

“Like a Form of Justice”: Disrupting Heteronormativity in Craig Gingrich- Philbrook’s *Cups*

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*This critical reading of Craig Gingrich-Philbrook’s 1999 performance of *Cups* illuminates the power of solo personal narrative performance to disrupt fundamental identity assumptions. I contextualize this review with Emmanuel Levinas’ project to uncover the ethical implications of intersubjective encounters. Rather than present a reading that bases the power to disrupt on the content of expression, this work argues that the presence of the performer represents an influential call to the audience to resist homophobic textual power.*

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In the Fall of 1999, at the Kleinau Theatre on the campus of Southern Illinois University, I watched Craig Gingrich-Philbrook’s solo performance *Cups*. The show is about, among other things, Craig as a gay-identified man speaking about the difficulty of articulating a loving relationship between himself and his partner in the face of heterosexist and homophobic discourse. When the work of a personal narrative performance artist presents an identity, that identity is already imbricated within a grammar, a pattern of historical density that surrounds the construction of sexuality and gender. As a

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(note: the online version of this essay contains a multimedia component of video clips and images.)

critic, I am interested in the analysis of an identity that lays beyond normative scripts that limit “love” to heterosexual relationships, and in a performance that may disrupt audience expectations of stable sexuality.

There is a residual belief that personal narrative performance is the ultimate story of the self, where an identity is asserted without much regard for different voices. People worry that the solo-speaking artist asserts an authority over the performance that mutes critique; indeed, it would be the ultimate performance of a single, indisputable reality. “The efficacy of personal narratives in daily life resides partially in their power to construct the illusion of a persistent, stable self [. . .] When personal narrative performance is constructed as offering a space of an (kn)own, it must leave untroubled the illusion of the stable self” (Hantzis 204-05). In other words, there is the fear that a “my story” will usurp a critique of the social conditions which help produce the “I” who speaks in the first place. The “I” speaks in the name of reality, leaving in place assumptions about the naturalness of gender norms or sexuality, for example. This is an oversimplification of personal narrative; as an audience member, solo performance is often presented with more examples of the fractured, multifaceted, and interrelated aspects of being than are performances that feature fictional characters and persona. I understand, however, that behind Hantzis’ critique lies a certain awareness that the solo speaking performer possesses an authorizing power that is unique to the genre. The solo performer, in presenting herself or himself to an audience, implies a sort of interpersonal situation where the power to influence others comes not merely from textual presentation, but from the sheer fact of appearing before another. This aspect of performance, I argue here, presents a unique power to disrupt an audience out of complacent expectations about identity and boundaries between the audience and performer. Judith Butler acknowledges the possibility of performatives that exist beyond the realm of normative sexuality when she writes:

the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and

unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. (53)

I believe that *Cups* presents an example of such a “linguistic impropriety.” In the following review I present an analysis of the show influenced by Emmanuel Levinas’ ethics of intersubjective relationships, by focusing on moments that represent disruptive challenges to normative sexuality, and to the conception of the solo performance artist isolated as a stable identity. In the spirit of phenomenology, my criticism is intertwined with the experience of audiencing Gingrich-Philbrook’s performance.

I am nervous even though all I have to do at the beginning of the show is open the stage door to let him in. Holding a clipboard, I step on stage and gesture him out. This is a reference to an image that appears later in show, where Gingrich-Philbrook reflects upon a reoccurring dream about the death of his father. In the dream, a man with a clipboard utters unrecognizable sounds, reporting of the resurrection of his father after a seemingly failed operation to correct brain hemorrhage. Later, as stage manager, it is my job to illuminate the show. The lights are down, but the spotlight is on him. I sit at the console, watching through the Plexiglas that superimposes an image of my face over the stage like a monstrous, ghostly head. I watch through this image of myself and see that beyond it, Gingrich-Philbrook begins to speak.

It begins like this on his script¹:

Start:
Mugs in place.
Notebook in pocket.

¹ (Ed.—the script Pounds quotes is a version with stage directions from the 1999 performance. It differs someone from the version published in this issue.)

In the booth I ask myself, “Is self-expression merely the manifestation of a thought by a sign?” (Levinas, “Transcendence” 148).

Even as a boy I wanted more;
More than my bicycle, and the pleasure of riding down hill;
More than the blue dog running along beside me;
More than the road’s curves and the feel of them, banking
in my body as I coasted around standing on the pedals. (1)

I know this feeling, wanting more. When have I ever be satisfied with what I have done? When hasn’t it seemed like just a beginning, a half-formed effort, and the birth of an understanding? I ask myself this question now as I did then. Why does this performance move me? I look at the script and then my face. Gingrich-Philbrook disappears until he says:

But I think I wanted most just to be there. To find myself sufficient, enough; something other than the empty vessel I felt myself to be; wanted to be content, steadfast, simple—like the rocks, trees, grasses, the shallow rooted everything resisting, everything resisting falling, everything resisting falling further down hill.

What I wanted on that hill, and find myself wanting still, is a new language, a language, a language to describe the delicacy, the simplicity of possibility between men—the look between us, and strong enough to overcome the thousand ways this look has been menaced by inadequate, impossible, words.

He wants, perhaps, moments beyond the realm in which things are said. Words in this “beyond” space function like coils of wire rolled about by hundreds of thousands of people, rolled, collided, spun, stuck, twisted and uncoiled into nets, into fences, into straight lines. Wire that is twisted around the heads, genitals, and hearts that make us into men, that make us into women. Words exist in the realm of the said, as they have already been sprung.

Language points beyond itself, even if it can't escape itself. As philosopher and Levinas scholar Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak explains, language is "more than an epos, myth, or *Sage*, more than a disclosure of a difference that would be restricted to the realm of ontology" (60). When Gingrich-Philbrook stands up there, and I get to see his struggle with language, struggle through language I recognize that he must be trying to communicate something that doesn't easily translate. He wants a new language, and he has only just begun the performance!

As scholars and audience members we ask ourselves "what is performance supposed to do?" Performances like Gingrich-Philbrook's move me so completely; I connect with them. Is this movement part of the purpose of performance? *Why am I so moved?* I already know the answer to this question, but its explanation escapes the language that I could use to tell you. At least, the answer cannot be given directly in a way that can settle once and for all why these performances are moving. By way of getting to it, I ask myself a different question: how can I make this performance live on, make something more out of the connection that I experience with it? This is the realm of performance criticism, but so often when I move into this realm I find the language lacks something that captures the vitality of the moment of performance. I want to make my words thrill; I want them to shout, allure, seduce, and subvert. But I am getting ahead of myself. Already as an audience member I have been disrupted. I cannot separate the performance from my own thinking. But this is just the beginning of my analysis. I will turn to how this performance can be disruptive to more than just myself.

Back in the light booth, Gingrich-Philbrook's voice and story disrupt my solitary existence. I experience a calling that pushes me beyond a mere recognition that I have been disrupted. I am moved to interpretation. In the booth then, and as I write now, I reflect upon the significance of this contact between Gingrich-Philbrook and me. And there is so much to say about what he said. Affirmation and negation: when I sit in the booth on the night of his show I play between that great old feeling of losing myself in something and staying focused on the light cues. I lose myself in his show, in his

stories. But another light cue comes and I pull out of my thoughts and push the next button.

I want to talk with you about these cups, about fullness and emptiness, about the cold of the cupboard and the warmth of use; about the handle, and the hollow, and the lip; about the sudden accident and thud in the heart that leaves everything changed, in pieces at one's feet.

About being a performer who is broken in this way.

About this performance; which is also broken, and will not conceal the conditions of its own breakage.

Levinas describes identity in expression as a sort of proclamation. According to Peperzak, “the affirmative character of identification is kerygmatic: to identify a being is to pronounce a kerygma or proclamation; consciousness proclaims this phenomenon to be this and such” (58). Kerygma, which usually refers to the preaching of religious truth, is respecified by Levinas to mean speaking the words that introduce a being. Identifying a being resonates with the performative act of naming; I am _____, or, she is _____. “All of them [words of introduction] gather things, events, and relations into the synchronic unity of a whole, in which the fluency of time is punctuated by the identification of knots and relations” (Peperzak 58). These knots are revealed when we speak forth, spinning ourselves into being through stories, through utterances, through our very movement toward expression. What seems to happen with performances that take narration (particularly narration of the self) as the point of their focus, is that audience members dive into that expressive moment in order to pull out everything that seems to structure it, predict it, influence it, give it velocity and direction. Furthermore, and in keeping with Levinas, these knots tend to happen in connections with others. Here at the beginning of Gingrich-Philbrook’s show is an invocation of sorts, one that functions to preview the show’s structure, but that also reveals some aspect of setting being forth in language. As a concept, kerygma suggests a speaking that exists in the realm of revelation, an expression somehow closer to the aspect of saying, as it concerns itself with the articulation of a being

The *self(se)*—which no longer surprises us since it enters into the current flow of language in which things show *themselves*, suitcases fold and ideas are understood [. . .]. A unicity that has no site, without the ideal identity a being derives from the kerygma that identifies the innumerable aspects of its manifestation. (Levinas, *Otherwise* 8)

When we speak a kerygma, we are also indicating expectation, rupture, and the beyond. In this case, the notion of other humans points to the sense of the beyond that stands behind any one of us. The expectation in this case refers to the claiming of human recognition, when we, for example, say a name. But the rupture comes when the full impact of the other person hints at his or her infinity.

The whole notion of kerygma tends to form itself around specific moments *in relation to others* in Gingrich-Philbrook's *Cups*. After the invocation of the performance, Gingrich-Philbrook speaks of going into New York City, to a coffee shop, and an encounter with a waiter. He describes how that waiter moves between the crowded tables, constantly refilling the coffee cups. This section serves as an extended introduction to the show, where Gingrich-Philbrook thinks, with a certain amount of resignation, about writing another performance. His talk gradually clusters around the appearance and actions of the waiter, who seems in the description familiar yet different. In words that echo in the space of kerygma, Gingrich-Philbrook speaks of the encounter with the waiter:

As a performer, I am interested in this feeling his performance gives me. I am asking myself, who is this “me” who allegedly disappears under his mistreatment? His self-indulgence when fulfilling his waiter role? I mean does he steal me from myself when he confronts me with his difference?

These questions point out the interconnection between persons and the familiar notion of a gestalt, in which a background suddenly becomes a foreground. “There is something about the potency of

this waiter.” In this case, the other person is what becomes prominent, but what implications, or responsibilities, does that entail for Gingrich-Philbrook?

Does he steal Gingrich-Philbrook away from himself; does that other replace the presence of his subjectivity, or sexuality? “In the at least momentary insistence upon his heterosexuality, does he erase mine [sexuality]—that touchstone our era has taught us to use to make sense of everything from life partners to toothpaste?” It is not merely the question of sudden prominence of another that is at stake here. It is the weight of the other’s identity. The other as a person is there in the waiter, but so is (seemingly) the strength of the other’s sexuality. Heterosexuality intrudes and threatens Gingrich-Philbrook’s non-heterosexuality. On the surface, this is a quiet interaction between others, one that is overshadowed by the power of heteronormative sexuality. The speaking forth of kerygma is complicated by this relationship, and it points to a critique. Thus, the “historical density” that makes statements of being legible also affects this moment of expression. To be a heterosexual is normal. And when placed side-by-side with a self-expression of gay identity, as it is in this performance, the heteronormative expression threatens to blot the other out.

But this is exhausting. Maybe it is enough that this show moves me. Perhaps I should remain silent in the booth ignoring the presence of my reflection. My head looks odd anyway, with a headset on it, and eyes that disappear as soon as I look at them. I think about the audience that sits just in front of me beyond the Plexiglas. I could be breathing on their necks if this separation weren’t between us. I dissolve into the show again. Gingrich-Philbrook describes how, between interactions with the waiter, he is writing in his journal on an upcoming performance.

Perhaps I was writing the story of how I knew I’d changed forever the first time I stepped over a body on the street and didn’t look back—assuming it was a drunk until a few block later when the sensation of lifting my leg to go across him finally registered and I realized he might have been dead; or maybe I was writing about that day at

Shakespeare and Company, a bookstore on the upper Westside—it's not there anymore, pushed under by a mega Barnes and Noble that opened across the street, that became dominant in that territory, that took over the readers.

In order to clarify the significance of interpersonal connection I turn to another significant moment in this show. This story occurs in the sequence of the show just after the description of his experience with the waiter.

I was down on my knees in the poetry section, reading the titles of the W authors, when I heard a noise; a man had come up to me. He had his arms wide open, and bandages wrapped around his head, and a fresh scar—pink and muddy robin's egg blue from a trachea-tube; it was as if he had wandered out of intensive care into the poetry section, and with his arms open like that, I knew, I just knew what he wanted.

I had been prepared for this moment many times, by a dream of my father. It started just after he died when I was twelve. And I had that dream over and over again, for twenty some-odd years.

This is one of the most moving parts of the show for me. In the performance Gingrich-Philbrook speaks of a recurrent dream where his father returns from the dead, from an unsuccessful operation to correct a brain hemorrhage. The man in the store opens his arms and Gingrich-Philbrook fills them with himself. "Now. I don't think it's my dad, right? You get that? It's not so much the body that I recognize but the structure of a damaged man with the taste of death in his mouth." Gingrich-Philbrook discovers from the nurse who follows the man that he is just beginning to recover from brain surgery. This experience takes away the recurrent dream; at least Gingrich-Philbrook says it does.

The man is more than a stand-in for Gingrich-Philbrook's father. He is more than a chance encounter. This contact illustrates the intertwining of the other with the self. The threads are hard to separate sometimes, and to me this is one of the points this moment

makes. In a sense, this (real) man's presence ruptures Gingrich-Philbrook's experience in the bookstore. At a level deeper than Gingrich-Philbrook could have anticipated, the "structure" of the man resonates with the feeling and memory of his father. It seems to me at this moment the narrative runs the risk of the kind of appropriation for the self that critics of genre seem to fear. Is the "real man" merely the stand-in for his feelings about his father, or is "the real man" a person in his own right? The man whom Gingrich-Philbrook encounters is not merely appropriated by the fact that he speaks of him. He does not speak *for* the other. Nor does he efface the alterity of that other when he speaks of this encounter. One reading of this moment could support the idea that this man is a replacement, a character trotted out by the narrator to resolve a story line. It could be the use of this person for the ends of the narration. But it isn't that. This situation reminds me of how Levinas is adamant that the other pushes himself and herself out beyond what can be captured. "The act of expression makes it impossible to remain in oneself (*en soi*) or keep one's thought for oneself (*pour soi*) and so reveals the inadequacy of the subject's position in which the ego has a given world at its disposal" ("Transcendence" 149). The story of this encounter, rather than an appropriation, is the revelation of vulnerability. It is the fact that this encounter escapes any simple reading (is this a replacement for the father? another element of the dream? mere chance? something fundamental in human relationships?) that points the inadequacy of the notion that the world and its experiences are simply the subject matter for Gingrich-Philbrook's performance. It is the performance, the enactment of this expression that reveals this. Levinas writes, "I am simultaneously a subject and an object [. . .] my voice carries the element in which this dialectical realization is realized in concrete terms" ("Transcendence" 149). This does not mean that Levinas privileges speech over writing. Instead, he recognizes the duplicitous element of expression, in its most fundamental sense. It is an assertion of self, indicating, enacting, being. But as an expression it can be (and is) reduced to the status of an indexical sign.

This is an important point, and one which helps show why Gingrich-Philbrook's performance disrupts the operation of a

heteronormative world. Levinas writes that “in social relations the real presence of the other is important; but above all, it means that this presence, far from signifying pure and simple coexistence with me [. . .] is fulfilled in the act of hearing” (“Transcendence” 149). The hearing of an (other) voice evokes the existence of that other for and against us. It intrudes into our selfish thoughts and demands an awareness of the other’s alterity. And we all know that alterity means something that we can’t appropriate for our own ends. Derrida takes metaphysics to task for a stated belief in an uncontestable truth, wherever it may be. But the kerygma is not a metaphysics that is somehow extractable, or transcendental to the human. The kerygma is more analogous to a guide, or a shaman of the self, who points inward and outward simultaneously. It speaks as if to say there is a world, and there is a you, and you and the world relate in ways that makes you a knot, on a line, in a net, connected to other knots.

However, not all of the disruption in the performance resides at the level of expressing identity. At one crucial moment in the show Gingrich-Philbrook illustrates the power, and violence, of the dominant discourse.

When I took the job here [Carbondale, Illinois], some of my New York friends thought I was crazy. Never mind the loss of bookstores and performance, they warned, you won’t be safe there. Well I’d tell them about the good stuff I’ve seen at the Kleinau, the Doug and the lab theater and remind them of all the shit we’ve seen at Dixon Place and PS122. And I’d say I felt safe here—reminding them of the puddle of blood I’d stepped in during the Pride Parade in Manhattan.

[. . .]

But I’d always flash on a certain inscription in the marble wall of the stall in the men’s room here on the second floor of the building. Wondering if it was still here.

[. . .]

It’s an everyday thing, you know, always there this inscription in marble, this inscription in stone like around the top of the library or courthouse this ethic of

destruction handed down like a sentence, like a version of justice: KILL FAGS”

At this moment, I bring the lights up on a sign that says “KILL THE AUDIENCE.” This sign, like the sign carved into the bathroom stall, appears to be an “official” sign. The carving in the bathroom stall is, literally, etched in stone. I saw it the first day that I was on campus. The sign in the theatre that night is the same little mini-marquee we use to ask the audience not to bring in food or drinks. We’ve changed the letters at Gingrich-Philbrook’s request. In the booth, this is the part of the show that scares me the most. We are living in a time where acts of hate and violence against gays and lesbians are an accepted thing. I worry at this point in the show that someone in the audience could stand up and attack Gingrich-Philbrook, as it is clear that only the most thickheaded audience member does not know that the performer is gay. It is not simply the speaking forth of the self (and the realization that that speaking forth is conditioned by our intersubjective relations) as Levinas states, but that self who is spoken forth is gay. In the context of the moment, the statement almost *seems* out of place, as if the imperative “KILL FAGS” is a disruptive thing to say.

Judith Butler’s work on performativity’s relevance to an analysis of the term “queer” suggests that there is a heterosexualization that is the paradigmatic form of speech acts that name. “It’s a girl” is the first pronouncement in a heterosexist regime that illustrates the power of the performative to create that which it names. Butler explains that the performative is one domain “in which power acts as discourse” (225). Significantly, she explains that power does not reside merely in the uttering of a proclamation, but also in the fact that those speech acts are reiterated. She turns to the example of a judge whose words appear to have a binding force that comes from the force of his or her will, or from a prior authority. Yet Butler finds “it is *through* the citation of the law that the figure of the judge’s ‘will’ is produced and that the ‘priority’ of textual authority is established” (225). The performative citation of authority is also the exercise of an authority that is sanctioned and supported by social patterns that recognize certain positions as more powerful than others. Thus it is

imperative to recognize an aspect of speaking forth the self that I have not alluded to thus far in my working through of Levinas and this performance. These speech acts exist within a field of discourse that contains various matrices of power that give authoritative weight to some utterances and deprive others of their effectiveness.

In the context of the show this is a moment where several disruptions occur simultaneously. In the first, this is, I believe, an account of a profound disruption on the part of the performer, who has already indicated his identity as being gay. It is also a disruption on the part of the audience who, if they are not already disturbed by the situation that Gingrich-Philbrook has conveyed, find themselves face to face with a sign in the audience that calls for their death. In addition, the disruption extends to the level of analysis that I am pursuing in this writing. I have indicated already that the proclamation of a gay identity is fundamentally disruptive. But this encounter, or description of this hateful act disrupts yet again some of the presumptions (or expectations) upon which I suggest that an articulation of a gay identity can happen in the first place. Let us return to the notion of historical density and how it shapes the saying, or kerygma, of identity.

“‘I pronounce you . . .’ is a speech act that names. But from where and when does such a performative draw its force and what happens to that performative when its purpose is precisely to undo the presumptive force of the heterosexual ceremonial?” (Butler 225). This is a question for Gingrich-Philbrook’s show. The imperative “KILL FAGS” is an act of hate. It is also a speech act that produces a queer subjectivity that is already victimized. “I pronounce you dead,” is another way to translate the writing on the bathroom stall that is in keeping with a heterosexist language that is upset by the appearance of that which is not heterosexual. The only option other than murder for a gay-identified subjectivity is a pathologization of the position. It is possible to see, therefore, the imperative as not disruptive, but “like a form of justice” that reiterates norms that call for the exclusion of non-heterosexual.

“In order to be presented or given, that is, in order to appear to become phenomenal, a being must deploy itself *in time*” (Pepperzak 55). It is possible to explain the disruption that does occur with these

statements of hate by understanding them in terms of the time that it takes to be a subject. Gingrich-Philbrook dives into this aspect of expression when he isolates the words “KILL FAGS.” A simple understanding of this is that these words represent the objectification of these persons. Like graffiti from the time of the Nazis, this text’s time is made present in the performance, and it indicates the operation of hate, a linguistic transformation of a person into an object of hatred. Kill the vermin, kill the fags, kill the audience. In our normal day-to-day some of us are lucky enough not to have our subjectivities called into question. For the gay-identified Gingrich-Philbrook, the encounter with the act of hate disrupts the outward flow of being as-act-of-expression, deployed in time. If, in his performance, we see the writing on the wall as disruptive, then we are experiencing the disruptive juncture of two discourses meeting, one which is the positive expression of being that is gay-identified, and one which does not allow for the expression of this discourse. It is a place that marks the limits of heterosexist discourse. The sign “kill the audience” does not have the weight that “kill fags” does. To make the threat toward the audience seem as threatening, he would have to be aided by a prop, perhaps the control panel to a bomb that he had placed in the audience, or a pistol that he pulls from behind him. But he wants to subvert the language of killing.

Common sense would have us believe that acts of hatred are anomalous events that happen occasionally. What Gingrich-Philbrook seems to mean in this moment is that the expression KILL FAGS is more common than an inverse; than LOVE FAGS. “I want a new language” but for what purpose? He is speaking to us in a language already. “A language to describe the delicacy, the simplicity of possibility between men.” But this is a contradiction. To speak of this desire is to articulate it, is it not? But this articulation stands over and against the dominant language, one in which the expression of an imperative, an act of hate, is so common that it is banal. But what is the alternative?

Gingrich-Philbrook stages his encounter with violent discourse, using the power of his ethos to convey and then subvert the message. This expressive act, I believe, constitutes the recognition of a beyond, a sense of interpersonal relation and responsibility. At the very least,

the performance is an attempt to open up avenues of speech about gay identity. As such, it presents a negation of the totalizing language of murder. In effect it personalizes even the hateful words “KILL FAGS,” making it problematic, at least for a time, in the space of the theatre. To approach the notion of a performative “beyond” discourse, I now turn to Gingrich-Philbrook’s alternative language.

In short, the alternative exists in the articulation of the relationship between Gingrich-Philbrook and his partner Jonny. It is possible that the articulation of this relationship defies expression in language, overshadowed by the reiteration of heteronormative discourse: “I don’t know where I first heard that relationships between gay men were ‘empty.’ Might have been my mother’s pastor; Might have been on a sitcom; Might have been something in Dr. David Reuben’s book; Might have been something that Jesse Helms said; Might have been something on the bathroom wall.” As before, his attempt to articulate the significance of the parting between the two men is made difficult, if not impossible, by discourse. Indeed, Gingrich-Philbrook says something that might indicate that he has given up. ‘For Chirssake—maybe we shoulda satisfied all of their language better. To hell with finding our own. Maybe we had it all wrong talking with each other through it. Maybe we should have fucked goodbye on the hood of the car.’ They didn’t, and he didn’t give up searching for their own language. But that language is something which extends beyond the words he presents in the script.

The solution exists somewhere beyond what he is able to write in the script. He calls forth the audience’s recognition. It is not an identification that he seeks. It is not the articulation of a gay male identity that is disruptive in this performance. It is a gay male that lives and loves, misses his sense of home, experiences moments profound and mundane; it is the presentation of a gay male that is so much like a person we could call a friend. There is an appeal that unfolds in this performance. To listen to it is to be taken up by it, as if we are accepting an invitation. But this is a powerful thing. This identification is in the strong sense, as in the identification with the *exemplar*, where we find ourselves living in the style of that person. Explaining the notion of the exemplar in the work of Max Scheler, Anthony Steinbock writes that “the exemplar solicits the

transformation of person; it is on the basis of this transformation that particular acts of volition, behavior, or accomplishments will follow” (18). This, I believe, is one of the significantly disruptive strands in this performance. The audience members who hold an investment in an image of stable sexuality will find themselves in a disruptive situation where the allure of identification with this performance competes with the desire to push this performed possibility away in fear or disgust.

He vulnerably reveals his love for Jonny, and the difficulty in articulating this bond within discourse. But in speaking these things he puts them in relation with us, the audience. He presents in the mode of personal narrative. The fact of him speaking carries a weight that asks us to orient to him as a person, not merely a person performing a script. The force of this experience comes regardless of questions of authenticity or veracity which we associate with personal narrative, but which have been complicated by performers and critics.

In the light booth, I experience the wish, along with him, for a way to allow this relationship between these two men to exist. I can understand how it is so hard to articulate this relationship. Yet, standing before us, Gingrich-Philbrook initiates a whole new sensation that exists, even if for that moment, as a feeling of wholesome genuineness, a real sense of contact and love between two men. At the least, the performance resists the “accumulation” of authority that a homophobic reading of Gingrich-Philbrook and Jonny’s relationship would bring to the history of “queer” and, by extension, gay identities (Butler 227). Butler says that it is only possible to articulate the “I” to the extent that “I have first been addressed.” This address “*precedes and conditions* the formation of the subject” (225). I suggest that this performance is calling out the conditions for the formation of an “I” that has different relationships with men, ones that supersede the limits of heteronormativity. In the show, there is central story of connection that, in a way, bonds the performer to his partner, Jonny Gray. We learn that Jonny and Craig exchange favorite cups as a way to have a reminder of their relationship and a feeling of contact. At the end of the show, we learn that Jonny’s cup, the one that Craig possesses breaks in one of those accidental events that happen everyday. The story of the cup that is

broken is also the breakage of the person, Gingrich-Philbrook, and his show, which is also broken. As he said in the overture, this was going to be a show:

*About being a performer who is also broken in this way.
About this performance; which is also broken, and will not
conceal the conditions of its own breakage.*

Like the cup, the language of the show is broken, disrupted. If the task of the show is to invent a new language, then it is an impossibility. Perhaps the task is merely to speak the desire, *and desire is perhaps the initiation of many languages*. And the experiences that he describes are what *does* that. “The use of the word wrenches experience out of its aesthetic self-sufficiency, the *here* where it has been quietly lying. Invoking experience transforms it into a creature” (Levinas, “Transcendence” 148). That creature is the show.

To speak is to offer ourselves vulnerably to our listeners. We are asking to be heard, to be assured of being identified. We are also offering up our responsibility to the listener. It is not anticipatable. To speak disturbs our selfish existence because it presumes that there is someone who listens. To speak is what exists in language, objectified as it can be, and yet points to the activity of language: saying. In the case of his show it could be the spinning of the stories. Or it could be how he gets wrapped up in that spinning. It is in this saying, a saying that is invested in the disruptive nature of intersubjectivity, where a rupture can point to new forms, to a new language, one which can express the delicacy and simplicity of relations between men and men, men and women, women and women.

Personal narrative performance is itself a kerygma, a speaking forth of the self. To be sure, all performance, all composition speaks a kerygma. But personal narrative so often takes this enunciation as its topic. This enunciation, or proclamation, exists within a world of discourses, some of which encourage, and others of which limit, hide, and even try to destroy these proclamations. The works of Levinas and Butler point to a phenomenologically nuanced reading of performance that encourages the description of performance and

performative acts that stand above or against hegemonic identity practices. In the case of *Cups*, the speaking forth of the self presents a normatively disruptive identity that calls attention to the power and pervasiveness of heteronormativity. But in doing this, it also presents an exemplar of gay-identified love, making it difficult to dismiss the message even if we are prone to doing so.

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