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Martin Riedelsheimer

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Vulnerability and the Community of the Precarious in David Greig's *The Events*

Before David Greig's *The Events* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2013, there had been concerns that the play might somewhat inappropriately turn mass murder into a musical (see Campbell 2013). While such worries turned out to be unfounded, it is certainly true that *The Events* uses unusual theatrical means, most striking among them a full-scale choir on stage, to address a delicate topic: it portrays the consequences of a violent irruption into communal life – a gunman's attack on a multicultural choir – so as to remind the theatregoing public of the risks of living in an open, liberal society. The play is therefore concerned with what Judith Butler has termed the "condition of primary vulnerability" (2004: 31) all humans are subject to and it reflects on responses to this precarious state of being. Both the fragmentary structure of Greig's play and his protagonist Claire's encounters with her multiple Others in her search for an explanation for the traumatic 'events' serve to engender the precarious aesthetics of *The Events*, which is reinforced by the use of strategies of contingency in performance practice. While thus an air of precariousness – both in Butler's sense and, when it comes to the face-to-face encounter between the victim and the shooter, in the sense of Emmanuel Levinas's ethics – prevails in Greig's play, it also projects a potential community of the precarious, the choir, as its response to this vulnerable condition.

My understanding of precariousness is based on Samuel Johnson's definition in his famous *Dictionary of the English Language*, where the 'precarious' is described as that which is "dependent; uncertain, because *depending on the will of another*; held by courtesy; changeable or alienable at the pleasure of another" (1968; emphasis added). As a word of warning to writers (and presumably also critics) engaging with the precarious, Johnson adds that "[n]o word is more unskilfully used than this with its derivatives. It is used for uncertain in all its senses; but it only means uncertain as dependent on others" (1968). It seems that this definition still underlies most, if not all, philosophical and theoretical uses of 'precariousness' and allows for a lucid approach of the precarious in contemporary theatre. In her detailed analysis of the semantics of the precarious, Katharina Pewny (see 2011: 25 – 37) identifies the aspects of revocability, of being uncertain, or at risk, and of being delicate or fragile as defining elements of the precarious. The meaning of 'precarious', she concludes with a pun, is "*ungesichert*" (2011: 36), which means both 'uncertain' and 'insecure'. De-

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spite the semantic vagueness of the term, the crucial aspect of precariousness is, as Johnson insists, that the state of uncertainty is caused by the dependence on an Other. In this sense, precariousness is always rooted in an encounter with the Other, which explains why the term has been fruitfully used both in political and in ethical discourse.

Thus Emmanuel Levinas describes the face, a notion that is central to his work, as precarious. The face is that which makes an encounter with the Other "straightaway ethical" (Levinas 1985: 87). This is because of the unprotectedness and nudity of the face (see 1985: 86) – it is that part of the body which ultimately cannot be covered, which remains bare skin. It therefore allows for a direct, unmitigated confrontation, face to face with the Other. It is in this encounter with the Other that the precarious nature of the face becomes apparent:

> The proximity of the other is the face's meaning, and it means from the very start in a way that goes beyond those plastic forms which forever try to cover the face like a mask of their presence to perception. But always the face shows through these forms. Prior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expressions, which cover over and protect with an immediately adopted face or countenance, there is the *nakedness and destitution* of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defencelessness, *vulnerability itself*. (Levinas 1989: 82–83; emphasis added; see also Levinas 1996: 167)

The primary condition of the Levinasian face, then, is that of defencelessness and vulnerability, where the Other is at my mercy – a perspective that is crucial to Levinasian thought. For in Levinas's ethics, there is a primacy of the Other over my self, that is, the Other has replaced my self at the centre of ethical consideration (see Ridout 2009: 52–53). Thus, Levinas does not focus on my vulnerability at the hands of a hostile Other, but rather on the vulnerability of the Other who is encountered by me. The Other as demanding care rather than an object of contemplation (or even confrontation) is at the core of his philosophy (see 1996: 166–167). For it is precisely from this condition of vulnerability that the ethical appeal of the face arises, because through its destitution, "the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question" (Levinas 1989: 83). This means that the encounter with vulnerability demands the ability to respond ethically, to resist any impulse to, as it were, prey on the defencelessness of the Other. This is expressed in Levinas's frequently quoted enigmatic statement, "The face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakeness to the precariousness of the other" (1996: 167). The face exposes the vulnerability of the Other, who in this state of vulnerability is dependent on me – hence precarious – and out of this precariousness demands a response from me, demands that I be awake to the vulnerability of the Other and to abstain from violence.

In her essay collection *Precarious Life* (2004), Butler relies on Levinas's ethics, and in particular on his concept of a fundamental condition of vulnerability, as a basis to analyse reactions to the 9/11 attacks. She diagnoses an ontological state of human vulnerability that we are reminded of whenever we suffer injuries (for example in terror attacks) and "sees in these events a reminder of the reality of persistent insecurity rooted in a constitutive and persistent vulnerability" (Watkins 2008: 188). For Butler, this condition of vulnerability is both *universal*, in that everyone is subject to it (see 2005: 34 – 35; see also Watkins 2008: 188), and *irrecusable*, because "one cannot will [it] away without ceasing to be human" (Butler 2004: xiv; see also 19; 29). Our injurability highlights the fact that we are dependent on others, who may commit acts of violence against us and even kill us (see Butler 2004: xii).[1] This dependence on others, with its implication of insecurity and being at risk, is what makes our lives precarious. For this reason, Butler arrives at her "broad existential claim, namely, that everyone is precarious" (2012: 148). It is a precariousness that is caused by our ontological vulnerability and that we are reminded of whenever we suffer an injury.

Such an insight into our "primary vulnerability" (Butler 2004: xiv) cannot be without consequence for our living together. Indeed, for Butler, it requires a rethinking of our way of life, both on the level of society, or politics, and on the level of community. This leads Butler to the following question:

> Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference? (2004: 27)

It is a rethinking of community, then, that she hopes for as a result of the insight into our vulnerability. In particular, this rethinking requires the eschewal of violence or revenge and the embracing of our vulnerable condition itself. In other words, this reconceptualisation of community envisages a communal state of

1 Grounded as it is in Levinas's ethics of the face-to-face, Butler's concept of vulnerability has its foundation on a pre-social level. Nevertheless, her interest is primarily in the social dimension of the precarious. In Butler's political philosophy, the focus is always on an encounter with several others, who may even remain unknown to us. Precariousness to her is a social condition (see 2004: 20) that demands responsibility on the political level as much as on the personal level. This is a key difference from Levinas, whose ethics is first of all based on the face-to-face encounter with the Other, to which the advent of a third party adds the necessity of consciousness and rules (see Levinas 1996: 168 – 169).

being open to the world – Butler understands vulnerability as a "way of opening onto the world" (2011: 2) – that acknowledges the vulnerability of the self and the Other and refigures this apparent weakness into a strength. This is, as Watkins rightly points out, a "sombre understanding of community", a community which is "constituted via shared and inescapable, yet ambiguous vulnerability [and] entails not only the possibility for attachment, enrichment, and affection but also detachment, loss, and mourning" (2008: 191). Indeed, the sort of community that is envisioned by Butler is based on the living together of singular beings (in the sense in which this term is used by thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy; see 1991: 1–42) whose differences are unconditionally acknowledged. It might perhaps be described, with a nod to Benedict Anderson's (1991) phrase, as a re-imagined community of the precarious – a community that depends on its insight into individual and collective vulnerability and the embracing of this condition.

It is in this context that the potential of the theatre comes into play. Of course, the theatrical space is not exempt from Butler's existential claim of precariousness, for it makes possible "the face-to-face encounter between embodied, vulnerable spectators and Others wherein the former are summoned to respond, to become actively engaged in an exemplary exercise of ethical 'response-ability'" (Aragay 2014: 4–5). That means the theatre is a forum in which questions of vulnerability and 'response-ability'[2] are negotiated, with spectators as, according to Rancière, *per se* active participants in this process (see 2011: 13) – or, as Greig puts it in an interview: "News allows you to look at events but with drama you are inside them" (2014). So the theatre may have its own ways of recalling to us, the always-already involved spectators, our vulnerability, of reminding us of the inevitability of this vulnerability and of asking in its own way the same question Butler asks – how to respond to the vulnerability of the self and the Other?

Greig's *The Events* certainly is a case in point as regards the aesthetic potential of the theatre to address the issue of vulnerability. The play, which was received very positively by most theatre critics (see e. g. Brown 2013; Cavendish 2013; Gardner 2013a; Gardner 2013b), stages the plight of a victim of violence. Claire, a liberal, slightly "hippyish" (thus Greig in an interview; *Herald Scotland* 2013), lesbian priest, is the clearly traumatised survivor of a gunman's attack on her multicultural choir project. The play shows how she tries to come to terms

2 The reference here is to Hans-Thies Lehmann's notion of an "*aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)*" with which the theatre aims to reduce the distance implicit in the act of (spectatorial) perception (2006: 185; see Ridout 2009: 56–59).

with 'the events' by looking for answers in increasingly desperate attempts to understand the motives of the shooter. Her efforts, however, remain futile and lead to her "descent into a kind of madness" (Cavendish 2013). Throughout Greig's play, the issue of the vulnerability and precariousness of our lives and the challenges and possibilities that follow from the recognition of this vulnerability are prominent.

This begins with the fragmented structure of *The Events*, which itself creates a sense of precariousness – a feature that has been reinforced in performance practice. The play's setup, which is inspired by ancient Greek tragedy (see Greig 2014), requires only two actors and a choir on stage at all times. There is the actor playing Claire and another actor who plays a number of roles – most notably that of the killer, but also all the other people Claire encounters: her girlfriend Catriona, a psychologist, the killer's father and the leader of a right-wing party, among others. In the playscript, this actor's roles are simply subsumed under the label 'The Boy', although it might perhaps be more fitting to call him 'The Other'. On the one hand, the concentration of multiple roles in the person of one actor leads to the indeterminacy of this 'Other' character. At times The Boy changes characters almost imperceptibly within a dialogue and it is never quite clear in the first place which character Claire is facing at any given moment. For example, there is a scene in which she repeatedly addresses The Boy as 'Catriona', only for her/him to answer with words that can be clearly attributed to the persona of the shooter – "If I'm to leave a mark on the world I have to do it now" (Greig, *The Events*: 48). The play's relative lack of traditional theatrical means such as curtains or entrances that make a clear-cut division into scenes possible – the songs of the choir are the only thing that comes close to such a traditional structural device – makes it difficult to distinguish which of the various personae The Boy is assuming in any particular situation. Thus a feeling of instability or uncertainty is created, which mirrors the unknowability, or the impossibility of making a "content" (Levinas 1985: 86–87), of the face of the Other.[3] On the other hand, from the dramatic minimalism of the face-

3 According to Levinas, "the Other, in the rectitude of his face, is not a character within a context" (1985: 86), i.e. the face is more fundamental than social roles or cognitive categories. It pierces through a character that may be assumed in a social situation and goes beyond that which we can 'know' in a (socially or otherwise) situated context, laying bare the "*meaning*" of the face, namely, its ethical entreaty not to exploit its vulnerability, or, in Levinas's words, the "'thou shalt not kill'" expressed by the face (1985: 87). In *The Events*, then, the instability of the role of The Boy makes it impossible to 'know' which character he represents in any given scene – what remains is precisely this residual ethical core of the face of The Boy, the "thou shalt not kill" expressed by the face of the Other.

to-face constellation on stage an antagonism must ensue. If, as reviewers have pointed out, the omnipresence of The Boy on stage reflects the way the shooter dominates Claire's thoughts (see Burton 2013; Loxton 2013), then it is also a reminder of her injurability. Through the person of the actor, the face of the killer is contained in every Other Claire encounters. It is a reminder that the encounter with the Other is always potentially violent, a reminder of the precariousness and vulnerability of the face – both of the self and the Other.

This prevailing sense of uncertainty is reinforced by the general nature of the descriptive labels employed in Greig's play. Even its eponymous 'events' remain nameless and thus indeterminate. Just like in the role of The Boy, a generic term is used here rather than a proper name that identifies the events or the person of the perpetrator. This has a double function. Firstly, where The Boy is concerned, his radical alterity is emphasised: his anonymity is in line with Derrida's argument that the "absolute other [...] cannot have a name or family name", as such a name would immediately introduce the familiarity of something that is knowable (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 25). The absence of even a name thus reinforces the otherness of The Boy. Secondly, the vagueness of the descriptive labels points to the universal nature of the events and of the character of the shooter and thus of our vulnerability. The events might happen anywhere and any bo(d)y might turn out to be the shooter. Indeed, although Greig (2014) cites Anders Breivik's shooting spree on the Norwegian island of Utøya as a direct influence in his writing of the play, the events in it have been linked in theatre reviews and interviews to various atrocities past and present, from the 9/11 and 7/7 terror attacks (*Herald Scotland* 2013) to the Boston Marathon bombings (Glasgow Evening Times 2013), the Woolwich murder (*Herald Scotland* 2013), the German NSU right-wing terrorist murders (Theaterkompass 2013) or Elliot Rodger's shooting spree in California in May 2014 (Greig 2014; McElroy 2014). Ramin Gray, the director who worked closely with Greig in putting *The Events* on stage, remarked in an interview that the perpetrators of such attacks "have become totally exchangeable" (Gray 2013; my translation).[4] The concrete massacre depicted in Greig's play is thus as exchangeable as the concrete Boy who commits the violence. What is inescapable is the underlying ontological vulnerability.

In performance practice, strategies of contingency have been employed to create an air of uncertainty and perhaps improvisation that reflects the uncertainty, or precariousness, of encountering the Other. Most prominent among these is certainly the choir (see Trueman 2014), whose functions – much like

4 The German original reads, "Die Attentäter sind total austauschbar geworden".

those of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy (see Weiner 1980) – range from being a guiding voice of common sense for Claire (see Greig, *The Events*: 57–59) to providing neo-Brechtian alienation effects (see 52; 41–43) and, ultimately, as will be shown, to supplying the play's vision of an alternative community of the precarious. It has been stressed that in performance practice the choir should not be a professional choir, that the choir members should not be familiar with the play and that it must be a different choir in every performance (see Trueman 2014). Particularly this latter fact again points at the unpredictable inevitability of 'the events' and at the universality of human vulnerability, as the victims might come from any group of people (see Brown 2013). Due to such scripted randomness, the choir is enveloped in an air of improvisation (see Präauer 2013), which is most prominent when Claire uses a spontaneous, unrehearsed answer by a choir member – "the first thing that comes into [the choir member's] head" (Greig, *The Events*: 41) – to make up a chant in the shamanic ritual to retrieve her soul. This is not the only instance where the play or its director aim at this kind of performative indeterminacy, so it seems that creating such a sense of improvised uncertainty is on director Ramin Gray's agenda. It is worth noting, in this connection, that in July 2014 a special trilingual version of *The Events*, a "'live theatrical experiment'" (Gray qtd. in Trueman 2014) involving actors from the play's British, Austrian and Norwegian productions, all of them performing in their respective languages, was staged in London – notably *without* prior rehearsals and hence with a great deal of "uncertainty [...] at the core of the endeavour" (Trueman 2014).[5] As in the other instances where the dramatic form of *The Events* creates such an air of indeterminacy, this is an uncertainty that not only mirrors the openness towards the Other – reinforced by the multiple languages in this particular staging – that is central to Claire's thinking (thus Gray qtd. in Trueman 2014), but also reflects the insecurity that underlies our every encounter with the Other, i.e. what Butler terms the precariousness of our lives.

On the level of content, vulnerability is an obvious topic because of the nature of 'the events'. It is quite telling that the shooting depicted in the play has been linked in theatre reviews and interviews to such a large number of different atrocities past and present, all leading to what Butler calls, with regard to the 9/11 attacks, "conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression" (2004: xi). Such intensified vulnerability and aggression is certainly what we witness

5 The role of The Boy was played by a different actor from one of the three casts (and hence performed in a different language, albeit surtitled) in every scene, while the actor for Claire only changed from night to night. For a more detailed description of this "[t]ag wrestling in three languages", see Trueman (2014).

in Claire and her encounters with the various Others that are a central topic of *The Events* from the very beginning. In the first scene, The Boy describes an Australian aboriginal boy watching the arrival of the first ships with prisoners without understanding what is going on, and warns of the violent threat these newcomers pose. The Boy asks, "If you could go back in time and speak to that boy, what would you say? You would stand on the rocks and you would point at the ships and you would say – 'Kill them. Kill them all'" (Greig, *The Events*: 12). After a quick change of scene and a song by the choir, this is immediately contrasted with Claire welcoming The Boy as a new arrival into her choir. She extends her hospitality by saying, "Hi. Come in. Don't be shy. Everyone's welcome here. What's your name?" (12). This means she offers her hospitality before she even knows to *whom* she is offering it (the question after The Boy's name remains unanswered). This is close to what Derrida calls the "absolute or unconditional" form of hospitality that precedes any pact or contract (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 25) – for it is impossible to make a contract with someone who remains entirely unknown – and it marks a stark contrast to The Boy's hostility. The play here seems to mirror Levinas's ethics: the first impulse presented to us is hostility – just like in the invitation to kill that the recognition of the vulnerability of the face of the Other seemingly makes (see Levinas 1985: 86). And in the same way in which this invitation to violence coincides with the imperative of peacefulness, with the 'thou shalt not kill' of the face (see 1985: 86 – 87), so The Boy's hostility is immediately followed by the vision of Claire's hospitality – by her 'awakeness to the precariousness of the other'. Thus, in their antagonism, The Boy is marked down as taking a stance of hostility towards the Other, whereas Claire offers openness.

The motif of encountering the Other is present throughout the play: from Claire's strained relationship with her girlfriend Catriona, most notably their half violent, half erotic struggle for a kiss (see Greig, *The Events*: 47), to her visit to the representative of a right-wing party with its implication of the wider social complex of problems surrounding immigration and otherness (see 33 – 36), and her highly unreliable memory of picking up and accommodating a runaway boy (see 43 – 44) – all the Others, of course, being played by The Boy. Most striking, however, is the play's climactic penultimate scene, in which the strains of encountering the Other and, in them, our own vulnerability can be seen most clearly. As the play progresses, Claire is driven almost to insanity (and to the edge of suicide; see 54 – 56) in her quest to understand the motives of the killer and to come to terms with her most traumatic memory – the memory of the shooter asking her and another woman of the choir, "I have one bullet. There are two of you – Which one of you do you want me to shoot?" (26; see also 51, 66), a scene that the play comes back to several times and that only grad-

ually becomes clearer to the spectators, as it is retrieved from the foggy mechanisms of sublimation. Ultimately, as she is caught between feelings of hatred and embracing the Other (as in those scenes where the encounter with The Boy is highly sexually charged; see 52–53; see also 47), or perhaps even forgiveness (although this remains entirely a matter of speculation in the play), Claire visits the shooter in his prison cell, because, as she explains to Catriona, "I have to see him. Face to face" (48).

It is in this face-to-face encounter that "the limits of forgiveness" (Wicker 2013) are put to the test and revenge becomes a distinct possibility. When Claire arrives at the prison, she carries a tea bag in her pocket that she has filled with a chopped up poisonous mushroom. The Boy receives Claire hospitably – he even offers her a cup of tea (see Greig, *The Events*: 60), a gesture that is abundant with dramatic irony and again points to the reversibility of roles and the universality of vulnerability. During their conversation, in which Claire again unsuccessfully tries to uncover the shooter's motives, truly personal information about the killer is revealed for the first time. The mask that covers his face – to remain with Levinas's metaphor – gradually peels off and it becomes clear that he, too, is vulnerable, plagued by sleeping troubles since childhood, and that he, too, is capable of empathy for the vulnerable, as becomes clear from his account of how he offered shelter to a girl that had been abused (see Greig, *The Events*: 61; 63–64). The face of the hitherto seemingly faceless, anonymous, or at least impersonal Boy comes to the fore, thus placing him within "the horizon of ethics" (Butler 2012: 140). And yet, Claire is tempted to revenge when she once more recalls the moment of that horrible question, "Which one of you do you want me to shoot?" A cup of – presumably – poisoned tea is placed before The Boy. As he reaches for it, the answer to his inhumane question is finally revealed: "We both said 'Me'" (Greig, *The Events*: 67) – a memory that immediately prompts Claire to smash the cup as The Boy is about to drink from it and thus to forgo her revenge. This is because this memory of the ultimate ethical act of choosing self-sacrifice over self-preservation – an act that is ethical because it places the life of the Other before one's own life and so fully accepts the responsibility that the face of the Other demands from us according to Levinas (see 1986: 24) – makes it impossible to take revenge; to, as it were, *efface* The Boy.

The cup of tea Claire hands to The Boy is thus a poisoned chalice not only in the literal sense: performing her act of revenge – and thus yielding to what Greig in an interview described as "this voice you're trying to suppress, the violence of retribution" (Wicker 2013) – would implicate Claire in a spiral of violence and ultimately make her lose her own humanity, as revenge is always "a refusal of empathy" (Watkins 2008: 197). She would no longer be a mere victim, but also herself a perpetrator, committing an act of violence against the face of The

Boy – the same can of course be said for the other instances where she entertains violent fantasies without acting on them (see Greig, *The Events*: 54). As Butler explains, "it is absolutely ethically necessary, after one has been injured very deeply, that one not respond in kind", for rather than solving the "problem of vulnerability" (2003), revenge only transfers it to the other who may then react in kind. Thus, with her decision to forgo revenge, Claire breaks such a "cycle of revenge" (Butler 2003). It is a decision not to exploit the vulnerability of the imprisoned perpetrator.

So instead of taking revenge, Claire returns to the community of the choir, which emerges as Greig's version of the kind of community Butler imagines as a response to the insight into the human condition of vulnerability. The choir is portrayed as a hospitable, if not quite safe, haven. It does not lay claim to providing safety either, as other communities might perhaps do – indeed, with the attack on the multicultural choir, which embodies the ideal of liberalism, *The Events* brutally recalls to the audience the vulnerability of this kind of community, or indeed of any community. This insight quite literally strikes home because of the practice, in performance, of using choirs that are rooted in the local community and that are thus closely connected to the theatregoers – they "embody what is at stake", as Ramin Gray puts it in his Director's Note to the playscript (Greig, *The Events*; see McElroy 2014). In this sense, the choir in *The Events* represents precariousness. What is more, it also is the theatrical device that most poignantly alerts the audience to the precariousness of their own lives. This is because if "[e]very act of theatre revolves around a transaction between two communities: the performers onstage and the improvised community that constitute what we call an audience" (Gray's Director's Note in Greig, *The Events*), then the choir is situated right between those two communities – it is a part of the onstage community, but at the same time it is as improvised as the audience. In particular, the choir assumes the function of an onstage audience, as its members remain passive observers throughout most scenes, seated at the rear of the stage on a pedestal and looking back at the audience.[6] Such a setup is particularly apt to underline the "situation of mutual spectatorship [that] raises the ethical stakes in theatre" (Ridout 2009: 15). Thus, the choir is an element the audience can identify with and that simultaneously, by emphasising the act of spectatorship, strengthens the audience's involvement in the stage action and so makes the most striking demand upon the spectators' 'response-ability'– an effort that peaks in the closing tableau of the play, where Claire turns directly to the audience

6 This seating arrangement can be seen in the pictures accompanying the reviews by Loxton (2013) and McElroy (2014).

and invites them to join the choir's closing song, because after all, "We're all one big crazy tribe here" (Greig, *The Events*: 68).[7] The choir thus contributes to the play's own version of what Lehmann describes as an "*aesthetics of risk*", that is, to the diminishing of the "safe distance" between audience and stage (2006: 187). In this fashion, the choir is the aesthetic device that, by implicating the audience, extends the sense of vulnerability beyond the limits of the stage. However, the play's closing scene makes clear that in this respect the choir does not only embody precariousness, but also represents a tentative response to the state of vulnerability Greig's play unmasks. The vision of welcoming openness the choir projects – Claire's "Come in. Don't be shy. Everyone's welcome here" (Greig, *The Events*: 68) echoes at the very end of the play her inviting words at the start (12) – demonstrates the "resistance to the seduction of vengeance" Butler demands (Gutterman and Rushing 2008: 131). Instead, it embraces diversity and, above all, the state of vulnerability the play abounds with – Claire's and The Boy's and therefore that of all the Others Claire encounters. Hence, the choir is symbolic of the kind of community Butler might have in mind in response to the insight into our ontological vulnerability: a community of vulnerable beings, each vulnerable in their own way, but openly embracing both such a shared condition of vulnerability and the Other. In other words, the choir represents a community of the precarious, always at risk, always depending on the Other and their openness and will to peace. Thus the choir is the element of the play that is most strongly charged with the precariousness of life. It is a symbol of vulnerability and, at the same time, also of responding to vulnerability, of the 'response-ability' Greig's play promotes.

In conclusion, *The Events* is a play that negotiates our ontological condition of vulnerability, and thus the precariousness of life, both in the character of Claire and her quest to come to terms with such vulnerability by trying to understand the motives of the shooter, and, where the structure of the play is concerned, in the instability of the character of The Boy as well as through the use of strategies of contingency in performance. With regard to these aesthetic strategies, Lyn Gardner rightly observes that the play is "full of doubt and hon-

7 Incidentally, such an invitation to respond is also achieved by the choir through the very different aesthetic mode of alienation, as when the Repetiteur announces a tea break, which is filled with a "short nature documentary about foxes", or when a choir member reads out a text about chimpanzees (Greig, *The Events*: 42–43; 52). Here, the classical Brechtian alienation effect is achieved, which according to Peter Brook "is a call to halt: alienation is cutting, interrupting, holding something up to the light, making us look again. Alienation is above all an appeal to the spectator to work for himself, so to become more responsible for accepting what he sees" (1968: 72; see also Weiner 1980: 211).

esty, about its own function, its own fragmentary aesthetic, about what we mean by society, and our flailing helplessness in the face of unexpected violence" (2013a). In Claire's multiple encounters with the emblematic Other that is The Boy, *The Events* returns in various ways to the topic of vulnerability and reflects on possible responses. Particularly after Claire's eschewal of violent revenge in the climactic penultimate scene, face to face with the Other, the choir emerges as a tentative vision of a community of the precarious that may help to perhaps not accept, but accommodate vulnerability. In this sense, Greig's *The Events* can be seen as a catalyst for necessary ethical considerations in the face of our irrecusable condition of vulnerability. The closing tableau, then, with the choir on stage as a symbol of resistance to violence and its invitation to the audience to join their song as a further emblem of being open to the world, expresses the hope that however deep the scars caused by the violent exploitation of our vulnerability may be, a community of the precarious may emerge after such events and find a peaceful, ethical response to them.

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