic and affective *mise-en-scène* sought to contribute to disrupt the obviousness and naturalness of the affective underpinnings of neoliberal consumer capitalism, allowing for “intermittent acts of political subjectivization” (Rockhill [2000] 2004, 3) in spectators, for them to find new definitions of happiness, outside the late capitalist model.

At the same time, the play redefines ethics in affective and contingent terms and as that which “confirms, facilitates, and enhances the subject’s *potentia* –the capacity to express his or her freedom” (Braidotti 2008, 186). From this point of view, and if the “good”, according to Spinoza, is what brings “maximum potential and connection to [a] situation” (Massumi 2015, 11-2), then happiness could be redefined in terms of “the struggle for possibility” (Ahmed 2012, 222). That is, as “the sense of being fully alive to the world we are in at the moment, whatever triggers that heightened state of affirmation in the time and space we occupy” (Segal 2017, 77). In Massumi’s affective terms, it should consist on “prying open” the spaces that would enable individuals to create “a fabric of heightened states” between them, between which “the greatest number [...] of connecting routes would exist” (1987, xv).

Crimp thus presents an affective textual and stage poetics, which consists in opening social interstices to create ethical “worlds of subjectivation” (Bourriaud [1998] 2006, 170), and ever more dense, “deep[er]” (Crimp 2012a, 37) forms of existing. Against the dominant, “vertical” (Cavarero 2011a, 195) emotions of neoliberal consumer capitalism, which reflect an understanding of happiness in private, individualistic terms, the play thus subversively redefines being as intensive and “driven by affect” (Braidotti 2008, 185), and demonstrates that our existence is always in itself collective.



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