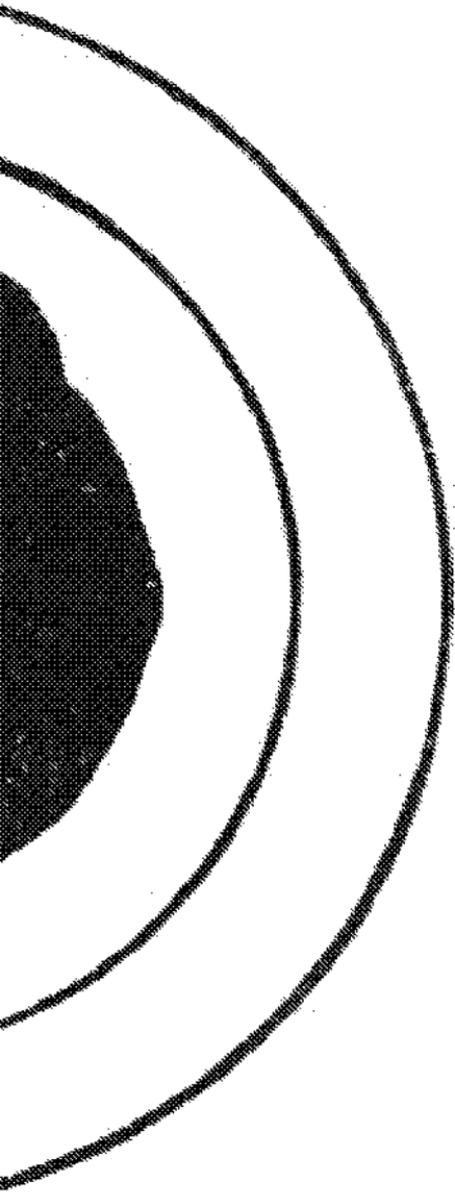


Where did you hide the gun?



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INTRODUCTION

“[A] film is a girl and a gun,”

Godard once said.¹ A loaded statement. Loaded by the iconic, loaded word ‘gun,’ and loaded more by its juxtaposition to the, perhaps, just as iconically loaded word ‘girl.’ Both blunt and triggering, the statement provokes the reader, the audience, the viewer to an individual response, either agreeable or offended, as one would more or less willfully judge any such piece of loaded language in its nonchalant utterance. Admittedly, it is not a very exemplary example of loaded language. In all modesty, I hope this essay can shine a brighter light on the term—loaded language is, in fact, my central subject.

While exploring loaded language, I employ various concepts used to explain its force and effect, and even its anti-thesis, loaded silence. A great deal of my research taps into philosopher Judith Butler’s study *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), in which she delves into speech and conduct of contemporary political life. Though this particular publication mostly revolves around racial hate speech, pornography, and military homophobia, its theoretical framework is similar to mine, as well as its central theme of injurious speech. I will address this theme, too, as a consequence of loaded language.

The body as a linguistic instrument—the agent for loaded language and subject of injurious speech—is approached

¹ Lack, Roland-François. ‘All you need is... A girl and a gun.’ <http://www.thecinematourist.net>. Monday, December 15, 2014.



N.b. Though the above mentioned quote is widely attributed to Godard, Lack reveals in his blog that it is actually filmmaker D.W. Griffith who should be credited. According to Lack, Griffith is referred to by the Belgian photographer and poet Paul Nougé in ‘Introduction au cinéma,’ a lecture given in 1925 in Brussels, published in 1955 in the journal *Les lèvres nues* and again in his book

Histoire de ne pas rire (1956). Lack: “Godard might have read [the quote] in the 1956 book and remembered it when he was publicising *Bande à part* in 1964.” The image above is from *La proie du vent* (1927), by filmmaker René Clair. [CY]

through the Speech Act Theory developed by language philosopher J.L. Austin, as explained in his book *Doing Things With Words* of which I have consulted a Dutch translation (1981). His theory has been disputed—especially by other (language) philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jürgen Habermas—but is enticing due to the fact that it reveals a connection between the more fleeting, effective characteristic of language to the more physical, affective characteristic of an act. It has given a tangible essence to my writing. How both body and language are intertwined through speech will be confirmed by, once again, Butler, and reflects my slight but purposeful ouroboric tendency while writing this essay.

To illustrate my research, I refer to a few examples from my personal field of study, stretching from the performing arts through fine arts to graphic design. However, the principle example in this essay is a fictional narrative, which I have interlaced with my more academic exposition. A story that in many ways is as much a cliché as Godard’s blunt statement, but surely more or less familiar and therefore, I hope, functional in an otherwise quite subjective exploration of my pull towards loaded language.

Why this pull would be of any interest to another will, at best, prove itself through a sense of recognition. Not only in how often we load our own language towards others,

(guilty)

but also how often we ourselves are enveloped, confronted, and mesmerized by it. Becoming aware of its injurious, restraining, and engaging capacity, realizing it has the potential to *do* and change, and realizing also, that its authority can be both threatening and empowering. This is the more moral motive, carefully advocating an awareness, if not reservation, of rhetoric. More important, however, may be the attempt to counter an increasingly virtual, image-saturated era with something less obviously pictorial but not in the least less powerful. Whether voiced or embodied, language is, can, will, could, should or shouldn’t be our gun.

I. THE VOICE. BUT FIRST: THE HEAVY BOX.

It was the warmest 2nd of November ever noted.² Long, woolly sleeves rolled up. There were eighteen boxes, and I carried all of them down the three flights of stairs while she made coffee and cried over the memories. In a corner of the bedroom lay a pile of his stuff. We didn’t talk about that.

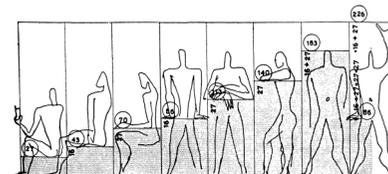
The first boxes were easy to hold and could be absentmindedly hauled down. The heavier boxes demanded more regard. You forgot to look around and enjoy the unseasonably mild weather on that notable 2nd, breaking all the records. Instead, you concentrated on the weight while muscles tightened up and the cardboard cut down into your fingers. One step at a time, one foot at a time: a thigh pushing a box forward, your arms clenched against your ribs. Jaw locked, the el of your elbow to your hand straight and strained. At least the heavy box fit conveniently into the anatomy of your body, modulator,³ like holding Le Corbusier’s *Villa Stein*⁴ against your hips.

“Are you OK?”

2 Trouw.nl. ‘Warmste 2 november ooit.’ Saturday, November 2, 2014.

3 Le Corbusier. *Modulor*, 1943.

4 Le Corbusier. *Villa Stein*, 1927.



she asked, and you had to pause while your jaw unlocked so you could yell back

“All fine!”

from your pinched throat.

The voice: either passing through or coming forth from that fleshy gape of the larynx, or voice box, as it is commonly called.⁵

You say something about the load, and the vocal chords contract and push out the words. A little tense maybe, because you’re out of breath and the heavy box is weighing down on your thigh, but still, the voice manages to exteriorize something of what is going on inside, let’s say a sigh or a moan, because that could effectively communicate how you’re feeling with the heavy box in a staircase laden with, well, memories.

A hard, loud sigh, flexing the anatomy of the throat to fit the sound efficiently.

Like the man the artist Mirko Martin ran into, during the night with all that gunfire. Martin—a Berlin-based filmmaker and photographer⁶—was in L.A. taking pictures of car crashes and film sets alike, as interchangeable scenes. You could wonder about which of them were staged and which were not. The series later flanked the screening of his encounter that night—a black image with the agitated voices subtitled in an equally agitated tempo.

“Did you hear all that gunfire?”

the man asks Martin, sounding desperate to make sense of it. Perhaps with his eyes wide open, his head jerking from one side to the other, glancing down the street. He had just fallen asleep, when the gunshots woke him up:

5 Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Thursday, November 20, 2014.

6 Martin, Mirko. *Foam Magazine*, issue #28, Fall 2011.

“AH... POW POW PWLRAHPOW-
LAHRWLRPABOHPAHPOW POW...”

“Fuck!”⁷

The man, so baffled he splurts out sounds instead of words, the larynx shaping itself around the vowels

(like the sigh),

the tongue around the consonants.

POW POW.

His throat loading itself for the exclamation, relying on his body to act out the gunfire. Trying to make sense of the gunfire sounds, straining to communicate them. Not really speaking, but surely, in a way, ‘voicing’.

It reminded me of the artist Katarina Zdjelar, whose work often revolves around this physical strain in speech. Like the feeling of tongue-tiedness when learning a language that is not your own. In Zdjelar’s video work for the Serbian Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennale, for instance, a young woman asks the camera

“Is... is... is... is... diceraar? Tsjerar?
Isdjerar?”⁸

while Zdjelar’s voice patiently repeats her own name. The woman listens intently and ruffles her tongue to the word, forcing it out through her shyly smiling teeth. She breaks down the name, reduces it to its very sounds, and by doing so, Zdjelar bares the bodily agency of the voice and language it speaks (or attempts to). She embraces the fact that the body itself is lingual, speaking a language shaped by its socio-cultural heritage, even before the moment of actual

7 Mirko Martin. *Noir*, 2008.

Did you hear all that gunfire?

N.b. Though Martin transcribes the voice of the man he meets as saying “BAW BAW” in the subtitles of *Noir*, I have taken the liberty to spell the words as “POW POW” here—this spelling being, in my opinion, a more familiar use of onomatopoeia for the sound of gunfire. [CY]

8 Katarina Zdjelar. *There Is No Is*, 2006.

speech. Or, as philosopher Judith Butler puts it in *Excitable Speech*,

“The ‘agency’ of language is not only the theme of the formulation, but its very action.”⁹

The man asks Martin:

“Did you hear all that gunfire?”

then the voice box itself is loaded and fired.

II. MAKING THE CHANGE, WITH WORDS. BUT FIRST: IT’S OVER.

“I’m breaking up with you.”

That said, everything changed for both of them. By the utterance of the sentence, by speaking the words, the words actually did what they said at the moment of saying. The break-up was validated by its utterance, the sentence itself the deed that it effected.

I am giving this example because it may be, in fact, the essential point of no return in the story and demonstrates the capability of language as an agency of change. The frame of mind I refer to here is based on the work of language philosopher J.L. Austin and his scholar J.R. Searle. It argues that speaking can perform an act generating a change, transforming one state of being into another. Austin calls it ‘doing things with words’ or performative utterances, claiming that we not only express ourselves and communicate with words, but actually perform an act while doing so.¹⁰

In her writing, Butler often refers to Austin’s Speech Act Theory and performativity in particular. She explains a speech act as follows:

“If a word in this sense might be said

¹⁰ Austin, J.L. ‘Performatieven en constatieven’ in *Studies over taalhandelingen*, ed. F.H. van Eemeren & W.K.B. Koning. Meppel: Boom, 1981.

N.b. What I do not mention here, is the distinction Austin makes between various speech acts, to elaborate their definition more precisely. To whom it is of interest I present the following quote, that sums up the two main distinctions Austin makes: “Austin, of course, distinguishes between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of speech, between actions that are performed by virtue of words, and those that are performed as consequence of words. The distinction is tricky, and not always stable. According to the perlocutionary view, words are instrumental to the accomplishment of actions, but they are not themselves the actions which they help to accomplish. This form of the performative suggests that the words and that things done are in no sense the same. But according to his view of the illocutionary speech act, the name performs *itself*, and in the course of that performing becomes a thing done; the pronouncement is the act of speech at the same time that it is the speaking of an act.” Butler, 1997 (44). [CY]

⁹ Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997 (7).

to 'do' a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing. It seems here that the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting."¹¹

The context, of course, is of importance here, and performative utterances should not be confused with mere verbs, which also have a certain degree of action embedded in their connotation. In many cases, there is an awareness of authority, someone entitled to perform a speech act and validate it from that status or position. For instance, a jury foreman proclaiming you guilty and by that utterance changing your innocence into guilt, where, let's say, the witness cannot. (Though Butler notes:

"Of interest here is the equivalence posited between 'being authorized to speak' and 'speaking with authority', for it is clearly possible to speak with authority *without* being authorized to speak."¹²)

The authoritative language of the jury looking down at her from the tribunal, an officer on each side, in uniform with guns girdled to their hips. But he had that same authority, lying naked and defenseless next to her in bed, his knee against her thigh, his voice failing him when he said,

"I'm breaking up with you,"

and it was so. A change more definitive than if he had just got up and left. Words over act. Lawless and still: nothing to be done, undone. The voice box loaded and fired, his gunfire shooting down the alliance.

POW POW.

11 Butler, 1997 (44).

12 Idem (157).

The Other

She changes this thing in the house to annoy the other, and the other is annoyed and changes it back, and she changes this other thing in the house to annoy the other, and the other is annoyed and changes it back, and then she tells all this the way it happens to some others and they think it is funny, but the other hears it and does not think it is funny, but can't change it back.¹³

13 Davis, Lydia. *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis*. London: Penguin Books, 2009 (241).

III. GUNFIRE.
OR: LOADED LANGUAGE.

Usually, when one speaks of loaded language, onomatopoeia

—like a baffled exclamation of
POW POW—

is not what is referred to. Rather, it is an embedded array of implications that load an utterance to something significant or forceful. Most often language is loaded with emotive words that provoke strong positive or negative reactions beyond their literal meaning. Name-calling would be the most obvious kind. Insults can have a physical, injurious effect on your body, the same way a physical punch can. Wounding words would be the loaded term:

“The use of a term such as ‘wound’ suggests that language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury.”¹⁴

In it, linguistic and physical vocabularies are merged. This moment of merging, when words—spoken, externalized—punch, shoot, or injure the body internally, is somewhat a reversal of Martin’s man, or Zdjelar’s video. In those examples, it is the *body’s* force—pushing *out*—that produces the voice to speak its language in the first place. A step beyond that, as in Austin’s speech acts, this body is used as an agent for language to *do* or change something, confirming the bearing of the body as the rhetorical instrument of expression.

In Butler’s words:

“[T]hat the speech act is a bodily act, and that the ‘force’ of the performative is never fully separable from bodily force: this constitute[s] the chiasm of the ‘threat’ as a speech act at once bodily and linguistic.”¹⁵

14 Butler, 1997 (4).

15 Idem (141).

Loaded language, on the other hand, has a force of its own, forcing itself *into* the body of the addressed and changing something there.

The moment he broke up with her not only made it so, but shot her, just asleep, right into another state of being. Alone now, and bleeding (but she can't change it back).

Words with a controversial connotation also have the potential to stir one up emotionally. When loaded, it is particularly forceful because it exploits a tendency to react promptly, based on an immediate emotional response. No surprise. Nevertheless, scientific tests exist for this. Scans show that language activates the emotional system of the brain, triggering a specific emotion when certain, loaded words are heard or read. What emotion is addressed could depend on your morals and ethics, which means language becomes personal in a split second.¹⁶

What emotion, for instance, is addressed when journalist Lesley Stahl talks to Madeleine Albright —ambassador to the United Nations at the time— on CBS' *60 Minutes* following U.S. sanctions against Iraq?

“We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, this is more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?”¹⁷

A voice box heavy with gunshots.

Loading a question can be more complex. The load can be in the words themselves, but even more in how they are combined, and depending on the time, place, and mood when asked. Often, a loaded question contains a false or disputed presupposition, an unjustified assumption, like guilt.

“Are you OK?”

is loaded in the sense that it, by connotation, presumes the answer

“All fine,”

especially when the one asking is the one who is not and could be spared a ‘not fine’ explanation. We play our parts.

She was taking a nap when the doorbell rang. Ears wake up eyes, wake up the rest of her. While opening the door she clears her throat.

(Loading...
Still working...)

“Where did you hide the gun?”

they ask, with the conviction that she has it, and the assumption that she did it. According to their loaded question, she is already guilty of the deed. The way she pulled the knob to open the door, the way she cleared her throat; her body could barely make another move without confirming their conviction. We play our parts? She opens her mouth but is so baffled she just splurts out a sound. AH...

Is that gunfire? Guilty!

“You have the right to remain silent,”

says the officer, and you wonder when that gun hid itself inside your voice box.

16 Boogaard, M. & M. Jansen. *Alles wat je altijd al had willen weten over taal*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 2012 (202).

17 Lesley Stahl interviews Madeleine Albright on *60 Minutes*, May 12, 1996.

IV. GUILTY.
BUT FIRST: ARE YOU WILLING TO TALK WITH
US AT THIS TIME?

(Recorder on.)

“...OK, I’m going to turn on my tape recorder. It’s March twenty three, two thousand and six. We’re at Central Police Department. I’ll identify myself, I’m Robert John. And, if you would... Speak your name for me please.”

“Mary Kovik.”

“Mary Kovik?”

“Yes.”

“OK. Let me go over this form with you. It says you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in court or other proceedings. You have the right to talk to a lawyer for advice before we ask any questions, and have him with you during questioning. If you cannot afford the lawyer, one will be appointed without cost to you before any questioning. If you decide to answer questions now without a lawyer present, you still have the right to stop answering at any time you wish. Can you understand these five rights I have read to you?”

“Yes.”

“You understand what they mean? OK? This paragraph here says—I’ve been advised of my rights and I understand what my rights are and I’m willing to make a statement and answer questions. I do not want a lawyer at this time. I understand and know what I am doing. No promises or threats have been made to me. No

pressure or coercion of any kind has been used against me. Do you understand what this is saying?”

“Yes.”

“Are you willing to talk with us at this time? OK? I want you, if you would, to print your name on this top line for me.”

“OK.”

“And sign it at the bottom.”

“OK.”

“And Mary, I’m going to start off by getting some basic information here from you. What’s your full name?”

“Mary Kovik.”

“How tall are you?”

“One meter fifty eight.”

“OK, and your weight?”

“Sixty three kilo’s.”

“And hair color? Brown. And your eyes? Is that green?”

“Green, yes.”

[..]

“Alright. We’ll kind of pick up from where we left off, OK? So you’ve been married nine years and eleven months. Is this your first marriage?”

“Yes.”

“First and only?”

“Right.”

“Now I know couples are going to have squabbles, that’s typical, that’s normal. But you didn’t have any major problems going on?”

“No.”

“OK. Anybody else involved with either party?”

“No.”

“And how were you financially?”

“Getting through.”

“You don’t work. You’re a full-time student.”

“Right.”

“And he is a full-time pastor?”

“Yes.”

“What size is his church?”

“About two hundred.”

“That’s the only income he has?”

“Yes.”

“When’s the last time you talked to him?”

“Yesterday morning.”

“Where was that at?”

“Home.”

“Home? OK. What did you discuss?”

“No real conversation. Just... No comment. I don’t know.”

“OK. All right. Mary, let me just explain some things to you. Everything that has transpired up until this date, from the time you are born, is history. We can’t change a thing. All we can change is from this point on. And, I don’t know what’s taken place in your life, I don’t know you, I’ve never met you before. Like I said, from this point on, we control our destiny by decisions we make, the things we do, and we can’t change anything that we have already done. I’m just going to be frank with you: you need to talk with us. We need to work this out, OK? You need to think about the girls, the baby, yourself. OK. What was going on? What was the problem? I want to hear your side. I want you to tell me what was troubling you so much.”

“I just can’t right now.”

“OK.”

“I just can’t right now. I appreciate... I feel like you have genuine concern and I do appreciate you. I just... Not right now.”

“I know a lot of things can happen between people. I know a lot of times mental state, emotions, everything comes into play. And it’s tough. It’s tough being married these days, I mean. Society, itself, has made it tough. I think there is a reason, there’s got to be a reason that all this happened. We’re kind of tasked to figure this stuff out, but there’s only one person that really knows why and that’s you. We want to help you, but I don’t know where to start, because I don’t know what’s going on. It’s your

life. Mary?”

“I don’t even know words to say.”

“Just go step by step and tell me what happened.”

“I just can’t right now. Sometimes I think something might have happened and then, there is no way.”

“Seems like it’s not real, right? Is that the way it seems to you, like it can’t be real?”

“Just not right now.”

“Seems like a blur, I’m sure. Has he ever hurt you?”

“Not physically.”

“What about mentally? Verbally? Any kind of abuse that way?”

“No comment. I just need to think this through some more myself.”

“Do you know the condition of your husband now? You don’t know if your husband is alive or dead, do you? Was he alive when you left the house? You don’t know, or you know and just can’t make yourself say it?”

“I don’t know!”

“Why did you shoot him, Mary?”¹⁸

18 Ignas Krunglevicius. *Interrogation*, 2009 (transcription).

V. BUT IF YOU TAKE MY VOICE WHAT WILL BE LEFT OF ME?¹⁹

Well, the body. After all, it is the very agent for that voice.

“The relationship between speech and the body is that of chiasmus,”

Butler elaborates.

“Speech is bodily, but the body exceeds the speech it occasions; and speech remains irreducible to the bodily means of its enunciation.”²⁰

Like in choreographer Alexandra Bachzetsis’ *Secret Instructions*, a collaboration with graphic designer Julia Born, consisting of six scripts for plays, a printed program and performance. The six scripts—by Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Berthold Brecht, Anton Chekhov, Sarah Kane, and Harold Pinter—are reduced to their stage directions. All the spoken texts have been deleted so that only the instructions for the body and its movements remain.²¹

“On stage, six people simultaneously interpret all six plays, each performer embodying the movements of all

19 Zdjelar, Katarina et al. *But if you take my voice what will be left of me?* Catalogue for the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009.

20 Butler, 1997 (57).

21 Bachzetsis, Alexandra & Julia Born. *Secret Instructions*. Script for the performance at De Brakke Grond (Amsterdam) and Theaterhaus Gessnerallee (Zürich). Amsterdam: Calf & Meischke, 2005.



the characters in one play.”²²

The implicit language of gesture and movement, or physical interpretation, is what becomes the language on stage. The lack of voice is instead loaded by the agent of the voice. A silence loaded with absence, straining to communicate, despite—or because—of its socio-cultural heritage, similar to Zdjelar’s straining woman.

Even without a voice, there is the body. Modulator—its kinesthetics giving you an awareness of where you are, positioning your presence in space. A character of its own. Wounded, guilty, dangerous

—a gun to be loaded
and fired.

Carrying heavy boxes, straining, sleeping, doing, waiting. Speaking its own voiceless language. Silent, but at times just as loaded as the language of its voice. Or silenced, and then certainly subject of some kind of load. The power of language cumulating a deprivation of speech, through which silence, too, becomes a performative effect of speech.²³ Leaving you speechless or holding your tongue, the latter, strangely enough, implying to have more honour in it than the former.

(You have the right to remain silent.)

“I’m breaking up with you.”

POW POW.

A loaded silence flooded every corner of the room, pressed down on her chest and wrapped itself tightly around her pinched throat.

“Are you OK?”

Loading...

Still waiting...

Then he turned around, drew back the covers, and got up. She watched him put on his clothes, his shoes, his coat, before hearing him leave. The soft click of the front door a final, deafening POW. The words took all they had together

and put it in the past, leaving the present empty and her own presence painfully diminishing in the increasing silence.

“To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control.”²⁴

Sometimes (and she does not remember if this is an actual memory or just a thought reconstructing a thought of her own, or that of someone else’s conviction), she would see herself the way he saw her. Entering with the gun in her left hand. She was right handed, actually, but needed that hand to push open the door. One full arm-length away from her, modulator, her hand gliding along the surface as it calmly swings open. She sees herself standing there with one arm stretched out, the hand still resting on the door. And her other hand, heavy. The presence of the gun itself, the agent of, say, eighteen shots, enough to make another change.

22 Bachzetsis, Alexandra. ‘My influences: Alexandra Bachzetsis’ in *Frieze*, issue 153, March 2013.

23 Butler, 1997 (137).

24 Butler, 1997 (4).

VI. SHOOTING BLANKS, AND SHOOTING SHOULDER BLADES.

The term loaded language may be considered rather plain and ordinary, a term that can be easily defined. Its frequent use in journalism and politics is hardly remarkable, maybe even thought of as necessary, or, to some extent, inevitable. However, when more familiar with the term, loaded language can be heard in any casual conversation. It can determine the direction of an answer, steering speech towards blunt statements, emotional reflexes or into a guilty state. It can be both threatening and empowering, blurring the boundaries of speaking with authority or being authorized to speak.

The connection to the body as a linguistic instrument has been my primary focus throughout this writing. Loaded language in particular is strangely entwined with physicality. For one, as injurious speech, it can hurt you inside. Secondly, and I'm thinking of loaded questions now, it can make you feel physically entrapped into a framed or manipulated response. It can proclaim you guilty, a performative utterance, leaving your body compelled to abide to that role. Baffled, maybe, in which case you could overreact, or

splurt gunfire.

Silenced, maybe, in which case the body is so affected, that it is deprived of defensive (or any kind of) speech, the box too heavily loaded to lift.

And it is then, that really only the body is speaking. Wordless. *Doing*. Giving 'secret instructions' in a silence loaded by the absence of speech.

What is compelling about the silent voice of, for instance, the character Martha's gestures in Bachzetsis' 'secret instructions' of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, is that it unravels a language which is entwined with our daily voicebox communication. The physical performance is a language to which your own body can physically relate and respond. Presence in itself becomes a powerful exclamation.

The presence of a gun weighing down in her left hand. The presence of a newfangled ex—in a room losing its contours while a loaded

silence floods it—and the transition to his exit and absence, his unpresence.

Loading... Still working... Unloading. A tensive circle.

Connecting speech to the body, merging both vocabularies, stresses the force of words. It is the moment in which words, essentially fleeting and intangible, *do* have an effect on the physical world in which they are uttered. Inflicting injury, achieving acts, affecting performance. There is a powerful, circular continuity in the voice, produced by a body, affecting another body, producing response, affecting the first body...

(The ‘performance’ of an in(ter)finity mark.)²⁵

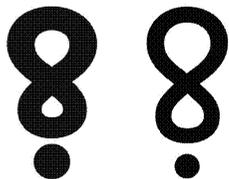
And at times, words can effectuate an even greater change than a physical act—

“I’m breaking up with you”

being more definitive than just leaving. *Telling* others about making changes in the house being more injurious than making the change in the first place.

I am aware that, throughout this essay, loaded language has been primarily associated with something negative. Injury, authority, force, and guilt, after all, being quite negatively loaded words in themselves. Change, however, is not—or not necessarily—negative. When loaded language triggers more immediate responses to surface either (voiced) feelings or (voiced) thoughts, it potentially paves the way to more direct, unvarnished, lucent, even exciting communication. But, at the same time, loaded language can do exactly the opposite, glossing over nuance, framing, and affronting. An interesting doubleness.

Shooting blanks or shooting gunfire.



25 An image that comes to mind here is graphic designer Radim Peško’s *interfinity mark*. This unusual interrogative punctuation mark implies a question that has both an infinite number of answers and no answer at all. Interfinity allows opposites to coexist.

Peško, Radim. ‘Interfinity mark.’ <http://www.radimpesko.com>. Tuesday, December 16, 2014.

The gun has been a constant metaphor throughout my writing. Now that we’re approaching the end, however, I am somewhat reluctant to use it as I conclude. This must be a remnant of my mother’s confident disapproval of anything even hinting at military symbolism. Growing up, playing with squirt guns was out of the question—

“The gun is not a toy.”

(Loaded!)

—and the T-shirt with camouflage print, bought the first time shopping alone with friends, went straight back to the store.

Still today there is a hesitance in wearing something green, in case the shade would be too combatant. Every time I use my army-green raincoat, those thoughts will cross my mind.

However, growing up, there was also a strange dream. A vivid one involving gunfire, and by now completely rooted into memory. It ended with two shots in each shoulder blade, toppling me over on a couch to sink into a deep and peaceful sleep, the shot wounds spreading a nice heat all along my back. So, despite all, there may yet be a slight, subconscious part of me that perceives the gun (the voice, the body) as arcane and magnetic. There’s a pull there.

Now, where is it hidden?

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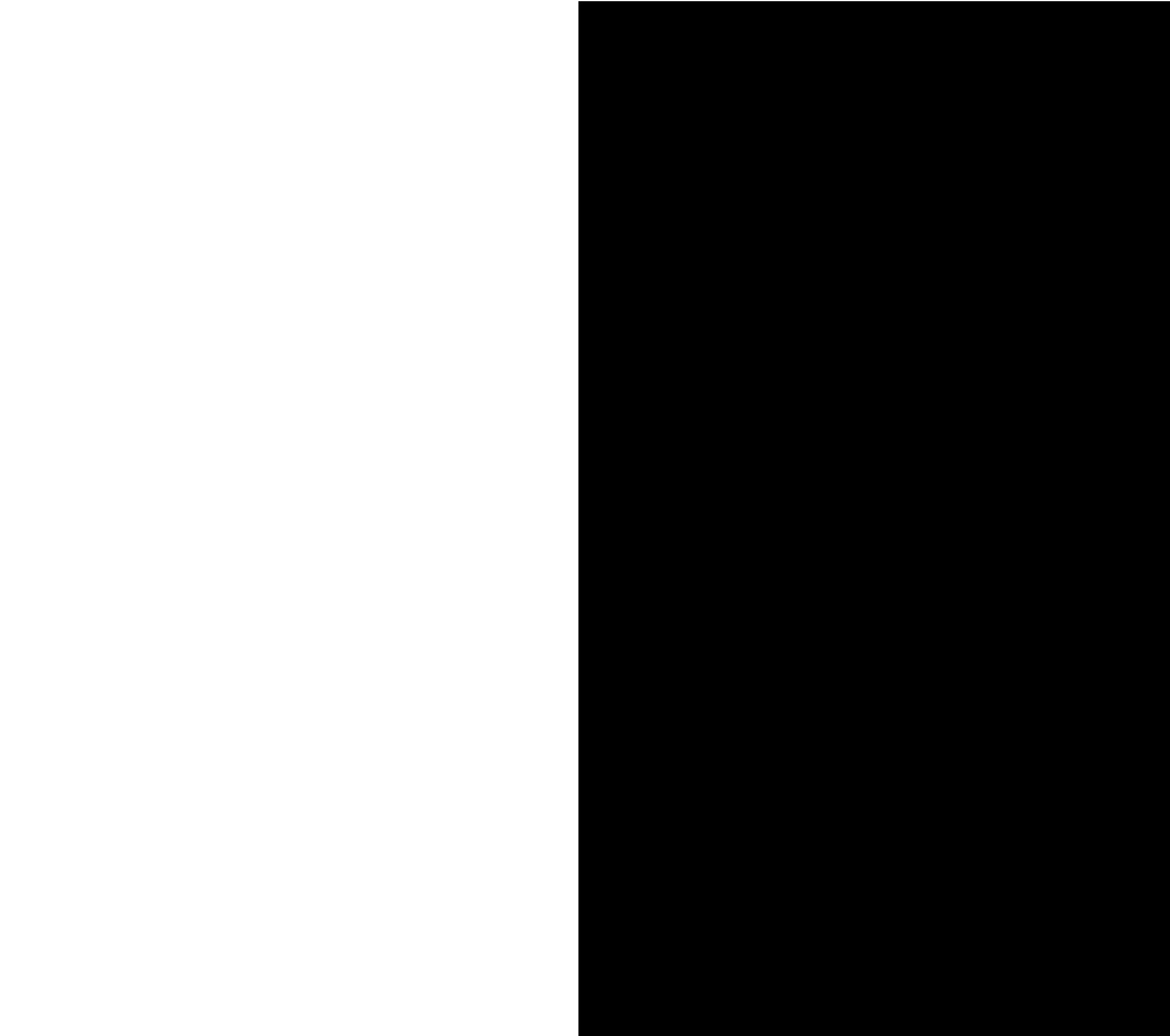
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