

The Mise en Scène of Post-Human Thinking

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In considering how we may rethink what is human in relation to the non-human, the inhuman, the sub-human and the post-human, I hope to contribute to such rethinking from a reconsideration of thinking itself, a reconsideration that works towards an understanding of human thinking as inseparable from the non-human, and of thinking as something that we do in the world, as part of the world and from within a condition of entanglement with the world. This is an understanding of thinking as something that proceeds through what Karen Barad describes as *apparatuses*: dynamic configurations that include humans as well as matter, things, discourse and other non-human elements.

Barad's reflections on the apparatus are part of her well-known book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Meaning and Matter* (2007). A book that, as she herself puts it, is all about entanglements. On the very first page she writes:

This book is about entanglements. To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions: rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating.^[1]

Barad's book is a critique of an understanding of the scientific knower as an autonomous subject distinct from and at a distance from the known. Instead, she argues for an understanding of knowing that acknowledges the fundamental entanglement of the knower and the known, as well as the fundamental performativity of practices of knowing. This brings her to an understanding of knowing as:

a distributed practice that includes the larger material arrangement. To the extent that humans participate in scientific or other practices of knowing, they do so as part of the larger material configuration of the world and its ongoing open-ended articulation.^[2]

In the following, my point is not be about scientific knowledge but about thinking. Taking Barad's observations on entanglement as a general condition of existence to heart, I argue for an understanding of human thinking as similarly happening in a condition of entanglement with the world, and as fundamentally performative. I will do so in dialogue with a selection of artistic performances and installations that I propose to understand as *thought-apparatuses*.

Barad points to the importance of insights in performativity as developed in social sciences and humanities, yet she does not take into consideration the knowledge and expertise embodied in the arts. It seems that much is to be gained from a closer look at contemporary performances and installations as examples of thinking understood as a distributed practice in which humans participate as part of larger material discursive configurations. I show how when understood as thought-apparatuses these creations may contribute to fleshing out an understanding of thinking as something that we do in the world, as part of the world, and from within a condition of entanglement with the world.

In the context of theatre and performance, the notion of the apparatus brings to mind a history of understanding the theatrical apparatus as a machine to produce illusions, and a history in which such machinery sets the stage for the representation of dramatic texts and of human performers as the central focus of attention. However, already since the beginning of the twentieth century, avant-garde theatre makers have resisted such understanding of theatrical staging in favour of practices of staging that foreground the here and now of the theatrical event, that decentralise human performers and that present what with Barad we may call material discursive formations: compositions of space, light, sound, music, texts, movement and gesture that take audiences along in experiences, trigger associations and challenge them to make sense of what they encounter. Here I elaborate an understanding of several of such works as thought-apparatuses and show how these constellations of elements engage their audiences in acts of material thinking, crossing over between the conceptual and the aesthetic. This approach combines Barad's understanding of the apparatus with on the one hand the idea of the thought-image as promoted by Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and other European writers in the 1930s and 1940s and, on the other hand, a non-representationalist understanding of thinking as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *What is Philosophy?* (1994). Point of connection is the notion of *mise en scène*.^[3]

Mise en scène is a term from theatre that describes in a broad sense the arrangement of "all of the resources of stage performance: décor, lighting, music and acting".^[4] *Mise en scène* can therefore be used as an analytical term that draws attention to the specificities of this arrangement in an already existing theatre performance. It can also describe the practice of creating such arrangements. Although the practice of putting things and humans on a stage is as old as theatre itself, it was only around 1820 that the terms *mise en scène* and *metteur en scène* first began to be used in the way we use them today.^[5] The emergence of today's use of these terms is closely related to the gradual emancipation of theatre from the drama text what Hans-Thies Lehmann describes as the development from dramatic to post-dramatic theatre^[6] and of the director (and not the author of the drama text) becoming the central figure in the creation process. These developments set the stage for practices of making that, as dramaturge Marianne van Kerkhoven observes, are no longer about bringing out the structure of the meaning of the world as given in a play, but "(a quest for) a provisional or possible arrangement"^[7] or *mise en scène* of materials, people, texts, sounds and what more.

Approaching such arrangements as thought-apparatuses allows for an understanding of their meaning as not first and foremost a matter of what they represent, show or express, but of what they bring about, and how we may understand that what they bring about their performativity as a call to thought. With Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of thinking we may understand this bringing about in terms of thinking for which *mise en scène* sets the stage, and as the result of how spectators engage with the affordances of this *mise en scène* and enact its possibilities. "Mise en scene sets the stage for the performance of performativity and, in turn, for the staging of subjectivity" observes Mieke Bal.^[8] Bal writes about sculpture and installation art, and about how to account for their performativity as not exclusively driven by a subject but rather as something that is brought about by how the audience enacts its role as spectator engaging with the composition of materials or *mise en scène* that

is the work. Taking my inspiration from the thought-image as promoted by Benjamin, Adorno and others, as well as from Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of thinking, I argue that we may understand what is brought about by the enactment of the affordances of the mise en scène of an artistic creation to be a mode of thinking. I also show how these artistic creations as thought-apparatuses present a different image of thought a different understanding of what it entails to think than the one proposed by the thought-image. Whereas the thought-image presumes a thinker for whom it all comes together in a flash i.e. a position of overview somehow outside the ongoing interaction with the world these artistic creations present an image of thinking as a continuous unfolding brought about by how spectators enact their engagement, and of thinking as a manifestation of what Mark Hansen has termed *human implicatedness*.^[9]

Hansen introduces this term in the context of his discussion of current technological developments and how these confront us with a situation in which technology can no longer be understood as a set of tools used by humans, and instead has become an ecology in which humans participate. In way that resonates with Barad, Katherine Hayles observes that:

In the version of the human articulated within the liberal-humanist tradition, agency is seen to reside primarily in the individual subject. Individuals can be incorporated into larger structures, but it is ultimately the individual that possesses agency. As we move deeper into a highly technological regime and as the technological infrastructure surrounding us becomes more and more complex, it becomes increasingly obvious that human agency cannot ever be seen in isolation from the systems with which humans are in constant and constitutive interaction. In fact, ... it is a good corrective to see agency as distributed among both human and non-human entities.^[10]

The fact that humans operate as part of larger ecologies, and that their agency and sense of self is intimately intertwined with the affordances of these ecologies, is of course not new, nor unique to today's technology. As theorists of post-humanism have pointed out, this condition has merely been obscured by a history of human-centered thinking and, as Hayles and Hansen observe, technological developments now make this condition more obvious and more intense. This situation, Hansen argues, requires that humans develop better awareness of their modes of being, experiencing and thinking, as well as their sense of self and of agency, as being implicated within larger apparatuses.

Ecologies of Affordances

My first example is the project *Tree Drawings* by Tim Knowles.^[11] These are some of Knowles's tree drawings.



Fig. 1: Tim Knowles, Tree Drawings, installation view

Or actually, they are drawings by this tree.



Fig. 2: the tree that made the Tree Drawings 'by' Tim Knowles



Fig. 3: detail of tree drawing one of the Tree Drawings

There are more of them:



Fig. 4: a different mise en scène of trees, pencils, papers and easels

By different trees:



Fig. 5: another tree, paper, easel and pencil in another context

Knowles's *Tree Drawings* invite us to reflect on agency, what it means to have agency and the role that agency plays in our understanding of artistic creation. Using low-tech means, the project addresses issues similar to those addressed by Hayles and Hansen in relation to contemporary high-tech developments. *Tree Drawings* show agency to take shape from and within an ecology of relations. The drawings would not be there without the artist Tim Knowles. Yes. Yet, what the drawings are is not a matter of his actions or intentions alone, nor does he control what the drawings will be like. There are also the trees. And the trees are not capable of drawing without the wind, which in its turn depends on the larger weather system, the climate. How the wind interacts with the trees also depends on the structure of their surroundings, etc., etc. Useful here is the notion of *affordance* introduced by James Gibson to describe the ways in which environments hold the potential for actions and perceptions.^[12] Gibson introduces these ideas in the context of evolutionary biology. Environments, he observes, afford things such as walking, picking berries or growing plants, whereas others afford climbing in trees, hunting animals or catching fish. What people and other animals can and will do in certain environments will not only depend on what they are capable of, but also on the affordances of the environment and how these affordances allow them to use their capacities in certain ways rather than others.

In the case of the *Tree Drawings*, it is quite literally their ecology that affords the trees to draw and thus do something they would otherwise not be capable of. This particular ecology affords trees to create things that look like artistic expressions. In the case of a drawing by a human artist, we may, and often do, understand such drawings as the expression of agents who use drawing to express themselves, to communicate something or represent something. Which would suggest that agency *precedes* the expression. Can we understand agency here in a similar way? Is the tree a pre-existing artistic agent that then expresses itself in the painting? Or is it rather this ecology affording the tree to make a drawing that makes it possible to conceive of the tree as an artistic agent in the first place? And what if we take this as a perspective on human agency? To what extent does that what is perceived as human agency actually emerge from what is afforded by the ecologies in which humans operate?

Knowles's *Tree Drawings* thus present a reflection on agency that resonates in many ways with Barad's theoretical elaborations on agency and the apparatus. Knowles, however, does not make this point by means of an argument expressed in language, like Barad does, but by means of a material discursive formation. This work

not only invites reflection on agency and apparatuses, but may also itself be considered an apparatus: an apparatus that engages spectators in thinking. The work that constitutes *Tree Drawings* are not merely the actual drawings, but exists in how Knowles confronts his audience with a composition in time and space of a range of elements, including trees, pencils and paper, the wind, the art gallery, etc. The work is not any of these elements individually, rather it is the effect of how all of them together trigger thinking: how as a constellation they call spectators to thought. This is where a connection can be made with what Benjamin, Adorno and others aimed for with what they called “thought-images”.

Thought-Images

Thought-images (originally in German *Denkbilder*) are not images, nor are they descriptions of images. Rather, they are short prose texts that aim to evoke mental images as a result of how they engage their readers. The “image” in thought-image thus refers to what these writings performatively bring about. This performativity of the text how they bring about images provides a point of connection between philosophical thinking and theatrical staging argues Freddy Rokem.^[13] He describes the Benjaminian thought-image as “a form of writing through which philosophical ideas become immersed in complex and sometimes quite enigmatic performative contexts” and in which “(l)anguage becomes performative through a mode of creativity in which philosophy both thinks and performs at the same time”.^[14] Rokem refers to Benjamin’s text about Klee’s *Angelus Novus* as an example of how writing evokes a theatrical staging or *Inszenierung* of which the thought-image is the effect.^[15]

For Adorno, Benjamin and other twentieth-century authors, thought-images held the promise of an alternative way of writing history. One that is speculative in how texts engage readers in grasping possible connections between elements presented to them in writing. Adorno characterises thought-images as “scribbled picture-puzzles, parabolic evocations of something that cannot be said in words.” They establish “a kind of intellectual short-circuiting, which does not hold back conceptual thinking, but shocks through its enigmatic form and by that get thought moving.”^[16] Knowles’s creation *Tree Drawings* is not about history and is not a written text, yet similarly it invites audiences to speculate about compositions of elements and in doing so gets thought moving. *Tree Drawings* does so not by means of a text that conjures a staging or *Inszenierung*, but by means of a composition of materials, that is, by means of an *actual mise en scène*. This composition of materials in space and time engages the audience in what, with Deleuze and Guattari, we may consider a mode of thinking through composition.

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between three practices of thinking: philosophy, science and art. Unlike what their title suggests, the book is not so much about the question “What is philosophy?” as it is about the question “What is thinking?” Deleuze and Guattari present what may be called an enactive approach to thinking. They do not engage with the different modes of thinking of art, science and philosophy in terms of what these types of thinking are about, but consider what is involved in doing thinking in each of them. Doing thinking, they argue, involves grasping connections and relations. In philosophy this takes the shape of the production of concepts, in science of representations of states of affairs, and in art in the creation of compositions. Readers and spectators, in their encounter with the outcomes of such thinking philosophical texts, scientific results or artistic creations similarly enact a grasping of connections and relations as proposed by texts or work of arts and somehow make sense of what is presented to them.

From the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of thinking, making sense of a philosophical text, a work of art or a scientific argument is not a matter of decoding what they represent, but is the result of grasping the logic of the acts of thought proposed by them. From this expanded understanding of thinking we

can begin to understand artistic creations as apparatuses that engage audiences in processes of thinking that are brought about by how they afford audiences to participate in the material discursive formations set up by the makers. As is the case with thought-images, such thinking is not something *represented* by the creation but is *brought about* by its composition and how audiences participate in thinking unfolding from how this composition is calling them to thought.

Thinking through Material Practice

Thought-images, Gerhard Richter observes,^[17] stage a new form of materialism that manifests itself in a sensitivity to the materiality of history: a sensitivity for history as it takes shape in and through material practices of engaging with elements from the past, and a sensitivity for the materiality of that what mediates our understanding of the past, which includes both the materials on which we base our understanding of the past (texts, objects, practices) and the medium used to share understanding of the past. Such sensitivity to materiality is taken much further in the work of contemporary post-humanist and new materialist thinkers like Barad, shifting attention to the ways in which human ways of making sense and thinking happen in interaction with the material world, and within a situation of being part of larger material apparatuses. A similar sensitivity can be observed in the work of Knowles as well as other contemporary artists. In the following I will refer to three of them, namely Dries Verhoeven, Julian Hetzel and Milo Rau.

Verhoeven creates performances and installations (it is often hard to say whether his works are one or the other). Characteristic for Verhoeven's way of working is that he uses the potential of concrete material situations to think through urgent issues and phenomena. Creation starts from constructing a model of this situation that is then used to explore the potential of the situation as a thought-apparatus. In this sense, the creative process itself can be considered a thinking through material practice. These material compositions do not set the stage for the appearance of actors, but are themselves performers. If human performers are part of the creation, they appear as one type of material among others.

In his recent creation *Happiness* (2019) audience members encounter a small concrete building somewhere in public space.



Fig. 6: Dries Verhoeven, *Happiness*, 2019, in Utrecht. Photo: Willem Popelier.

The building has no windows. Upon entering the audience finds itself in a space that even with only two or three others present feels cramped and disconnected from the world outside, like a bunker or other secret hiding place. Upon entering there is a counter, and behind the counter, separated from the audience by a glass screen, a feminoid robot.



Fig. 7: feminoid robot in Dries Verhoeven's *Happiness*, 2019. Photo: Willem Popelier.

She explains the use of various kinds of psychoactive substances, from ketamine to cocaine, heroin, anti-depressants, painkillers, and more. Although her explanation does include references to their addictive qualities and other risks, her monologue is not a warning against the use of these substances. Her tone is light and her explanations are instructive as to how the various means discussed operate on human bodies. Her performance presents the invitation to consider the potential of these means. Her explanation suggests an understanding of the human body as some kind of machine, and of the substances discussed as ways of altering the operations of this machine. She herself is a machine too. Although much effort has been put into giving her a human-like face and voice and human-like movements, the construction of her upper body and arms is left bare. She is thus exposed as a machine explaining how we may alter the operations of our own bodies, as if we are machines too. Yet, although she appears perfectly capable of explaining and mimicking the effect various products have on human bodies as if to suggest that she know these effects from experience these substances cannot affect her robotic body in similar ways. Even if to some extent we may be considered machines too, humans and robots are machines of a radically different kind.^[18]

Although *Happiness*, like many other of Verhoeven's creations, has been presented in the context of theatre festivals, it does not tell conventional stories or present dramatic representations. Instead of being offered a story or the point of view of a performer or character to relate to, spectators have to find their own manner of engagement with the composition of elements offered to them. They invite us to be with them for a while and to experience what they do and what this does to us: what they make us feel, associate, and think. Then, in a second instance, they make us reflect on what this may tell us about the world and about ourselves. This is important to how Verhoeven's work triggers speculative thinking. His creations are constructed to evoke what Adorno describes so aptly as a kind of intellectual short-circuiting that gets thought moving, as referenced earlier. They do so by means of propositions formulated in the very material means of installations and performances, like in *Happiness*, for example, about relationships and differences between humans and

technology, medicine and drugs, the legal and the illegal. These propositions trigger thinking understood in a broad sense, as an embodied practice that is inseparable from feeling and experiencing as a result of how they set in motion associations, play with contrasts, suggest connections, and subvert expectations.

Many of Verhoeven's creations are constructed to make us reflect on how we look, and on looking as a social and cultural phenomenon. They draw attention to how our modes of looking are shaped and affected by assumptions, presuppositions, desires and fears, and how these are part of the cultural and historical moment that we share with others. His work thus shows all the world to be a stage, as Shakespeare famously put it. But whereas Shakespeare used this phrase to identify us all as performers, Verhoeven draws attention to our role as spectators: to how we enact this role, and how we are complicit in how the world comes about. How our ways of seeing, making sense and understanding are implicated within the real-life apparatuses that we are part of and how they are what Donna Haraway terms "situated", that is, inseparable from our embodied and geographically and historically specific perspective.^[19]

This situatedness and how that is part of the modes of operating of Verhoeven's creations and what they performatively bring about, is brought to the fore in unexpected ways by a planned revival of one of Verhoeven's older works titled *You Are Here*. I attended this work in 2007. At what looked like the front desk of a hotel I received the key to a small room furnished with a bed and a lamp. No windows. I knew there were others in more or less similar rooms around me, but I could not see them. Performers communicated with me via pieces of paper slid under the door. Music and voices entered the room via a speaker integrated in the wall. Reflected in a mirror covering the entire ceiling I could see myself, lying on my bed, alone in my room.

In a text about this creation, Verhoeven explains how he used to live in a very narrow street in Amsterdam and how he would sometimes be able to see glimpses of the life of his neighbour reflected in the windows at the opposite side of the street.^[20] This made him realise that every night, on the other side of the wall, only 80 centimetres away from him, someone else was sleeping too, someone he did not know. The same was happening on the other side, and above, and below: all around him people were living their lives very close to him, yet he had no idea who they were and what their lives were about. What would it be like to zoom out and see all these lives simultaneously?

This is what happens in *You Are Here* when at one point in the performance the mirror ceiling slowly rises and instead of only the room in which we find ourselves, we get to see the other rooms around us. Forty small rooms housing forty isolated individuals.



Fig. 8: Dries Verhoeven, *You Are Here*, 2007, photo: Anna van Kooij

Back in 2007, *You Are Here* invited reflection on how people that live close by can be complete strangers to one another while we are at the same time intimately connected to others who are far away from where we find ourselves, about how media technology supports the distribution of intimacy and belonging across distance. Zooming out, *You Are Here* performed the gesture of the map indicating where we find ourselves and helping us to orient ourselves to what is actually around us. Looking back in 2020, I cannot help noticing the resemblance of the spatial construction of the performance to the improvised Covid emergency hospitals erected in conference halls and sport stadiums. I cannot help thinking about closing the door of our rooms behind us and keeping the world around us at a distance as a way of protecting ourselves and others. I cannot avoid being reminded of people quarantined in hotel rooms, receiving instructions on pieces of paper slid under their doors by invisible messengers. Or how caring for loved ones became leaving food in front of their closed doors, to be opened by them only after I had left. Things that had not happened yet when this work was created, yet that have now become part of my ways of looking and begin to interfere with my way of understanding what this performance does, how it makes me think. If indeed *You Are Here* is going to be revived, this will turn the spatial marker that is the performance's title into a temporal marker as well. You are here, now.^[21]

From World Picture to Being Implicated

Verhoeven's creations are compositions of materials that make people think. These apparatuses are constructed in ways that trigger reflections about how being part of them as well as of other material discursive formations is constitutive of ways of being and thinking, and how our modes of experiencing, understanding and thinking are implicated within larger apparatuses. A similar mode of operating can be observed in Julian Hetzel's *Schuldfabrik*. The German word "Schuld" means both guilt and debt. "Fabrik" means factory, and I suggest we may also read it as apparatus, referring to the apparatuses within which our actions and judgements take shape, as well as the theatrical apparatus in which we similarly are implicated and that can also be used to draw attention to aspects of this condition.

In *Schuldfabrik* the audience encounters a succession of seven scenes staged in seven different spaces. The first is that of a trendy pop-up store in an actual shopping area. This store promotes and sells a new brand of soap named *Self Human Soap*, handmade and sold in a limited edition of numbered bars. Two shop attendants

inform the viewer why what is being sold is more than soap: it is, as they explain, an ethical and sustainable way of living that is also good for your skin. Their soap is “made from people for people”. Quite literally. It is made from fat left over after liposuction, and for every bar sold, it is stated, another one will be donated to a project in Afrika together with a financial contribution to the construction of a water well. This soap pampers your skin while it at the same time washes away your guilt and cleans up Africa.

It is not difficult to see how this scene and the staging of the pop-up store plays with the ways in which companies of all kinds use ethical responsibility and sustainability as part of their branding of consumer goods. Yet, *Schuldfabrik* is not merely about exposing and criticising good intentions as a business model. Instead, *Schuldfabrik* is constructed to engage the audience in thinking by means of a succession of scenes in different rooms that do not tell a linear narrative or add up to a coherent story, but where each offers a set of associative elaborations on the themes introduced by the shop in the first scene. These scenes include an encounter with a plastic surgeon who demonstrates the process of liposuction and shows how a mixture of fat and blood is being extracted from a human belly. The next room comprises an installation showing materials and instruments that were used to turn human fat into soap, as well as documents confirming the donation of human fat and describing the legal implications and complications of producing and selling soap made of human fat. Another room looks like a small auditorium where the audience attends a performance of soap foam cascading from the ceiling and flowing across the stage. Accompanied by dramatic music, the foam presents a sublime spectacle of ephemeral beauty, freshness, lightness, pureness and elusiveness. Or is it an ironic commentary on the promise of guilt, greed and gluttony being washed away in a flood of soap bubbles? Finally, the audience encounters a man who explains the logic of making soap out of human fat as a development project. This project, he explains, turns overconsumption, exploitation and guilt into profit and at the same time improves lives in Africa. A win-win situation. Performing as a combination of a television preacher, an insurance agent and a responsible lifestyle guru, he presents himself as having the answer to all problems. The result is an uneasy sense of no escape, of being manipulated and lured into something one cannot oversee, and of being implicated in stories over which one does not have control.^[22]

Creations such as *Happiness* and *Schuldfabrik* demonstrate the potential of theatre, performance, installation and, more broadly, mise en scène as thought-apparatuses. They demonstrate the potential of mise en scène for exploring thinking as something that happens in the world and in a situation of entanglement with the world. Creations like these do not afford the world to be grasped as a coherent “world picture” as perceived by a distant and detached observer, but instead confront spectators with the lack of such a position of mastery. Doing so, they present a different image of thought a different image of what it means to think than the one presented by the thought-images of Benjamin, Adorno et al. In the historical genre of writing, the image stands for how the linear progression of the text comes together in a flash with the spatiality of a constellation of elements. It is “through this double perspective of movement and rest that we can achieve what Benjamin terms a ‘dialectics at a standstill,’ the dynamic stasis through which the *Denkbild* as an image of thought is shaped by the journey of the storyteller that becomes transformed into the movement of the narrative itself”, Rokem observes.^[23] The creations of Knowles, Verhoeven, Hetzel and Rau do not work towards bringing about such mental images in which the linearity of writing comes to a dynamic standstill. Rather, their mises en scène take spectators along in an ongoing unfolding of thinking in which audiences participate as part of larger apparatuses consisting of human and non-human elements. Such participation may take the shape of being with the work for a while, as is the case with *Happiness*, or being taken along an itinerary through it, as in *Schuldfabrik*, or even actively playing role in its performative unfolding like in Milo Rau’s *Moscow Trials*.

The title *The Moscow Trials* refers to trials staged by the regime of soviet dictator Jozef Stalin in the 1930s.

These trials were not fair trials, but staged to prove the truth as propagated by Stalin's regime. They were show trials. The trials that Rau engages with in his work *The Moscow Trials* are not Stalin's show trials, but more recent ones, namely three trials against artists, curators and activists that took place in Moscow between 2003 and 2012. The first was the trial against the curators and artists involved in the exhibition *Caution! Religion* (2003), the second the trial against artists and curators involved in *Banned Art* (2007) and the third was the trial against Pussy Riot in 2012. These trials caused national and international outrage for how they were not actual trials, but power play by the Russian state using the Church and supposed disrespectful behaviour against the church to silence its critics.

For his *The Moscow Trials* Rau constructed a court room and staged a new trial strictly according to the format of a trial in Russia. He invited the people who had been part of the original trials, or, if they were not available or not willing to participate, people representing similar positions, visions and worldviews. And then they conducted the trials again, starting from the same accusations and according to the official rules. Some have called these trials reenactments, but *The Moscow Trials* does not mimic what happened in the original trials. The outcome was not set. Instead of reenacting the original trials, *The Moscow Trials* set the stage for a collective rethinking of the events that were tried in the original ones.

The Moscow Trials demonstrate the potential of a theatrical apparatus for a collective thinking through of historical events and, in doing so, they bring to mind the ambition of the authors of the historical *Denkbilder* to develop a new approach to writing history: an approach that is speculative and with a sensitivity for history as taking shape in and through material practices. Rau adds to this a Baradian sensitivity to the inseparability of matter and meaning and to how spectators and their behaviour and thinking are implicated in larger apparatuses. The construction of *The Moscow Trials* foregrounds the rules of the game of the court case as giving shape to how the performance may unfold, as well as the social, religious, political and ideological frameworks through which subjects come to matter and in which the various participants are implicated. Rau's staging thus draws attention to how practices of making sense and thinking are implicated in larger apparatuses that extend beyond the theatre and how the theatrical apparatus can be used to reflect on such being implicated from a position inside.^[24]

Hetzel's *Schuldfabrik* too points to being implicated. "I am German, white and Christian", he observes in the press release about his performance, "that's a complex starter kit. I am aware of my privileged position. It comes with a sense of guilt." This guilt is not a matter of Hetzel's personal mistakes, but of how he finds himself implicated in larger systems and histories. *Schuldfabrik* takes audience along in an exploration of being implicated and the ramifications of this condition. In the pop-up store the visitor is literally addressed as a consumer implicated within a marketing strategy. The associative parcours that follows draws attention to the economic systems, culture, history and networks of symbolic meanings and associations within which responsible action takes shape and is judged. Together they present what might be called a post-humanist perspective that foregrounds the apparatuses within which possibilities for action and judgement take shape, and confront visitors with the complex ways in which they are part of these systems and networks. How to be a responsible node in an Actor-Network?

Towards a New Image of Thinking

Creations like *Tree Drawings*, *Happiness*, *Schuldfabrik* and *The Moscow Trials* demonstrate the potential of artistic creations as thought-apparatuses to address and explore the implications of a post-human

understanding of subjectivity and agency, and of thinking as immersed in and immanent to networks of human and non-human relations that extend beyond our awareness. Their modes of operating draw attention to how human behaviour and human modes of perceiving, understanding and thinking, of human agency take shape from a position of being inextricably linked within larger ecosystems within which humans operate and the totality of which they cannot oversee. They demonstrate the potential of *mise en scène* for exploring and thinking through the implications of this condition in ways that build on and further extend the new forms of materialism that, as Richter (see above) points out, can be observed in historical thought-images. With their dramaturgies, in which concepts become thinkable as or through aesthetic sensations evoked by composition, they point to the inseparability of meaning and matter and present a materialisation of new modes of thinking as observed by Deleuze and Guattari, and also move beyond them.

The thought-images of historical writers, Richter argues, may be understood as “conceptual engagements with the aesthetic and aesthetic engagements with the conceptual, hovering between philosophical critique and aesthetic production”.^[25] The thought-image “reconfigures the relationship between conceptual and aesthetic categories, between philosophy and art.”^[26] Rokem accounts for this crossing over between the conceptual and the aesthetic in terms of the performativity of language and how this results in an image of philosophical thinking in which philosophy both thinks and performs at the same time. The thought-apparatuses on the contemporary stage, however, do not present an image of philosophical thinking also being performative, but rather, I would argue, materialisations of new modes of thinking crossing over between the conceptual and the aesthetic hinted at but not elaborated, anticipated by Deleuze and Guattari at the very end of their *What is Philosophy?*

Throughout their book, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between philosophy, art and science as three distinct modes of thinking. They thus present not only philosophy and science as modes of thinking, but also art. Surprisingly, however, they associate thinking through art with feelings and sensations, as distinct from philosophy, which they associate with concepts, which seems to imply a rather conventional understanding of art as having to do with emotions, sensations and feelings, and philosophy as conceptual thinking associated with the mind and rationality. A distinction that seems somehow at odds with their forward thinking in the rest of their work.

This distinction does make sense, however, if we understand the difference between art, philosophy and science in these terms as itself the product of history and tradition, that is, as resulting from traditions in how thinking has been practised and has developed as practice, or practices. Practices that are the product of culture and history and that may change over time. This possibility seems to be confirmed by Deleuze and Guattari’s own observation that sometimes modes of thinking of philosophy or science and of art become indistinguishable, for example when “we speak of the intrinsic beauty of a geometrical figure, an operation, or a demonstration”, in which case the logic of the way in which they confront chaos is evaluated in terms of aesthetic sensation and composition.^[27] Or in the case of Zarathustra in Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy, mediating in modes of thinking in which philosophical concepts become thinkable as or through aesthetic sensations evoked by composition. These instances, or these interferences, as Deleuze and Guattari call them, herald new modes of thinking to come. And that is where their book *What is Philosophy?* ends.

The thought-apparatuses created by artists like Knowles, Verhoeven, Hetzel and Rau, as well as many others, are explorations of such new modes of thinking to come. They generate new movements of thinking in which the conceptual crosses over in the aesthetic and vice versa. Their modes of operating present an image of how thinking takes shape in and through material and embodied practice. They present images of thinking that acknowledge the generative power of the material. Images of thinking as happening in the world, in intra-action

with the world rather than in the head of the autonomous subject, and as a sensuous and sensory practice in which mind and body are indistinguishable.

Footnotes

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
16. Adorno, "Benjamin's One-Way Street".
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18. A short video impression of this work can be found at <https://driesverhoeven.com/project/happiness/> (accessed 2020-10-12).
19. Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2016. A longer version of this argument about Verhoeven's work appeared in *IN DOUBT. Studio*

- Dries Verhoeven*. Bielefeld: Berber Verlag. 2020. pp. 136–138.
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 21. For more on Verhoeven’s creations, see <https://driesverhoeven.com/> and *IN DOUBT. Studio Dries Verhoeven*.
 22. For more on this and other works by Julian Hetzel, see <http://julian-hetzel.com/> (accessed 2020-05-26).
 23. Rokem, *Philosophers & Thespians*, p. 182.
 24. More on *The Moscow Trials* can be found at <http://international-institute.de/en/the-moscow-trials/> (access 2020-10-12).
 25. Richter, *Thought-Images*, p. 2.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 217.