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Through the Arendtian Lens: Developing Statelessness through Gregor Schneider's *Weisse Folter*

Much more stubborn in fact and much more far-reaching in consequence has been statelessness, the newest mass phenomenon in contemporary history, and the existence of an ever-growing new people comprised of stateless person, the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics.¹

This article is concerned with the productive collision of the work of two individuals: contemporary artist Gregor Schneider and the political and historical critical thinker Hannah Arendt. The aim here is to specifically explore the intersection between Schneider's 2007 work *Weisse Folter*, which I shall describe momentarily, and Arendt's thoughts on 'statelessness', first outlined in her 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: a text that retrospectively attempted to retrospectively track the various politico-cultural stages that caused or allowed the acts of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes to occur. The development and/or creation of the stateless individual is a central facet of Arendt's observations; the term describes the various groups of uprooted persons whom had lost the protection of their nation-state in the early 20th century, existing within the interstitial spaces of legality, nationality and geographical place. In Arendt's words, the 'problem' of the growing number of stateless people during the first half of the 20th century was one "for which internationally recognized and accepted procedure simply did not exist."² She continues:

Their existence can hardly be blamed on one factor alone, but if we consider the different groups among the stateless it appears that every political event since the end of the first World War inevitably added a new category to those who lived outside the pale of the law, while none of the categories, no matter how the original constellation changed, could

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), p. 276-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 276.

ever be renormalized.³

What becomes readily apparent when reading Arendt's nuanced text is that historical fact and conceptual readings are inextricably intertwined, making her analysis of totalitarianism, and its associated practices and effects such as statelessness, resolutely embedded within specific historical data. As such, the attempt to single out, and make contemporary, any one strand of her thinking is a rather labyrinthine endeavor, for conditions such as statelessness are embroiled in the political and historical minutiae of the first half of the 20th century. Bearing this delicate balance in mind, this article seeks to reinvigorate Arendt's theorising of history by using her writings to approach the contemporary artwork of Gregor Schneider and, as a result of this, a contemporary political situation. Through careful application to a specific case study, her historically specific model of statelessness can be both updated and additionally interpreted to help think through and conceptualise recent historical events. Richard King validates such an undertaking by saying, "the issues Hannah Arendt addressed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and her work up to the early 1960s are as relevant to the 'globalised' world of today as they were to the events of her time. Already during World War II, Arendt had realised that the West was entering an era that demanded a fundamental rethinking of its basic concepts and traditions."⁴ As such, my reading of Arendt's statelessness pays attention to her historical contextualisations but equally abandons them to wonder what statelessness is now, and how such a concept can be utilised in both art historical and political thinking.

The outcome of rethinking statelessness through a contemporary artwork such as *Weisse Folter* permits the emergence of two further yet interlinked inferences of the term, both suggestive of situations constituted by a lack of 'state'. Whereas Arendt's version of the

³ Ibid., p. 277.

⁴ Richard H. King, "Arendt Between Past and Future" in *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, ed. Richard H. King and Dan Stone (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 250.

term ‘stateless’ specifically alludes to the loss of governmental protection, where ‘state’ refers to the socio-political collective, my first, ulterior reading of statelessness suggests a purposeful or accidental loss or removal of ‘state’ as *substance*; for example, when either actual or conceptual material is taken away, negated or neutralised. This inflection of statelessness is perhaps most evident when representational processes are suspended or prohibited, such as in instances of censorship or redaction. The second alternative reading of ‘statelessness’ applies in cases when the various processes of representation fail or prove inadequate: a stateless incident in this case indicates the *inability* for something to ever have state in the first place, pointing to moments when the ‘rules of representation’ collapse or break down, made most evident by the fact that certain physical sensations cannot be adequately described or communicated by visual or verbal cues, for example, intense pain. Both of these representational inflections of statelessness, alongside Arendt’s original definition, will come to light as I outline my analysis of *Weisse Folter*, and both are traceable throughout Arendt’s writings, for although she refers to the stateless individual as one without nation-state or representation by a government, lying beneath her political readings are versions of statelessness that refer to both of those outlined here. These separate, yet interconnected, rhythms of the term work to produce a more nuanced definition of statelessness, one that, I feel, has powerful political ramifications and moves Arendt’s thinking into the 21st century. But before looking to Arendt, and developing this model of statelessness further, the artwork at hand, *Weisse Folter*, demands examination.

Weisse Folter was a large-scale, wholly immersive architectural installation made up of a sprawling series of hallways and rooms, installed for four months during 2007 in the basement space of the contemporary art gallery K21, in Düsseldorf.⁵ *Weisse Folter*’s visual aesthetic is most easily described as modernist and institutional, consisting of highly polished

⁵ For photographs of the installation, visit:

<http://www.gregorschneider.de/places/2007ddorf/pages/20070317_k20k21_duesseldorf_001.htm> or for a video of the exhibition, visit: http://www.gregorschneider.de/places/2007ddorf/video/2007weisse_folter.html>.

surfaces, monochromatic slabs of colour and little superfluous ornamentation. Alienating strip-lighting illuminates grey hallways that are lined with doors throughout, most of which are adorned with nothing but an opaque vertical slit window. The rooms encountered throughout the installation vary in size and style; from smaller, austere and claustrophobic spaces that seem like prison cells (fitted with a sanitation unit and bench), to a misshapen, triangular room with a wall-length mirror reminiscent of interrogation spaces, and a cavernous steel-walled chamber evocative of a storage facility.

The experience of the gallery visitor, upon entry to *Weisse Folter*, is one of incarceration: the spectator enters the exhibition alone as only one person was permitted entry every five minutes. To add to this isolation, gleefully enforced by the institutions of both gallery and artist, the architectural layout gives the impression of an endlessly labyrinthine sequence of spaces, arousing an intense feeling of disorientation. This sensation is only further exaggerated by the seemingly continual return to the same grey hallway, lined with the ominously recurring deep-red doors. After encountering several identical hallways, it becomes near impossible to tell if one has entered a new space or returned to one they have visited previously, echoing Freud's musings in 'The Uncanny' of the deeply unsettling effect caused by "an involuntary return to the same situation."⁶ Other elements of the installation reinforce these feelings, for example, many of the doors lock behind you, erasing the possibility of backtracking to regain one's way, and so removing both choice and control from the spectator's passage through the space. The architectural spaces of *Weisse Folter* seem to constantly maintain the upper hand over its inhabitants.

However, alongside these visual and architectural components, *Weisse Folter's* spaces are equally designed to stimulate the other senses. The smell of fresh paint is unmistakable; the temperature is several degrees below comfortable; and the surfaces cold and hard to the

⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in *Collected Papers vol. IV: Papers on Metapsychology*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press, 1956), p. 390.

touch, working together to sculpt a space that is intensely unwelcoming and alienating. Additionally, and most importantly in my view, there is virtually no sound: the ceiling is visibly soundproofed, and one suspects that the walls and floor may be too. This works to create a portentous atmosphere for any sounds that would usually bounce off such hard surfaces to produce echoes are, instead, absorbed and neutralised by the architectural materials. Simultaneously, perhaps consequently, the air feels curiously heavy and stifled as if the space were sculpted from material, a crucial reading I shall return to later.⁷ And it should be noted that the visual is not the most important sense in this installation, emphatically enforced by the fact that the latent documentary installation photographs are misleadingly innocuous: they do not work in conveying the actual experience. These photographs are somewhat empty of significance.

But the curious sensory stimulation and incarcerated disorientation that *Weisse Folter*'s spaces stimulate is not the sole cause of unease; the work's title provides a further clue as to what is so unsettling about this space. The German phrase 'weisse folter' translates literally to 'white torture', which refers to an action that, in the English language, is more commonly known as 'stealth' or 'clean torture': an interrogative practice specifically employed because it leaves no marks. In other words, it is a violent practice named stealthy and 'clean' because evidence of its occurrence remains invisible to the naked eye. Methods of interrogation that would fall under the rubric of clean torture are any which leave behind no visible trace of the process, and often require no physical exchange between torturer and victim. Such practices could include: stress positions; solitary isolation; exposure to extreme heat, cold, loud music, light and darkness; sleep deprivation; starvation; water-boarding; sexual or religious humiliation; and the threat of death to the victim or their family. It could

⁷ Schneider has long been working on creating such effects by lining rooms with various imperceptible substances (namely lead and sound-proofing materials), creating a sense of unease and anxiousness. For more on this, and Schneider's practice in general, see Ulrick Loock's interview with the artist "I Never Throw Anything Away, I Just Go On..." in *Gregor Schneider*, ed. Paul Schimmel, (Spain: Charta, 2004), or *Gregor Schneider*, ed. Maria Ramos, (Portugal: Museu Serralves, Porto, 2005).

be said that the practices of clean torture attack the body's interior for its methods bypass the protective outer barrier of skin, directly targeting either the internal organs (such as in incidents of starvation or muscular pain) or the mind (including manipulative acts such as water-boarding or solitary isolation). Therefore the skin, which usually bears the traces of bodily violence, fails to bear witness to the pain felt by the victim. In a manner similar to the somewhat inadequate photographs of *Weisse Folter*, the skin of clean torture's victims are bereft of the marks of signification.

What is fascinating about the phenomenon of clean torture in this particular context is that it is a form of violence implicitly bound up with what remains imperceptible and veiled, severely problematising the usual processes of representation: it is a stateless practice. Nothing is left to see as no bruises, wounds or visible scars are left to evaluate. How can one empathise with a victim of clean torture, if it looks like nothing has happened? How does one testify that violent acts have occurred if there is no trace of their occurrence? And at what point do such actions transition from acceptable 'enhanced interrogation techniques' to illegal torture, especially when, as shall become clear, the definitions of what constitutes torture are now so permeable and subject to change?

Clean torture practices have fallen under public scrutiny in recent years after the surfacing of photographs of detainee abuse in Abu-Ghraib, when critical attention fell upon the Bush administration's dubious interpretation of international human rights.⁸ What emerged under intense press attention is that ever since 9/11, United States laws concerning the practice of torturous acts have been continually written, rewritten and erased, infinitely complicating what coercive actions are, and are not, sanctioned by the state. The now

⁸ Perhaps the most famous occurrence of the US's tenuous grasp on torture was evidenced by Donald Rumsfeld's scrawling on an internal 2002 memo concerning the use of stress positions on Guantánamo Bay's detainees. He wrote; "However, I stand for 8-10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?" Available to view at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rumsfeld-4_hours_a_day.png. First reported by Richard Leiby, 'Donald Rumsfeld, A Real Stand-Up Guy', *The Washington Post*, (24 June 2004) available to view at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A946-2004Jun23.html>.

infamous ‘Bybee memo’, written 1st August 2002, reclassified the legal definition of torture to be acts that resulted in “death, organ failure or the permanent impairment of a significant body function” or “prolonged mental harm.”⁹ In shifting the legal and moral goalposts on what constitutes torturous deeds, the mutability of the concept of torture is made painfully apparent. Adding to this the specific problem of *clean* torture, one starts to get a sense of how problematic this praxis is when trying to define, discuss and conceptualise it.¹⁰

Essentially, clean torture emerges as a practice that exists between laws, between legal definitions and depends largely on individual interpretation.¹¹ I would go as far as to suggest that because clean torture’s procedures are often embedded in phenomenological experience as opposed to haptic contact, resulting in no *perceptible* harm to the victim’s body, its legal status remains vague and indeterminate. Whereas broken or damaged skin acts as tangible evidence of violence, and most often results in an empathetic reaction from the beholder,¹² the absence of such indicators undermines the validity of victim or witness testimonies, themselves discourses regarded as legally unreliable and untrustworthy. In several different ways, then, clean torture resists representation and categorisation: its effects

⁹ Jay S. Bybee, “Memorandum for Alberto R. Gonzales, Counsel to the President, from Jay S. Bybee, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal Counsel, *Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 U.S.C. §§2340-2340A*”, available for download at: <<http://www.justice.gov/olc/docs/memo-gonzales-aug2002.pdf>>. For a succinct analysis of the memo, see John W. Dean, “The Torture Memo by Judge Jay S. Bybee That Haunted Alberto Gonzales’s Confirmation Hearings”, 14 Jan 2005 <<http://writ.news.findlaw.com/dean/20050114.html>> [accessed 17th June 2010].

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion on the implication of altering torture’s definitions, see Errol Morris’ film *Standard Operating Procedures* (2008) and WJT Mitchell’s “The Fog of Abu Ghraib: Errol Morris and the ‘bad apples’”, *Harpers Magazine* (May 2008), p. 81-86.

¹¹ The ‘Bybee memo’ is itself a revealing document, for it demonstrates a problematic methodology through its very tone and purpose. In an attempt to clarify and justify what ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ are, and are not, legal, it resorts to a textual analysis of the United Nations’s ‘Committee Against Torture’, which defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession”, (available to view ‘Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h_cat39.htm>). By resorting to the infinitesimal particulars of dictionary definitions (itself an interesting and problematic methodology that allies itself to a particular ‘knowledge-indexing’ ideology), the Bybee memo is constituted by an incomprehensible excess of clarification and rationalisation that winds up in an impenetrably tangled narrative, entirely divorced from the actual and *moral* implications of torturous acts.

¹² For discussions on empathetic identifications with pain, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1988) and David B. Morris’ *The Culture of Pain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

can be neither seen nor photographed, nor can the practice be understood definitively as a legal or illegal practice. Unless the actual *act* of inflicting clean torture is captured, as it was by the 2004 Abu-Ghraib photographs and videos, its processes and effects will always remain beyond the visual and legal registers. It could be said that clean torture operates in the gaps between representation: it operates in the arena of lack, and as I hope to further show, is implicitly bound up in my conception of statelessness.

The relevance of all of this to *Weisse Folter*, beyond the mention of ‘white/clean torture’ in the title, is this: aside from the fear felt at one’s temporary incarceration and disorientation, Schneider has built a place in which severe sensory stimulation is key. There are, firstly, quite literal instances of this within *Weisse Folter*’s structure: near the end of the installation one encounters a hot, bright and noisy metal room, immediately followed by a refrigerated room, dark and reminiscent of a walk-in freezer. The juxtapositions of such temperature and light conditions parallels certain clean torture techniques, and it is plain that Schneider intends to simulate watered-down versions of such practices. The inclusion of a room known as a ‘camera silens’ in the installation serves as testament to this: a pitch black, soundproofed room commonly used in torturous practices, and known from psychological experimentation to rapidly debilitate a person, body and mind.¹³ The immediate critical response to *Weisse Folter* dealt primarily with the issues that allusions to torture evoke. One reviewer, in an article entitled ‘When Violence Takes the Form of a Room’ stated that *Weisse Folter* “shows that hell can be made and that a couple of clinically white rooms are enough to break a human being,”¹⁴ and another postulates that the purpose of the installation is “to dent the barrier that prevents people [...] who haven’t experienced such deplorable places and

¹³ Brigitte Kölle, “The Challenge”, in *Weisse Folter: Gregor Schneider*, trans. Fiona Elliott, (Köln: Walter König, 2007), p. 42.

¹⁴ Jan Thorn-Prikker ‘Gregor Schneider: When Violence Takes the Form of a Room’, <<http://www.goethe.de/kue/bku/thm/kab/en2192661.htm>>.

practices from empathising with those who have.”¹⁵ I would suggest, however, that this work holds further significance beyond mere ‘theatrical’ simulation, but before I explain why, and before looking to Arendt’s writings, the visual influence for *Weisse Folter*’s appearance must be addressed: Camp 5, Guantánamo Bay.

Guantánamo Bay contributes to my contemporaneous reading of *Weisse Folter* and Arendt’s statelessness in several ways, all of which I shall go on to examine. The first is that photographs of the inside of Camp 5 found by Schneider on the Internet provided the influence for the visual appearance of parts of *Weisse Folter*’s architecture.¹⁶ The second is that it has been publicly admitted that clean torture practices take place there, although under the alternative and more palatable label of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’.¹⁷ The third is that, in a manner similar to clean torture, Guantánamo Bay does not lend itself easily to representation, either legal or visual. And finally, Guantánamo Bay itself performs as a physical incarnation of Arendt’s statelessness, being as it is a place that evades standard geopolitical classification, allowing it to emerge as an extra-legal space with no discerning governing body, forcefully emphasised by the statelessness of the persons contained there.

Physical access to Guantánamo Bay under the Bush administration was famously restricted, even to the UN, resulting in a geographical region that performed as both a visual and ideological lacuna. The continually enforced message of ‘no photography’, posted on signs surrounding its perimeter,¹⁸ was pertinent to preserving the place’s sanctification, for as Susan Sontag writes, “When there are photographs, a war becomes ‘real’ [...] [This]

¹⁵ Dominic Eichler, ‘Gregor Schneider’, *Frieze*, 15:108 (June-August 2007), <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/gregor_schneider>.

¹⁶ Schneider has stated that he came across these photographs on the Internet (see Kölle, p.39-40), but I can reveal that they are by artist and photojournalist Richard Ross for his 2007 photo-series *Architecture of Authority* (not credited by Schneider).

¹⁷ One of many examples of this can be found here: Catherine Philip, ‘CIA admits water boarding of terror suspects’, *The Times*, 7 February 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_america/article3321297.ece>.

¹⁸ For images of this see Alex Gibney’s documentary *Taxi to the Darkside* (2007), or for further evidence of the manipulation of the press’ coverage of the naval base see BBC2’s *This World: Closing Guantánamo* (dir. Alex Cooke, pres. Michael Portillo, Renegade Pictures, 3 Jan, 2010).

illustrate[s] the determining influence of photographs in shaping what catastrophes and crises we pay attention to, what we care about, and ultimately what evaluations are attached to the conflicts.”¹⁹ Just as the unbroken skin of clean torture’s victims deny photographic representation, so, apparently, does the place in which such acts occur.

From a historical and legal perspective, the representation of Guantánamo is equally slippery. The laws that preside over Guantánamo are curiously flexible and indeterminate, continuously changing and always in flux,²⁰ due, in most part, to its curious geopolitical standing that undercuts both nation-state and geographical definitions. Amy Kaplan most succinctly expresses this bewildering situation by saying; “The global dimension of Guantánamo cannot be understood separately from its seemingly bizarre location [...] It also occupies a liminal national space, in, yet not within, Cuba, but at the same time a ‘bit of American territory’ [...] Guantánamo is not clearly under the sovereignty of either nation, nor seemingly subject to national or international law. Where in the world is Guantánamo?”²¹ It is an area that has a complicated history that arguably allows it to emerge as an extra- or hyper-legal space, within which usual lawful (and certain moral) standards cease to apply. In an analytic account of Guantánamo’s sovereign history and subsequent ideological implications, Nassar Hussain illustrates that Guantánamo Bay emerges as a place that “has become and remains shorthand for a larger set of formations”:

Looked at as an old problem, Guantánamo points to a long history of imperial powers carving out spaces on the globe not only for military and geopolitical needs but also as depositories for their ‘dangerous classes’. [These spaces...] were often claimed to be

¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), p. 93.

²⁰ This was certainly the case when the research for this article was initially undertaken, primarily whilst President Bush was still in power. Day to day the legal status of Guantánamo was in flux, and it appears that this has been the case for many years.

²¹ Amy Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo?” in *American Quarterly*, 57.3 (2005), 831-832.

outside the law and constitutional arrangements of the colonizer.²²

It is here that the similarity between the contemporary situation of Guantánamo Bay and Arendt's writings on the rise of totalitarianism in the early 20th century becomes clear, and by extension, contextualises *Weisse Folter*'s engagement with statelessness, for the act of depositing people in places where they were unrepresented by constitutional rights or nation-state policies, in other words manufacturing stateless persons, was for Arendt, the definitive step that totalitarian governments took in order to impose ideologies of racial superiority.

Arendt's conception of 'statelessness' is not the conclusion of her evolutionary account of totalitarianism, but rather the manufacturing of a population of stateless individuals, that is, persons with no legal right to representation or residence, is one of several stages that climaxes in the production of 'superfluous persons'; people whom the state could willfully execute for they had lost their right to live, as "to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all."²³ The stateless person is the precursor to the superfluous and expendable person, for "a condition of complete rightlessness was created before the right to live was challenged."²⁴ Where this becomes relevant to thinking about Guantánamo, and by association *Weisse Folter*, is that Arendt paid attention to how *spaces* were used in such a process. In her view, the conclusion of totalitarianism was reached when the concentration camp was implemented: that space in which superfluous people were treated as a mass of extinguishable bodies. But, she says, before such a stage could be reached, first the 'protective custody camps' were set up; places where stateless people would be held. These spaces "were used for 'suspects' whose offences *could not be proven* and who could not be sentenced by *ordinary process of law*" (my italics).²⁵ The creation of such spaces, she says, was a crucial stage in achieving the fundamental goal of totalitarianism: "the nihilistic

²² Nasser Hussain, 'Beyond Norm and Exception: Guantánamo', *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Summer 2007), pp.736-737.

²³ Arendt, p. 475.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

principle that ‘everything is permitted’,²⁶ which was, later, most forcibly figured by the manufacturing and exterminating of superfluous people in the concentration camps. In other words, the creation of spaces within which the ‘ordinary processes of law’ did not apply enabled the state to re-write what was permissible, moral and legal, resulting in a state-enforced lawlessness or hyper-legality, where an *over-administration* and re-definition of the law gradually eroded its very purpose; that is, to protect the population of the state.

If we turn back to Hussain’s contemporary analysis of Guantánamo Bay, as a space ‘carved out’ for specific purposes, which was then intentionally filled with ‘hyper-legality’ so that the actions that occur there, and those contained within it, are not subject to ‘normal’ or state law, then several conceptual parallels can be made between the use of Guantánamo Bay as a detention facility and Arendt’s ‘protective custody camps.’ As Hussain goes on to say, the laws that fill such places do not belong to standard legal systems, rather, “They draw on no norm nor are they capable of generating one. Instead, they are *sui generis* – tactical moves that are made and remade in order to fulfill a particular goal [...] Guantánamo emerges out of the use of technicalities and definitional parsing, and through a mixture of executive decree and legislative authorization;”²⁷ a sentiment which is, I would suggest, powerfully reminiscent of the steps taken to justify the use of clean torture, described earlier.

The fact that Guantánamo Bay itself is a place of indeterminate ownership and government is exactly what complicates the legality of what is allowed to occur within its walls. Additionally, such a complication undermines the status of the persons held there, whom I now turn to, for it is these people that, I would suggest, *Weisse Folter* pays particular attention to. Until 2006, when the US Department of Defense was forced to disclose the details of the detainees held at Guantánamo under the ‘Freedom of Information Act’, the majority of its prisoners were unnamed, colloquially referred to as ‘ghost detainees;’

²⁶ Ibid., p. 440.

²⁷ Hussain, p. 749-750.

implying not only an absence of identity, but also of a lack of corporeality, or physical state. Shortly following this release of information, the Bush administration mobilized the ‘Military Commissions Act’ renaming these detainees ‘enemy combatants’ and simultaneously removing their *habeas corpus*: erasing the prisoners’ legal right to challenge their detention, lawful or not. The translation of ‘habeas corpus’ is ‘thou shalt have the body’, and so disarticulating their ‘right to have rights’²⁸ is paralleled with their right to have a body. Aside from their legal lack of representation, therefore, the *state* of the detainees’ physical bodies is being called into question; an attitude which had been previously highlighted by Arendt: “the human masses sealed off in [the camps] are treated as if they no longer exist, as if what happened to them were no longer of any interest to anybody, as if they were already dead and some evil spirit gone mad were amusing himself by stopping them for a while *between life and death* before admitting them to eternal peace.” (my italics)²⁹

The ghost detainees at Guantánamo bear a striking similarity to Arendt’s stateless individual; persons whom had lost their right to rights, their right to *representation*, and as a result, are well on their way to becoming superfluous, expendable bodies. Residing in Guantánamo Bay, then, positions the unrepresented body in an extra-legal space where “their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them.”³⁰ As previously mentioned, the word ‘stateless’ equally suggests a lack of *physical* state, and it is not unlikely that Arendt intended this reading for she believed that losing one’s legal rights to government was the precursor to becoming less-than-human; a superfluous body, a living corpse, the phantom of a human. For the ghost detainee, then, their statelessness not only implies a lack of nation state, but, as in their subsequent removal of habeas corpus, implies a lack of physical being; they are figured as ghosts in every representational medium: visually,

²⁸ For an excellent analysis of Arendt’s views on the ‘right to have rights’ see any of the articles in the special Arendt issue of *Social Research* 69(2), (Summer 2002), specifically Seyla Benhabib’s “Political Geographies in a Global World: Arendtian Reflections”, p. 539-566.

²⁹ Arendt, p. 445.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95-6.

linguistically and legally.

Although there are, admittedly, many historically-determined differences between Arendt's model of statelessness that occurred in the rise of totalitarianism at the beginning of the 20th century, and the status of Guantánamo's ghost detainees at the onset of the 21st century, there is certainly a theoretical tenet one can draw from her writings, one that rests in the model of statelessness I began with, whereby what is state-less is that which wriggles away from established representational strategies, whether they be legal, national, governmental, or visual. And it is this conflation of the term's denotations that, I feel, *Weisse Folter* so powerfully embodies.

Rather than attempting to restore material, visible substance to such stateless persons, I would suggest that Schneider has, however, represented the prisoners of Guantánamo Bay as literal ghosts without bodies, maintaining their delicate statelessness by manufacturing an affective and phenomenological sculptural space. As mentioned earlier, the strange soundlessness within *Weisse Folter* is the central facet of my analysis of this work, for the *feeling* of being within an anechoic space is an uncanny and unsettling one. This simultaneous and conspicuous presence of 'too much space', along with a foregrounded lack of bodies, works somehow to emphasise them: the ghosts of Guantánamo Bay haunt the halls of *Weisse Folter*, and their absence is noticeably present.³¹

The problem lies, however, in that this 'heavy air' can never be given representational form for it is purely a phenomenological encounter. The experience of *Weisse Folter*'s spaces has no visual or linguistic equivalent; neither describing it nor photographing it adequately

³¹ A passage from Arendt, that I can't help but include, bears a striking resemblance to the haunted halls of *Weisse Folter*'s recreated detention centre: "It is not so much the barbed wire as the skillfully manufactured unreality of those whom it fences in that provokes such enormous cruelties and ultimately makes extermination look like a perfectly normal measure. We know everything that was done in the camps from the world of perverse, malignant fantasies. The difficult thing to understand is that, like such fantasies, these gruesome crimes took place in a *phantom world*, which, however, has materialised, as it were, into a world that is complete with all the sensual data of reality but *lacks that structure of consequence and responsibility* without which reality remains for us a mass of incomprehensible data. The result is that a place has been established where men can be tortured and slaughtered, and yet neither tormentors nor the tormented, and least of all outsiders, can be aware that what is happening is anything more than a cruel game or an absurd dream." p. 445-6 (my emphasis).

conveys the sensation of being there.³² And so, like both the practice of clean torture, and the place that is Guantánamo Bay, *Weisse Folter* resists representation and remains ‘between the gaps’ of representational media. By resisting these modes of communication, however, *Weisse Folter* manages to embody the very concept of ‘statelessness’, by *undoing* state in every sense of the word: nation state (by recreating and making tangible Guantánamo Bay’s halls and foregrounding the stateless persons residing there), legal state (by simulating clean torture’s practices), and physical state (in its emphasis on extra-visual sensory stimulation). As such, all three inceptions of the term statelessness that I started with: political, physical and representational, are each articulated by the spaces of *Weisse Folter*. In mobilising an Arendtian analysis to approach a work such as this, both the artwork is afforded a deeper significance than the mere performing of unpleasant sensations, but also Arendt’s writings are injected with a renewed relevance in contemporary politics and the theoretical importance of her work is made relevant once more.

This concludes my brief précis of how the practice of these two individuals may reciprocally inform one another. It is only by engaging with Arendt’s writings that a reading of *Weisse Folter* can be fully played out, for the theorizing of *Weisse Folter*’s soundlessness, and its recreation of clean torture and Guantánamo Bay, can be forcibly and politically mobilized in the face of Arendt’s conception of the stateless individual. Additionally, I would suggest that transposing, or adapting, Arendt’s model onto current, or recent, political events can allow us a fresh look at her writing without sacrificing the extreme care she placed in historical data. The danger of applying Arendt’s thoughts to contemporary situations is certainly not lost on me, however, I would equally suggest that such a methodology is exactly

³² Again, this echoes Arendt’s concerns regarding the problems surrounding concentration camp survivor’s testimonies: “There are numerous reports by survivors. The more authentic they are, the less they attempt to communicate things that evade human understanding and human experience [...] None of these reports inspires those passions of outrage and sympathy through which men have always been mobilised for justice. On the contrary, anyone speaking or writing about concentration camps is still regarded as suspect; and if the speaker has resolutely returned to the world of the living, he himself is often assailed by doubts with regards to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality.” p. 439.

where the thrill and importance of such work is located, articulated most readily by Nancy Fraser: “Seeking to inhabit the space ‘between past and future,’ [Arendt] self-consciously cultivated a way of thinking that was both historicizing and present-focused [...] Akin in some respects to the orientation of Michel Foucault, this stance strikes me as not merely relevant but downright indispensable to vital political theorizing in the coming period.”³³

What Arendt’s writings narrate is a cautionary tale crucial to contemporary politics, when certain inalienable rights are under threat by the continuing and undiscerning application of ‘too much’ legality. During a period in which the concept of the nation-state is crumbling ever more rapidly in the face of mass migration, globalising technology and faceless, stateless terrorist threats, Arendt’s thought on the potential and danger of the state-centric system, and the over-regulation of its laws, are in urgent need of circulation and contemporising. To end, a sentiment from Richard King that I too share; Hannah Arendt “took it upon herself to ‘think without banisters.’ It is this example of intellectual courage, even daring, that is perhaps the final lesson she has to teach us when we confront the burden of our time as well as assume responsibility for the past.”³⁴

³³ Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 132-3.

³⁴ King, p. 259.

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