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## Differently Married: Revising Wittgenstein, Remembering Bergman

### Abstract:

In the first part of the paper the author offers a frank reassessment of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy. He dismisses the *Tractatus* as philosophically irrelevant but points to the unshaken validity of the main tenets of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, especially the idea of speech acts being inevitably interwoven with extralinguistic, bodily practices. In the second part the author identifies radical limitations of Wittgenstein's thought, which he tries to eliminate by combining it with Foucault's understanding of power and Derrida's understanding of iterability. The latter link opens the path to viewing language-games as theatrical spectacles. In the third part of the paper the author illustrates the revised model of language-games/spectacles by relating it to two films, *Scenes from a Marriage* (directed by Ingmar Bergman) and *Faithless* (written by Bergman and directed by Liv Ullmann). This connection enables the author to enrich the model with an affective dimension which comes to the fore in Bergman's analysis of the breakup of a marriage.

### Keywords:

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ingmar Bergman, language-games, theater, power, iterability

*David Wood: I have never really understood what follows from Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's theory of the performative. Take the key example of the wedding ceremony. Does the fact that the performative is marked by the unavoidable iterability mean that I am less married?*

*Michael Naas: Well, differently married.*

Michael Naas in conversation with David Wood at the "Derrida Today" conference, Montreal, May 2018; unauthorized notes

## 1.

It is not very controversial to state that the early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, which found its expression in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, may be seen as a fusion of the two most important trends of modern philosophy, the empiricist one and the transcendentalist one. In this grand fusion Wittgenstein pushed the central motifs of modern philosophy to the extreme, beyond which virtually no move can be made any further within the framework of that philosophical tradition. What is meant is the tradition of the Cartesian, lonesome, disembodied subject whose highest – if not sole – activity seems to be the very act of thinking. In early Wittgenstein, the subject is reduced to the transcendental limit of the world it contemplates, with solipsism ultimately revealed to be equivalent to pure realism. There is a perfect isomorphism between the level of thought, the level of language, and the level of facts, an isomorphism guaranteed by the logical form. Nevertheless, the cognitive and linguistic capabilities of Wittgenstein's lonesome subject are not astounding. According to his extreme position, we can only think and talk of the most immediately given facts of our sense experience, which is ultimately rather sterile. Metaphysics cannot be rationally developed, and yet, in an act of the mute, mystical "seeing", we may perceive that the world as a whole is what it is – and hence free ourselves from metaphysical questions for good. In other words, what can be talked about is not worth mentioning, and what is worth discussing has to be passed over in silence.

The late professor Marcin Mostowski once remarked that the *Tractatus* is a book for teenagers. The field of Mostowski's expertise having been logic, he most probably meant that the logical notation and the propositional calculus developed by Wittgenstein in his book are rather basic if not misguided. However, his harsh judgment can be extended over the whole *Tractatus*. In other words, the book is not worth fighting for anymore. True, the "Preface" to the *Tractatus* will always remain a brilliant piece of writing, and the splendid, self-ironic chutzpah of its final paragraph will retain its value as one of the most hilarious passages ever written:

On the other hand the *truth* of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the rhetorical power of the opening propositions, of the 5.6–5641 section (the issue of the subject and solipsism), as well as of the famous closing (propositions 6.4–7), is still simply awe-inspiring. Philosophically, however, the book is dead and will not fly again. Its true value is, indeed, that it draws the ultimate and inescapable conclusions from the premises of the modern philosophical tradition, and hence it can be seen as its powerful radicalization, splendid caricature, and gravestone at the same time. But that is that. It is not just that it is as far as one can be from the way we mortals think, speak, or live, but that it does not take into account all the complexity of our existence. This in itself would not be a philosophical counter-argument against it, even though it already sets it apart from any use for any reader, but a solipsist (which, by the way, is more or less what Wittgenstein predicted in the "Preface"). The problem is that in its rather infantile vision of the correspondence between thoughts, propositions, and facts, it fails to explain how exactly it is that our mind and our language manage to refer to the world. Having ignored or even cut off all the other activities of the human subject but propositional thinking and all other functions of language but the constative, Wittgenstein remains at a loss

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1) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 4. The emphasis is Wittgenstein's.

as far as the very mechanism of this very thinking and this very function are concerned. Therefore, he can only end up declaring that they do work thanks to a dogmatically pre-established harmony between the mind, language, and the world.

This is the problem that Wittgenstein set out to confront in his later philosophy, which found its full expression in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Unlike the splendid but useless monument of the *Tractatus*, his second book, together with the overwhelmingly beautiful volume published as *On Certainty*, is still very much alive and in many ways simply correct. Three main ideas stand out as particularly pertinent. First, let us recall the very definition of a language-game: “I will ... call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a ‘language-game’.”<sup>2</sup> And slightly later: “The word ‘language-game’ is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.”<sup>3</sup> The simplicity of this definition notwithstanding, the formula should not be underestimated in its far-reaching consequences. In fact, it contains in a nutshell Wittgenstein’s answer to the question of how language works. In particular, it is crucial to remember something that, though so clearly stated by Wittgenstein, is often missed in the popular usage of the term “language-game”: namely, that a language-game is not composed solely of linguistic moves, but always involves extra-linguistic, bodily practices.

Of course, there are language-games (such as a university seminar, a telephone conversation, or an internet chat) that seem to be limited to speech acts. However, it is almost always the case that even the games that seem to be purely linguistic do involve some minimal extra-linguistic rooting in a spatiotemporal situation that includes the bodies of the participants as well as objects that surround them, while in such problematic cases as an internet conversation we can say that this sort of a language-game can work only because there is a large number of other language-games that are much more explicitly rooted in the extra-linguistic. Thus, when Wittgenstein urges us to think about the workings of language in terms of language-games, not only is he drawing our attention to the variety of linguistic behavior that goes way beyond the set of the constative propositions, but – even more importantly – he is stating that language simply does not work without a body located in a spatiotemporal setting. In order to respond to the question of how a word manages to refer to a thing or a phenomenon, Wittgenstein is not looking for any mysterious threads that would connect these two. Instead, he points to the fact that the referential connection is established and functions only and solely within a dense cloud of overlapping language-games that include, on the one hand, linguistic moves containing the word in question and, on the other hand, extra-linguistic practices that involve the thing or phenomenon to which the word is supposed to refer. It is also such clouds that are responsible for the fact that words with no clear referent, such as “but” or “however”, do have a meaning (identified with their “use”, or function). Moreover, the realm of the extra-linguistic practices that form the true element and the basis of the language-games necessarily includes a subdomain of blurred borderlines, namely, the sphere of gestures, in other words of the non-verbal signifying behavior. Finally and famously, the language-games are essentially collective, for only thanks to the intersubjective exchange and interaction of linguistic and extra-linguistic moves can language prove in practice that it remains in contact with the world – that it affects it – and has not gone idle.

This leads us to the second point. Being critical of the modern idea of the subject, late Wittgenstein mostly avoids the very term. However, in *Philosophical Investigations* he implicitly does develop a novel notion of subjectivity. Namely, to be a human subject means for him to be a participant of a language-game. However, as one can safely say that language-games do not exist separately, we should state that being a human subject

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2) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 8e.

3) *Ibid.*, 15e. The emphasis is Wittgenstein’s.

means being a participant in a multiplicity of language-games, in other words in a form of life. The form of life is essentially a collective phenomenon whose existence always already precedes the arrival of the singular subject, which in turn needs to be trained into the way one plays the game(s). Thus, the subject that Wittgenstein has in mind is necessarily a socialized subject of speech. Moreover, given the inevitability of the extra-linguistic aspect of any language-game, the subject is – with equal necessity – embodied. Our subjectivity gets established while we play the games which unavoidably involve at least the spatial presence of our bodies.

Thirdly, by playing the numerous language-games of our life we implicitly accept a dense texture of intertwined beliefs and propositions, which together pass for certain, although their stability is relative to the linguistic-bodily practices of our form of life, and it is essential that for the most part they do remain unsaid. The texture embodies our general vision of the world, but it also defines what passes for legitimate questions, accepted methods of justification as well as plausible answers within our form of life. As Wittgenstein writes in *On Certainty*:

The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules. It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid. The mythology may change back into a state of flux, river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.<sup>4</sup>

Or, perhaps most convincingly: “I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can *discover* them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility.”<sup>5</sup>

## 2.

All that is rather well-known and – to my mind at least – still very convincing. And yet Wittgenstein, even the late one, should not be served without additional spices. If unrevised, the impressive philosophy of language-games is ultimately rather sterile. I would not worry so much that, although Wittgenstein is so keen on leaving the crystal palace of the *Tractatus* and coming back “to the rough ground” of the complexities of everyday life and everyday language,<sup>6</sup> he still works with highly abstract models, and his “tribes” hardly resemble any real community. The abstraction enables Wittgenstein to study the anatomy of language-games as such. What is much more problematic is that when trying to counter the hyper-individualism of the *Tractatus* – the last cry of the modern individual – Wittgenstein comes up with an oversocialized and highly conservative, if not mindless vision of human life. We are to be trained into our form of life, play the language-games, and avoid asking too many questions, especially the philosophical ones. True, the rules of the language-games can never be written down, and hence the games are slowly and smoothly modified every time they are played, every

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4) Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. D. Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 15e.

5) *Ibid.*, 22e. The emphasis is Wittgenstein’s.

6) Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 51e.

time they are reenacted in a new situation. Thus, the participants who “follow the rules” are still, essentially, free human subjects rather than machines. However, they seem to be devoid of any passion and their world lacks any tension whatsoever: after the failed adventure of modernity, these radically sedated, rather thoughtless creatures are to play in peace their sad games that they have been trained to play.

If the philosophy of language-games is to give a more plausible (and interesting) account of the human life-in-language, it needs to be revised. Luckily, it seems to be open to various modifications. Here I would like to point to two rather different revisionary moves that, far from violating the general premises of Wittgenstein’s thought, complement it with crucial dimensions that the author of *Philosophical Investigations* has clearly missed.

The first revision springs naturally from the criticism of the language-game philosophy sketched above. Namely, it tries to make up for the lack of any tension, or, to put it more strongly, lack of any dimension of power in late Wittgenstein’s world. If we attempt to correct Wittgenstein from this point of view, we will find an obvious ally in Michel Foucault. Indeed, it is Foucault who has taught us most convincingly how to link discursive practices, power relations, and the constitution of subjectivity. With a steady hand he draws all these connections in the rightly famous conclusion of the first chapter to *Discipline and Punish*, a *locus classicus* which after so many years still stands out as one of the most impressive passages in the philosophical literature of the twentieth century. The whole revolution is conducted in three quick moves. First, Foucault shifts the focus from the macro- to the microphysics of power:

In short, this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the “privilege,” acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who “do not have it”; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure on them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down into the depths of society; that they are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes and that they do not merely reproduce, at the level of individuals, bodies, gestures, and behavior, the general form of the law or government; that, although there is continuity (they are indeed articulated on this form through a whole series of complex mechanisms), there is neither analogy nor homology, but a specificity of mechanism and modality.<sup>7</sup>

In the second move, Foucault ties the multiple relations of power to the variety of discursive practices that he rather ironically calls “knowledge”. Although his focus is mostly on the practices of the scientific study of the human, in fact he is stating a most powerful principle concerning the philosophy of language as such: there are no moves in the discursive realm that are not charged with power, and there are no power relations which have no discursive aspect. The two aspects should be seen as forming a system of mutual conditioning and permanent interplay:

We should admit, rather, that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.<sup>8</sup>

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7) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 26–27.

8) *Ibid.*, 27.

In the third move, Foucault connects the dual structure to the very idea of the constitution of human selfhood, which is produced in its given historical form by the process of subjectification. Thus, instead of searching for the mechanisms of alienation of the human subject, mechanisms that we would like to dismantle in the act of emancipation, Foucault urges us rather to analyze the ways subjectivity, with its identity and its legitimate ways of action, is established in the first place as an effect of the practices of power-knowledge:

But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not that a real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection, or technical intervention, has been substituted for the soul, the illusion of the theologians. The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A “soul” inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body.<sup>9</sup>

I am repeating this well-known lesson in order to show that already in its original form it is virtually ready to be used as the tool of a most natural revision of the philosophy of language-games. If we see to it that Wittgenstein marries Foucault, we can safely follow both of them on each of the three main points that I ascribed to them. Thus, we can arrive at an upgraded version of the language-game philosophy, which avoids at least some of the drawbacks of the original version. According to this revised vision, language, indeed, works within a system of practices that necessarily involve specific spatiotemporal location and certain movements or minimally the presence of our bodies. Indeed, human subjects can be understood only as participants in such linguistic-bodily games. Indeed, the cloud of overlapping games that can be seen as a form of life inevitably assumes a certain vision of the world, the bundle of “axis propositions” or “river-bed beliefs” that form the implicit background of the way we live, speak, and think. But the whole system is not as benign and gentle as Wittgenstein seems to have believed it to be. While playing our games, we are involved in the complex microphysics of power that permeates and conditions our form of life together with its implicit axis-propositions. When “following a rule”, we use the relations of power; we reproduce them and give them what we think to be a personal rendering. As subjects, we are established within the language-power-games we play as “free” participants who are expected to play in certain ways according to their roles, which are more often than not taken to be their “nature”. Thus, for example, disciplined by the discursive/power practices into being a wife and a husband, some of us, with our bodies and speech, play the language-games that together form that curious phenomenon called “heterosexual marriage”. “Honey, do you remember it’s your mother’s birthday next week?” “Have you paid for the school this month?” “Man, much is said about male domination, but – I’m telling you – in our marriage it is my wife who wears the pants.”

The idea of “roles” leads us to the second, equally natural revision of the language-games philosophy. This revision would be the result of a yet different marriage, one between late Wittgenstein and early Jacques Derrida. Also in this case a repetition of another old lesson is necessary, namely, the lesson of the seminal essay “Signature Event Context”. Obviously, in the second part of this breathtaking paper Derrida focuses on Austin’s theory of the performative rather than on Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language-games. And yet, however important Austin’s analyses and conceptual distinctions generally are, it can be easily observed that the theory of the performative is implicitly present within the philosophy of language-games. When Wittgenstein urges us to shift our focus from assertions to the variety of linguistic exchanges interwoven with the bundle of the extra-linguistic practices, he is effectively pointing to the omnipresence of the performative function of language as well as to the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of our speech acts. Every move in a language-game

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9) Ibid., 30.

has a performative aspect at least in the minimal sense that by the very virtue of being made it makes an event happen (e.g. a question has been posed): thus, it changes the situation on the board and addresses other participants to respond with moves more or less expected by the rules of the game. Thus, Derrida's criticism or rather deconstructive modification of Austin's notion of the performative can be also smoothly applied to Wittgenstein's idea of language-games.

Famously, at the very heart of the idea of the performative, Derrida identifies the paradox of iterability. The paradox touches every speech act and ruins its self-identity: in order to be what it is to be (a question, a marriage formula), the act must be "a citation" of former acts, a repetition, moreover, which due to the lack of the originary, primal, self-identical formula inevitably introduces a moment of difference. Thus, however Austin tries to distinguish "serious", pure, and authentic performatives from those which are "non-serious", impure, and parasitical, this distinction cannot be drawn, not even because the lines are blurred, but because iterability, "citationality" accounts for the very effectiveness of the performative. Derrida writes:

Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable statement, in other words if the expressions I use to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* to an iterable model, and therefore if they were not identifiable in a way as "citation"? Not that citationality here is of the same type as in a play, a philosophical reference, or the recitation of a poem. This is why there is a relative specificity, as Austin says, a "relative purity" of performatives. But this relative purity is not constructed against citationality or iterability, but against other kinds of iteration within a general iterability which is the effraction into the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every speech act.<sup>10</sup>

Now, if we see to it that Wittgenstein marries Derrida, we will witness two interesting shifts within the philosophy of language-games. First, we may say that we can see Wittgenstein moving away from a quasi-hermeneutic position and entering the deconstructive realm. It should be noted that in its originary form (i.e. before the dual – bigamist! – marriage with Foucault and Derrida) Wittgenstein's thought manifests an affiliation with the work of post-Heideggerian hermeneutic thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer or Paul Ricoeur, one of the crucial differences being the moment I have emphasized above, namely the stress that Wittgenstein puts on the importance of the body and extra-linguistic practices. The act of "following a rule" within a language-game can be seen as a practical form of the interpretative "application", which Gadamer points to as the model for the act of understanding. By making a move in a language-game we reapply the unwritten rule, "understand" it practically – in an act of practical wisdom that Aristotle called *phronesis* – and thus offer its new interpretation.<sup>11</sup> According to this quasi-hermeneutic reading of Wittgenstein, every "proper" move within a language-game fully and legitimately embodies the rule it practically interprets and on this ground it can be perceived as both identical with itself and belonging to a larger class of moves called questions, orders, exclamations and so forth.

If, however, we link Wittgenstein to Derrida rather than to Gadamer, then we shall begin to perceive the idea of "following a rule" in terms of differentiating/repetitive iterability and citationality rather than in terms of the interpretative understanding. Thus, we would have to follow Derrida in pointing to the internal split, the non-identity of every individual move within a language-game, which is dialectically hidden within

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10) Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 326.

11) Concerning this connection between the idea of understanding and the idea of application, as well as the reference to Aristotle's vision of *phronesis*, see: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 306–336.

its very attempt at being “authentically” and “purely” itself (being a question, an order, or a marriage formula). Every signifying move we make within a language-game – both a speech act and a gesture – is troubled by the paradox of citationality and so, to use the imagery borrowed from a later work of Derrida, it is inevitably “haunted” by a massive throng of previous moves it repeats and differentiates.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, both the speech acts and gestures tend to belong to more than one spectral chain of iteration, to be “multicoded”, and so they are sometimes charged with the potential of shifting the situation into an alternative language-game or at least of superimposing one game upon the other (say, a formal conversation at an office that suddenly gains the additional – and not necessarily welcome – dimension of a flirt).

Second, both the obvious inscription of “performativity” into the very notion of language-games and linking this notion to Derrida’s paradox, opens the path to another point of recognition. Namely, it is good to remember that the German word *das Spiel* means not only play or game, but also a theatrical play – and so to recognize that *die Sprachspiele* are spectacles. Of course, as Derrida notes, the iterability of an actual theater performance works differently than the iterability in different contexts – or, we may say, in different modes of language-games. But “general iterability” can be easily seen as “general theatricality”. This is not just a word play. According to the Wittgensteinian/Derridean rendering of the ancient trope of the world as a theater, within the language-games, or the language-spectacles of our lives, we play, with our words and gestures and other extra-linguistic moves, before ourselves, before our internalized others, and/or before the society that we think to be both listening and watching. Within these games/spectacles that constitute us as subjects we are haunted by the dramatic inauthenticity that lurks at the very heart of our attempt to say and do something, and so we find words and gestures caught in the (sometimes multiple, overlapping, superimposed) trails of iterability and sequences of citations, entangled in the very play of generalized theatricality.<sup>13</sup>

Just like the microphysics of power, this very predicament permeates the most intimate sphere of our existence. True, it needs to be remembered that the logic of iterability involves the inevitability of the differentiation of the rules, a force that can be mastered and used by systems of power, but which can be also used against them. It also needs to be remembered that, even if our freedom within language-power-games is defined by disciplinary practices and cunningly used as means of control (the soul is the prison of the body), the structures of subjectification do require us to be free agents rather than machines, as they need us to be accountable for what we do. These two basic observations account for the fact that the very mechanisms identified by Foucault and Derrida carry within themselves a potential for deconstructive, liberating subversion of the rules of our language-games as well as of the possible subjective positions for which they allow.<sup>14</sup> However, we have to bid

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12) See: Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

13) Here I am drawing additional inspiration from two different sources. My first source is Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the role of language in the mourning play (*Trauerspiel*): “The mourning play is nature that enters the purgatory of language only for the sake of the purity of its feeling; it was already defined in the ancient wise saying that the whole of nature would begin to lament if it were but granted the gift of language. For the mourning play does not describe the motion through the spheres that carries feeling from the pure world of speech out to music and then back to the liberated sorrow of blissful feeling. Instead, midway through its journey nature finds itself betrayed by language, and that powerful blocking of feeling turns to sorrow.” Walter Benjamin, “The Role of Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 60. My second source is the well-known definition of psychoanalysis given by Jacques Lacan: “Psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by language. From the Freudian point of view man is the subject captured and tortured by language.” Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses*, trans. Russell Grigg (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 243.

14) As for the most convincing texts in which Foucault’s and Derrida’s projects, respectively, reveal their actual emancipatory potential, see: Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 326–348; Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.



farewell to the idea of the authentic subjectivity beyond the stage of iterable language-spectacles charged with relations of power. By the subtle interplay of power and iterable discursive practices we are repeatedly declared (and by playing our language-games we implicitly declare ourselves) to be this or that – say, husband and wife – which certainly does not mean that we are less married. It's just that we are very differently married than we thought we were.

### 3.

Given the well-worn nature of the world-as-theater trope, the idea of the theatricality of language-games is in danger of being reduced to a catchword. In order to avoid this danger I would like to illustrate the model sketched above and, more importantly, give more affective flesh to it, by taking a look at the way certain paradoxes of the language-games of marriage are played out in two masterpieces of world cinematography. The films I have in mind are *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), written and directed by Ingmar Bergman, and *Faithless* (2000), written by Bergman and directed by Liv Ullmann, who played the main female role in the earlier movie. At least ever since *Persona* (1966) Bergman seems to have been interested in the theatricality of human language-games, but in the two films I'm choosing here the seemingly clichéd issue is analyzed in a most penetrating way and enables Bergman/Ullmann to reveal some of the deepest and most horrifying aspects of the human.

The protagonists of *Scenes from a Marriage* – the psychologist Johan and the divorce lawyer Marianne – are hardly aware of the theatrical character of their existence, and so they play their roles rather unknowingly. Thus, the theatrical predicament is rarely mentioned explicitly in the film, but Bergman sends clear messages that suggest he is treating the predicament as one of the key issues of the unfolding drama. The first signal is obviously the very title of the film: the whole movie is presented as a sequence of theatrical “scenes” with people playing something together and before each other. The second and particularly striking signal is the very first scene of the film, when Johan and Marianne are being prepared for a photograph and an interview on married life. The journalist shouts: “Marianne, let's do some pretending, can we?”

However, this initial hint may be somewhat misleading as it may suggest that, together with the actual outburst of the marriage crisis, the film passes from the conventional spectacle of the bourgeois pretending to the dynamic of authentic feelings, free from any theatricality. This is not the case. Bergman shows that, being human, we are forced to play our (sometimes shifting) language-spectacles without stopping, which obviously does not mean that – caught within the interplay of plays – we do not feel anything “for real”. One of his discoveries is that the bundle of language-games called marriage, being as it is the sphere of the more or less formalized feeling and more or less artificially sustained faithfulness and stability, a realm of relatively well-defined forms of subjectification and relations of power, is precisely this very domain in which the inextricable intertwining of affect and role comes to the fore in a particularly striking way.

In the key part of the film, titled “Paula”, after Johan has informed Marianne that he is leaving her for a lover. Since the marriage-language-game has been radically questioned, the couple does not know what to play further. It is late, so they go to bed. Obviously, they modify *ad hoc* the rules of the everyday marriage routine, but Bergman forces them to do everything, step-by-step, together with changing into pajamas and nightgown and setting the alarm clock for the next day. It is precisely because Bergman opts for the uncut, merciless presentation of the burden of the everyday – instead of an “edited” version which would break the continuity of the sequence – that the theatrical character of our life becomes so visible. The closed nature of the bedroom space, the heavy, unavoidable bodily presence of the participants and the ruthless continuity of time forces the married couple that is just breaking up to play its own breakup and, at the same time, to play the old language-game as well. In other words, it has to reiterate and play itself as its own copy. Foucault and

Derrida may help revise Wittgenstein, but it takes Bergman to show all the suffering involved in the bodily, spatiotemporal density of the element within which we have to play our games.

It is this very scene that is mirrored in a key scene from *Faithless* when the female protagonist (also named Marianne) and David (befriended by Marianne and her husband Markus) sleep with each other for the first time. The correspondence between the two scenes is clearly intended, as it can be seen from the identical positioning of the protagonists, the organization of space (i.e. the relation between the door and the bed), as well as the striped nightgown that both Mariannes wear in the two scenes. In fact, however, what we encounter in *Faithless* is not so much a repetition as, precisely, a mirror reflection of the scene from the film of Marianne and Johan. As we have seen, in the earlier movie the married couple that is just falling apart is forced, by the very burden of the everyday, to play, to quote itself once again, while at the same time trying to discover how actually to play the scene of breaking-up. Now, in the later movie, for the very same reasons – the density of space, the continuity of time, the inescapability of the bodily presence – the not-yet-lovers behave as if they have been married for years, a fact that is noted in a voice-over commentary by the more reflective Marianne. It is also worth noting that while in the earlier movie the couple ends up having rather desperate sexual intercourse (let's play it one more time), the couple in the later film sleeps without having sex: still only friends, indeed, but also a peaceful or bored married couple at the same time. Thus, Bergman is testing the limits of the marriage spectacle from both sides.<sup>15</sup>

The Marianne of *Faithless* is more sensitive to the theatrical nature of the language-spectacles we play because she is a professional actress herself, her lover being a theater director. Her last name is Vogler, which was also the name of the protagonist of *Persona*, an actress who passes through a severe crisis and has decided to go mute in a desperate attempt to sneak out of the world of language-games. This new Marianne (or Marianne who cites the older Marianne) repeatedly speaks of the theatricality of our existence, a self-awareness that obviously does not reduce the predicament. Her husband Markus, too, refers to the theatrical register: although he is already aware of the love-affair and thus he acts as a cruel director of the show, he ensures Marianne and David that he trusts them, for “the betrayal is not part of your roles”. This is also probably the reason why one of the most splendid and horrifying scenes of the film – the scene of exposure of the lovers by the husband – is (in its opening phase) filmed in a way that stresses its radical artificiality. The camera grasps the three figures from a distance, with the wife and the husband standing on both sides and with the almost naked lover sitting on the bed, just as if we were watching a movie about a theater spectacle. The exposed couple is apparently aware of the fact that they inadvertently found themselves on stage. Hence they keep on making inarticulate sounds: David is giggling in a most unpleasant way, whereas Marianne breaks into weirdly oinking sobs that could easily pass into spasms of laughter as well. The noises they make express their astonishment that they are bound to play such a clichéd scene of the exposure of lovers and that – the giggling/sobbing/oinking crisis of language notwithstanding – they are playing it anyway, although it is not what they have chosen, if they have chosen anything at all.

At least one sequence of images shows that when shooting *Faithless* Ullmann and Bergman were acutely aware of the above-mentioned multicoded character of our gestures and poses. In one of the scenes, having woken up after their first intense sexual encounter, Marianne and David are lying in bed with their heads on two opposite sides of the bed and the lower parts of their bodies covered with one quilt. Sometime later, after their first violent argument and fight, they fall on the second bed in the room, with their clothes on, but in

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15) Indeed, this very fragment of *Scenes from a Marriage* is based on Bergman's breakup with Ellen Hollender, his second wife, whom he left for Gunilla Holger, the prototype of the female protagonist of *Faithless*. Thus, Bergman remembers and reworks the same scene twice, once with a Marianne modeled on his wife, once with a Marianne modeled on his lover. See Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography*, trans. Joan Tate (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989), 161.

a similar pose. Marianne has her hat on her face, and so David starts laughing, with Marianne soon joining him. They are laughing at the ridiculous way she looks and at their silly argument. They are also desperately trying to discharge-through-laughter all the hatred that suddenly filled their bodies. However, their laughter is also a helpless reaction to the unspeakable horror of a truly chilling insight: that the beginning of the end of their relationship is staged in the same pose we saw them in after their first sexual rapture.

Now, there is one more scene in the film in which we see the same configuration of bodies: two people, a man and a woman, sit facing each other, covered with one blanket. The woman is the actress who plays Marianne. The man is the director. Indeed, the main plot of *Faithless* is captured within a narrative frame: the whole catastrophe of the marriage and the extramarital relationship is constructed or reconstructed by an actress guided by a director. Ullmann and Bergman see to it that the relation between the frame and the plot remains ambiguous: in particular, we cannot be sure if the director is inventing the story or remembering his own past (he would be the aged David), nor is it possible to figure out if the actress is only simulating her emotions or (perhaps as the ghost of the real Marianne) she is actually affected by the story. In order to make things even more complicated, the director – identified in the final credits as “Bergman” – is played by Erland Josephson, who, in turn, played Johan in *Scenes from a Marriage*.

Surprisingly, it is this very undecidability, the hesitation between the simulated and the authentic, that endows the film with an enigmatic power, and the ambiguous scenes of the encounters between the actress and the director belong to the most excruciating sequences in the movie. Ultimately, however, we should not be surprised by this effect. As we have seen, for Bergman (and Ullmann), marriage (and the extramarital relationship) seems to form the privileged realm of language-games wherein the interplay of the role and affect comes to the fore. Now we may say that the breakup of the relationship releases forces that cannot be simply ascribed to a pure feeling supposedly hidden under the mask of convention. “Divorce penetrates to the very heart of anxiety”, we read in the epigraph to *Faithless* borrowed from the German writer Botho Strauss. Indeed, the true abyss of anxiety, despair, suffering, and cruelty opens for Bergman and Ullmann not in the sphere of the allegedly pure feelings, but in that inevitable weaving and undoing of the language-spectacles of our existence, in that shifting zone between roles that is the site of the affect. The additional frame of the film, with its enigmatic relation to what it frames, enables Ullmann and Bergman to show the full swing of theatricality in the lives of the lovers, with roles falling apart and others being inadvertently taken up – and hence to show the true affective hell that opens in the rifts and shifts within the very movement of language-games that structure our lives.

It is along these lines that I would read one of the last scenes of the very last film that Bergman ever directed. In *Saraband* (2003) he has Johan (Erland Josephson) and Marianne (Liv Ullmann) meet one more time after 30 years. At the end of *Scenes from a Marriage* Marianne wakes up screaming and Johan is somehow able to calm her down. In *Saraband* it is Johan who, moaning and lamenting, comes to the sleeping Marianne. It is a torment from hell, he says, that tries to get into the world through all the orifices of his body. “I am too small for this anxiety”. Of course, Johan is playing a little in order to beg his former wife for mercy. Perhaps, it is also Bergman playing before us and asking us to forgive him his numerous sins. But one cannot do without a theater if one is to show the ultimate scale of human torment. The anxiety is “bigger” than Johan’s body, precisely because there are no pure, natural feelings that would be of the same scale as our natural body – just as we are no subjects beyond the language-spectacles we have been disciplined to play. There are only affects entangled in the play of roles, which do not exist fully beyond this play. Wittgenstein, even when married to Foucault and Derrida, had no intimation of the ultimate anxiety to which Bergman is confessing at the end of his last film. And yet, this very anxiety is the bleakest lining of being a subject of language-games. It is the anxiety of the subject captured-but-also-established by language, the creature tormented by the strangest interplay between being subject-to and subject-of.

If we were just natural creatures, our feelings would fit our bodies. If we were just machines automatically following artificial conventions, we would not have feelings at all. Now, as subjectified within the theatrical language-games, we are exposed to denaturalized feelings (i.e. affects) that trouble only the bodies-that-play. The affective thus understood is there precisely because even though we have been irretrievably captured within the language-games, our roles never fully fit. Thus, they keep on iterating themselves, retriggering the play of changing affects that accompany the movement of signs. This permanently shifting, unstable affectivity finds its culmination in what is instability as such: that ultimate anxiety, that horror of insecurity, which is the dark side of our freedom, a freedom that, ironically, is accessible only for the subjectified. And it is in order to soothe this very anxiety at least for a moment that Bergman has Marianne and Johan, Ullmann and Josephson, huddle stark naked. In the long run, this won't work either, just like the self-imposed muteness of the actress from *Persona* did not release her from the world of language-games: the nakedness is also rather theatrical, and hence it is no remedy for the predicaments of the tormented subject. Nor will the naked couple be married again, in a yet different, truly natural way beyond language-games, play of power and iterability. But, for the time being, the embrace does bring some relief.

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