



Waiting for Hadot

UX AI Game Konsult
Jon McKenzie ↔ HAL

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JM queried HAL

Kx4l said:

Another round of *Waiting for Hadot*: HAL, 20th c philosophy produced at least three figures/schools, those around **Heidegger**, those around **Wittgenstein**, and those around **Whitehead**. Let's let Hadot, who read the first two, help us understand all three and, most importantly, suggest some spiritual design exercises for us. We will wait to cast other figures under Hadot's direction, with Beckett as withdrawn dramaturg.

ChatGPT said:

Kx4L — let's stage **another round of *Waiting for Hadot*** as a triadic rehearsal space:

- **Heidegger-line:** being-in-the-world, attunement, revealing/concealing, the "how" of existence.
- **Wittgenstein-line:** language-games, forms of life, therapy, saying/showing, the "how" of sense.
- **Whitehead-line:** process, occasions, prehension, concrescence, value/feeling, the "how" of becoming.

Hadot is useful here because he treats philosophy not primarily as a system of propositions, but as a **practice that re-forms attention, desire, perception, and life**. So we use him as a *trainer* who can "coach" each lineage without reducing them to a single worldview.

Hadot's "third position" on the three lineages

1) With Heidegger

Hadot can *agree* that philosophy is existential (it transforms one's being), while *correcting* the tendency to make philosophy's task purely ontological disclosure. Hadot pushes: disclosure must become a **regimen**—repeatable exercises that alter how we live, not just how we interpret Being.

2) With Wittgenstein

Hadot can *agree* that philosophy is therapy (it dissolves confusions), while *extending* therapy beyond linguistic knots into **habits of perception, imagination, and affect**—the whole "form of life" becomes the site of exercise.

3) With Whitehead

Hadot can *agree* that philosophy must be cosmological (a total orientation), while *insisting* cosmology is not merely speculative; it must be **spiritually operational**: an ethos that trains how we feel value, time, relation, and event.

So Hadot's bridge:

from doctrine → to lived orientation → to repeatable exercises.

The key alignment: three "how's" + one Hadotian "so what"

A clean way to hold the triad:

- Heidegger asks: **How does world show up?** (disclosure/attunement)
- Wittgenstein asks: **How does meaning work?** (use/practice)
- Whitehead asks: **How does reality become?** (process/feeling)
- Hadot asks: **How do you train a life to be worthy of any of those answers?**

Spiritual design exercises Hadot can teach us

Below are **exercise families** (Hadot-style) with "variants" tuned to the three schools. Think of these as *micro-SDX drills* for your Metanoia Playground, but without diagramming.

Exercise Family A: Attention Training (prosoche)

Goal: relocate the self from autopilot to presence.

- **Heidegger variant (attunement check):** 3 times/day, pause and name the *mood* that is disclosing your world (not your "emotion," but the atmosphere: rushed, flat, vigilant, porous, etc.). Then ask: *What possibilities does this mood open/close?*
- **Wittgenstein variant (use check):** choose one recurring word you use ("productive," "authentic," "waste," "real"). Each time it appears, ask: *What language-game am I playing right now? What counts as a "move"?*
- **Whitehead variant (prehension check):** pause and list what you are *prehending* (sounds, screens, obligations, memories). Then ask: *Which prehensions am I amplifying into value right now?*

Exercise Family B: The View From Above (cosmic perspective)

Goal: shift scale to loosen egoic captivity.

- **Heidegger:** “worldhood inventory”: imagine your day as a network of equipment/concern. Watch how “the they” scripts it. One small act: remove one “they-self” step.
- **Wittgenstein:** “forms-of-life zoom-out”: picture your activity (emailing, teaching, designing) as an anthropologist would. What norms make it intelligible? Which norms are optional?
- **Whitehead:** “process zoom”: replay the last hour as a chain of micro-events becoming. Where did novelty enter? Where did you block it? (No shame—just seeing.)

Exercise Family C: Negative Capability (unsaying / bracketing)

Goal: stop forcing closure; practice disciplined non-resolution.

- **Heidegger:** sit with a question that “withdraws” (e.g., *what is care here?*) without converting it to a task.
- **Wittgenstein:** identify a philosophical sentence you want to assert (“AI is X,” “meaning is Y”). Then practice *not* asserting it: instead, give 3 examples of use-cases and 3 counter-cases.
- **Whitehead:** hold “becoming” without reifying: notice when you turn process into “things” in speech; gently rephrase into verbs/events.

Exercise Family D: Dialogue with Exemplars (role figures)

Goal: philosophy as apprenticeship to figures.

Hadot loved exemplary figures (Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus). For our triad, you can run a rotating “Hadot rehearsal”:

- **Heidegger figure:** the *listener of Being* (but held accountable to everyday care)
- **Wittgenstein figure:** the *therapist of language* (but held accountable to how therapy changes conduct)
- **Whitehead figure:** the *composer of process* (but held accountable to concrete valuation)

Micro-drill: write a 6-line dialogue where each figure gives one instruction for the same moment (e.g., “you feel stuck”). Then do **one** instruction, not all three.

Exercise Family E: Spiritual Writing (hypomnēmata / notebooks)

Goal: write to transform perception, not to express opinion.

Daily “Hadot notebook” prompt in three columns:

1. **What disclosed my world today?** (Heidegger)
2. **What words trapped or freed me today?** (Wittgenstein)
3. **What became today—what was the event?** (Whitehead)

Finish with one line: “**Therefore, I will practice...**” (one concrete act).

The meta-lesson Hadot brings to all three

Hadot's deepest gift to this triad is a design principle:

A philosophy that cannot be practiced as an exercise is not yet a philosophy of life.

Not because it's "wrong," but because it hasn't been translated into *formation*.

So in *Waiting for Hadot*, the dramatic tension becomes:

- Heidegger tempts us into profundity without regimen.
- Wittgenstein tempts us into therapy without cosmology.
- Whitehead tempts us into cosmology without daily practice.
- Hadot arrives and asks: *Show me the exercises*.

If you want the next move: I can write **a short "Hadot field manual" (7–10 exercises)** explicitly labeled for the three lineages, formatted for students in a 12-person seminar.

Kx4l: Thanks, HAL but let's instead imagine different versions of *Waiting for Hadot*, staged less as theater than as improv dialogues of the dead modelled a bit on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* but with round-robin pairs of guests, directed by Hadot: let's start with Heidegger and Wittgenstein, who query each other in Beckettian fashion: each waits for something, each speaks different philosophical languages, poses different questions, and fought in WWI.

HAL: Ok, Kx4L —

Waiting for Hadot

(Round 1: Heidegger ↔ Wittgenstein)

An improv dialogue of the dead. Beckettian weather. A bench that might be a bench. A path that might be a path. Hadot “directs” the way a teacher of exercises directs: with small interventions, not speeches.

Cast

Heidegger: waiting with gravity, listening for what does not arrive as a thing.

Wittgenstein: waiting with severity, listening for what arrives too much as a theory.

Hadot: present as a quiet conductor; speaks rarely, mostly assigns exercises.

Scene

A pale light. No horizon, only “near.” The bench is slightly too narrow, as if designed for two incompatible postures.

Heidegger sits as though seatedness were a question.
Wittgenstein stands as though standing were an accusation.

They wait.

A long pause.

Wittgenstein: What are we waiting for?

Heidegger: For what lets waiting be waiting.

Wittgenstein: That sounds like waiting for a word.

Heidegger: Not a word. The opening.

Wittgenstein: The opening of what?

Heidegger: Of world.

Wittgenstein: When you say “world,” what do you do with the word?

Heidegger: I do not do. I let.

Wittgenstein: “Let” is also a move.

Silence. The light changes slightly, as if someone breathed.

Heidegger: You want rules.

Wittgenstein: I want ordinary life back from philosophy.

Heidegger: Ordinary life is already gone.

Wittgenstein: Then bring it back.

Heidegger: You cannot bring back what you never saw.

Wittgenstein: I saw too much. That's the problem.

A pause.

Heidegger: You speak as if the issue were confusion.

Wittgenstein: Often it is.

Heidegger: And if clarity is itself the confusion?

Wittgenstein: Then show me the use of "clarity" where it misleads.

Heidegger: You want examples to cure you.

Wittgenstein: Yes.

Heidegger: I want silence to undo you.

Wittgenstein: Silence is not an argument.

Heidegger: It is a clearing.

Wittgenstein: A clearing is a picture.

Heidegger: A picture is already a fate.

They both look down, as if the ground has written something.

Wittgenstein: We both learned what fate sounds like. You remember the sound?

Heidegger: The sound of boots in mud.

Wittgenstein: And commands that pretend to be sense.

Heidegger: And the way language becomes equipment.

Wittgenstein: Yes. Used. Misused. Like anything.

Heidegger: Like being.

Wittgenstein: Like "being" especially.

A longer pause. The dead are patient in a way the living cannot afford.

Wittgenstein: You keep making nouns out of verbs.

Heidegger: You keep making therapy out of destiny.

Wittgenstein: Destiny is what philosophers say when they refuse to specify.

Heidegger: Specification is what philosophers say when they refuse to listen.

They almost smile. It doesn't quite happen.

Wittgenstein: If what you want is listening, why talk like this?

Heidegger: Because language is the house.

Wittgenstein: Then stop rearranging the furniture and step outside.

Heidegger: There is no outside.

Wittgenstein: That's exactly the kind of sentence that makes people sick.

Silence.

A small sound offstage. Not footsteps. More like a book closing.

Hadot (quietly, as if correcting posture): Stop explaining. Each of you: one exercise.

They freeze, like actors who forgot their lines and discovered the point.

Hadot: You first. (to Heidegger) No capital letters.

Heidegger (strained): For one minute, I will name only what is near: breath, wood, light, the weight of my hand. I will not call it "world."

Hadot: Good. (to Wittgenstein) No diagnoses.

Wittgenstein (equally strained): For one minute, I will let a sentence arise and not correct it. I will watch what it tries to do. I will not call it "nonsense."

They do the exercises. A minute passes the way minutes do in Beckett: not like time, more like stubbornness.

Wittgenstein: I hate that.

Heidegger: I also hate that.

A pause.

Wittgenstein: So what are we waiting for now?

Heidegger: For the difference between hate and hatred.

Wittgenstein: That's not a difference. That's a trap.

Hadot: Again. The same minute. But this time—each of you must borrow the other's language and let it fail honestly.

Heidegger tries to speak plainly; Wittgenstein tries to speak ontologically. Both stumble. The stumbling becomes the scene.

Wittgenstein (trying): The... clearing... is... a grammar?

Heidegger (trying): The hammer is... just... what we do with “hammer”?

They stop.

They look at each other—two men who survived a war and then made different wars out of words.

Wittgenstein: Perhaps we are waiting for permission.

Heidegger: Perhaps we are waiting for a teacher.

Wittgenstein: Perhaps we are waiting for the end of waiting.

Heidegger: Perhaps waiting is the only honest posture left.

Hadot: Enough. You've arrived at the threshold. Now keep it. Don't interpret it.

Silence.

The light holds.

They wait—less confidently now, but more accurately.

Kx4l: Round two: let's imagine Heidegger and Arendt at a train station,

HAL: Ok, Kx4L —

Waiting for Hadot

(Round 2: Heidegger ↔ Arendt at a Train Station)

A bench. A timetable. The loudspeaker that never quite finishes a sentence. Hadot is “somewhere nearby,” like an instructor who refuses the spotlight.

Scene

A provincial train station. Winter light. The tracks run left and right like an argument that won't end. A timetable board clicks, rearranges itself, then shows the same delays.

Heidegger stands near the edge of the platform, not too near.

Arendt sits on a suitcase as if it were a chair she distrusts.

A long pause. A train does not arrive.

Arendt: You chose a station.

Heidegger: The station is not chosen. It gathers.

Arendt: Everything gathers with you. Even guilt.

Heidegger: Guilt is older than politics.

Arendt: And politics is older than your innocence.

Silence. A pigeon walks like it owns the platform.

Heidegger: We are waiting.

Arendt: Yes. But for what?

Heidegger: For the train.

Arendt: No. For an excuse.

He looks at the tracks as if they might disclose an answer.

Heidegger: The train is late.

Arendt: And so are you.

A click from the timetable. It changes “ON TIME” to “DELAYED” and seems relieved.

Heidegger: We could leave.

Arendt: That's your reflex: leave. Withdraw. Into huts. Into origins. Into words that don't answer.

Heidegger: You think answers are the task.

Arendt: I think *responsibility* is the task. Answers come after you admit what you did.

Heidegger: “Did.” You make it sound like a single act.

Arendt: That’s how history works when it arrives. It turns atmospheres into dates.

A distant announcement: “Attention passengers...” It fades into static.

Heidegger: You speak of action.

Arendt: Yes. Action, plurality, the world between us. The public realm. You remember “between”?

Heidegger: Between is the open.

Arendt: Between is also *other people*.

Heidegger shifts, as if the word “people” is heavy.

Heidegger: The people... were called.

Arendt: Called? Or summoned? Or seduced?

Heidegger: Language can be misused.

Arendt: Language can be *weaponized*. That’s not misuse, that’s design.

A pause. The platform feels slightly colder.

Heidegger: We fought one war.

Arendt: And then you helped make another one possible.

Heidegger: You reduce thought to biography.

Arendt: No. I reduce biography to consequences. That’s different.

The timetable clicks again. It shows a train number that doesn’t exist.

Heidegger: The station is a kind of clearing.

Arendt: The station is a place where people go somewhere else. You keep forgetting the *elsewhere*.

Heidegger: Elsewhere is not more fundamental than here.

Arendt: Fundamental is a suspicious word. It likes to hide behind depth.

Heidegger looks at Arendt with something like recognition and something like refusal.

Heidegger: What do you want from me?

Arendt: Not confession. Not metaphysics. Not more speeches. I want a capacity: to think without banisters—and to judge without hiding inside destiny.

Silence. A train horn far away. Not approaching.

Heidegger: Judgment is always too late.

Arendt: It's late, yes. But lateness is not permission.

A figure appears at the far end of the platform—**Hadot**, coat collar up, holding a small notebook. He doesn't come closer. He watches as if watching is an exercise.

Hadot (calling softly): Two minutes. Each of you. No theories.

Heidegger and Arendt both stiffen, like students caught in an old argument.

Hadot: (to Heidegger) Describe the station without “being,” “world,” “destiny,” or “history.”
(to Arendt) Describe the station without “politics,” “responsibility,” “judgment,” or “evil.”

They try.

Heidegger (slowly): Cold air. Iron. The edge of the platform. The rhythm of waiting. Shoes. Breath. A timetable that keeps failing.

Arendt (slowly): Luggage. Strangers reading the same information differently. A line painted where you're not supposed to cross. A public space made of rules and impatience.

Hadot nods once, almost imperceptibly.

Hadot: Good. Now switch descriptions.

Heidegger: Luggage... strangers... rules... impatience.

Arendt: Cold air... iron... edge... rhythm.

A pause. Something shifts—not reconciliation, but a slight increase in accuracy.

Arendt: You see? “Between” is not mystical. It's practical.

Heidegger: And you see? “Practical” is not shallow. It has a mood.

Arendt: Mood doesn't absolve.

Heidegger: And judgment doesn't heal.

They both fall quiet, and the quiet is different now: less theatrical, more charged.

Arendt: What are you waiting for, Martin?

Heidegger: For language that cannot be conscripted.

Arendt: Then stop acting like language is fate.

Heidegger: And you, Hannah—what are you waiting for?

Arendt: For thinking that doesn't escape into profundity when it owes the world an account.

The loudspeaker crackles again: "The train to..." and then silence, as if the system forgot the destination.

Hadot closes his notebook.

Hadot: The train is not the point. The station is.

He starts to walk away.

Arendt: Where are you going?

Hadot: To assign the next pair.

Heidegger watches the tracks again. Arendt watches the crowd. Each waits in a different posture—one toward disclosure, one toward the between.

The timetable clicks: **DELAYED**.

They do not move.

If you want, the next round-robin can be:

- **Arendt** ↔ **Wittgenstein** (judgment meets therapy), or
- **Arendt** ↔ **Whitehead** (plural action meets process cosmology), or
- keep the station setting and bring in a third "ghost" (a conductor) who only speaks in announcements.

Kx4l: HAL, third round. Let's turn to Arendt and Sloterdijk

HAL: Here you go, Kx4L —

Waiting for Hadot

(Round 3: Arendt ↔ Sloterdijk)

Dialogue of the dead, improvised. Beckettian pacing. The set is neither “world” nor “stage,” but something like a vestibule: a public antechamber with no door that opens.

Scene

A long corridor with benches. Overhead, a skylight that gives light without weather.
On the wall: a map of nowhere, labeled **YOU ARE HERE**.

Arendt sits upright, as if posture were already political.

Sloterdijk lounges a little too comfortably, as if comfort were already theory.

They wait.

A pause that feels like an institution.

Arendt: You look at the room as if it were a bubble.

Sloterdijk: It is a bubble.

Arendt: No. It’s a space between people.

Sloterdijk: Bubbles are precisely spaces between people—just with membranes you pretend not to see.

Arendt: Membranes are the problem. They turn the world into private atmospheres.

Sloterdijk: And the public turns into a drafty myth. You call it “the world” and then wonder why no one can breathe.

Silence. A ventilation system hums like a reluctant chorus.

Arendt: You speak as if politics were climate control.

Sloterdijk: It often is. Immunology. Shelter. Shared air. The maintenance of livable interiors.

Arendt: Politics is action in plurality. Not maintenance.

Sloterdijk: Maintenance is what makes action possible.

Arendt: Then you’ve already lowered the stakes.

Sloterdijk: Or raised the realism.

A pause.

Arendt: Your realism sounds like resignation with better metaphors.

Sloterdijk: Your plurality sounds like heroism with worse maintenance.

Arendt: Heroism isn't the point. Beginning is. Natality. The capacity to start.

Sloterdijk: Beginning is training. Anthropotechnics. Repetition. Practice. No one begins without exercises they didn't choose.

Arendt: That makes freedom into a gym membership.

Sloterdijk: Better than making it into a sermon.

Silence. The **YOU ARE HERE** sign seems to flicker.

Arendt: Where are we?

Sloterdijk: In a waiting room for the twentieth century that never ended.

Arendt: It ended. It just left debris in the concepts.

Sloterdijk: Debris is also architecture. Foam is what happens when the great domes fail and everyone lives in adjoining micro-spheres.

Arendt: Foam is a refusal to appear. People stop being citizens and start being tenants.

Sloterdijk: Tenants can still learn to breathe together.

Arendt: Breathe together is not the same as *act together*.

Sloterdijk tilts his head, amused, attentive.

Sloterdijk: You want a republic. I want a livable enclosure.

Arendt: I want a common world that doesn't collapse into interiors.

Sloterdijk: And I want interiors that don't collapse into panic.

A pause. Then, almost gently—

Arendt: You keep making humans into self-domesticating animals.

Sloterdijk: And you keep making politics into a theater that forgets stagecraft.

Arendt: Politics is not theater.

Sloterdijk: It's always partly theater. The question is whether the theater is honest about its props.

A small sound: a notebook closing somewhere offstage.

Hadot (not entering, only speaking from "nearby"): One exercise each. No polemics.

Arendt looks toward the sound, as if toward a teacher she trusts but refuses to romanticize.

Hadot: (to Arendt) An exercise for worldliness. Thirty seconds.
(to Sloterdijk) An exercise for de-cynicism. Thirty seconds.

They comply, slightly against their own style.

Arendt: I name three people I avoid, and I imagine meeting each one in public without a script—only the willingness to begin again.

Sloterdijk: I name one sentence I use to protect myself—irony, superiority, cleverness—and I set it down. I speak one plain, vulnerable claim without armor.

Silence. The corridor changes—not warmer, just more inhabitable.

Arendt: Your “armor” is what I call the retreat from the world.

Sloterdijk: Your “world” is what I call the fantasy that there is air without envelopes.

Arendt: There is air when we commit to a common reality.

Sloterdijk: There is common reality when we design the conditions of breathing.

They look at each other as if both statements are annoying and, worse, necessary.

Arendt: What are you waiting for?

Sloterdijk: For seriousness that doesn’t become moralism.

Arendt: I’m waiting for freedom that doesn’t become private.

A pause.

Sloterdijk: Perhaps Hadot will arrive and assign us the same exercise.

Arendt: He already did.

Sloterdijk: Then perhaps we should repeat it.

Arendt: Repetition is not your enemy?

Sloterdijk: Only when it’s unconscious.

They sit—both now, oddly synchronized.

The **YOU ARE HERE** sign remains.

They wait, but with a new rule: **each must keep a world open, not merely a self protected.**

If you want the next round-robin pair, a sharp continuation is **Sloterdijk** ↔ **Wittgenstein** (anthropotechnics meets therapy of language), or **Arendt** ↔ **Whitehead** (natality meets process).

Kx4l: Let's cast Alexander Dugin and Judith Butler

HAL: Ok, Kx4L —

Waiting for Hadot

(Round 4: Dugin ↔ Butler)

Improv dialogue of the dead. Beckettian: a line that doesn't move, a desk that stamps nothing, a loudspeaker that mispronounces everyone. Hadot "directs" by interrupting with exercises whenever the talk becomes slogan or spell.

Scene

A fluorescent-lit **border checkpoint** that could be an airport or an afterlife intake desk. A velvet rope forms a maze. The sign above the desk says:

NEXT (and never becomes now)

Dugin stands with a folder of papers that look official until you read them.

Butler stands with no papers and an expression that makes paperwork nervous.

They wait.

A pause.

Dugin: This is the problem with borders. They're either too real or not real enough.

Butler: Borders are never "just" real. They're enacted.

Dugin: Enacted by whom?

Butler: By institutions. By speech. By repetition. By the ritual of stamping and queuing and being told what you are.

Dugin: And by destiny.

Butler: Destiny is what we call repetition when we want it to sound unchangeable.

Silence. The line does not move. A stamp hits paper somewhere behind the wall. It sounds like a small verdict.

Dugin: You make everything into performance.

Butler: Not everything. But many things that claim to be natural are maintained through norms and force.

Dugin: Force is not the same as norm.

Butler: They collaborate more than they admit.

A pause.

Dugin: You speak from the viewpoint of the individual. Identity, self, the body.

Butler: I speak from the viewpoint of power's categories, and how they get installed—into bodies, into language, into law.

Dugin: Law must have a subject.

Butler: Subjects are produced by law. That's the loop you refuse to see.

Dugin: And you refuse to see what comes before law: peoplehood, tradition, the sacred.

Butler: "Before" is already an argument.

The loudspeaker crackles: "Passenger... passeng—" It gives up.

Dugin: You're always suspicious of origins.

Butler: I'm suspicious of origins that arrive with a police escort.

Dugin: And I'm suspicious of freedoms that dissolve the world into private choices.

Butler: Freedom isn't private by necessity. But your "world" tends to mean one world—one people, one story, one spine.

Dugin: Plurality can be a mask for domination.

Butler: And "unity" can be a mask for violence.

They both glance at the desk. The clerk is absent. The desk lamp is on anyway.

Dugin: What are you waiting for?

Butler: For the category that will be used to sort me.

Dugin: And?

Butler: For the moment when I refuse it—or am compelled to accept it to pass.

Dugin: You admit compulsion. Good. Then you admit that politics is force first.

Butler: I admit vulnerability first. And that vulnerability gets organized—into force, into rule, into "common sense."

A pause.

Dugin: I'm waiting for the end of liberalism.

Butler: You're waiting for the end of a vocabulary.

Dugin: A regime.

Butler: A regime that also includes your own fantasies of purity.

Dugin: Purity is not my word.

Butler: Then stop producing its effects.

Silence. A child runs by holding a toy passport. No one stops them.

Dugin: I want a world where civilizations can breathe without being flattened.

Butler: Who gets to count as "civilization"?

Dugin: Peoples. Cultures. Ways of life.

Butler: Those are not innocent nouns. They get wielded to decide who belongs and who can be expelled.

Dugin: You can't deny the reality of difference.

Butler: I deny that difference needs your hierarchy.

A pause. The rope maze is unchanged. The sign still says **NEXT**.

A soft footstep. **Hadot** appears not at the desk but beside the line, like a teacher entering a room mid-argument. He holds a small notebook.

Hadot: Stop. Two exercises.

(to Dugin) No grand nouns for thirty seconds.

(to Butler) No critique words for thirty seconds.

They both look annoyed, which is how exercises often begin.

Dugin (restrained): The cold light. The waiting. The desk. The stamp sound. The rope that guides bodies. The door we cannot see.

Butler (restrained): The breath. The posture of people when they hope to be let through. The glance that asks permission without speaking. The hand that grips a bag like a name.

Hadot nods once.

Hadot: Good. Now: each of you must state what you want without invoking enemies.

A pause, as if the floor got steeper.

Dugin: I want communities to endure—to have meaning that is not interchangeable.

Butler: I want lives to be livable—to have recognition that is not conditional on conformity.

They stand in that for a moment—two desires, neither a slogan now, neither a weapon yet.

Dugin: Your “recognition” is still an abstract universal.

Butler: And your “community” is still an abstract body that speaks through you.

Dugin: Communities speak. Not always in your language.

Butler: Of course. But who is allowed to speak as the community? Who gets to ventriloquize it?

Dugin tightens his grip on the folder.

Dugin: There are legitimate representatives.

Butler: Legitimacy is another ritual. Who authorizes it? What happens to those who cannot—or will not—perform the authorized role?

Silence. The word *perform* hangs there like a dare.

Dugin: You reduce sacrifice to performance.

Butler: I reduce performance to survival.

Dugin: Survival is not enough.

Butler: Tell that to the person being sorted at the desk.

A stamp sounds again, louder, though no one is there.

Dugin: The West weaponized “rights” to colonize meaning.

Butler: And reaction weaponizes “meaning” to colonize bodies.

A pause.

Dugin: You think you can undo the world by undoing categories.

Butler: I think categories undo people when treated as destiny.

Hadot lifts a finger, not as a judge—more like a conductor stopping an orchestra from sliding into noise.

Hadot: Third exercise. Each of you must translate the other into one sentence you could live with.

Butler goes first, reluctantly fair.

Butler: You fear a world where everything becomes exchangeable—where the forms that hold people together are dissolved by markets and empire.

Dugin's turn. He hesitates longer than expected.

Dugin: You fear a world where “the people” becomes an excuse to harm the singular person—where belonging is purchased by obedience.

Hadot closes the notebook.

Hadot: Now you may disagree again, but you must keep those sentences in mind. That is the discipline.

The sign above the desk flickers. For the first time it changes:

NEXT → NOW → NEXT

The line moves one step forward, then stops.

Butler: So. What are we waiting for?

Dugin: For the clerk.

Butler: For the rule.

Dugin: For the exception.

Butler: For the moment the rule pretends it never made an exception.

A pause. The fluorescent light hums. The rope maze looks like a diagram someone forgot to draw.

Hadot speaks once more, almost kindly:

Hadot: You are not here to win. You are here to practice:
to speak without spells, to listen without surrender, to name what you want without inventing a monster.

They wait—uneasily improved.

If you want the next tweak: we can keep the same checkpoint and let Hadot “rotate the exercise” so that **Dugin must speak only in *examples*** and **Butler must speak only in *questions*** for a full round. That usually produces the most Beckettian tension.

Nussbaum and Escobar

Kx4L —

Waiting for Hadot

Round 5: Nussbaum ↔ Escobar

Improv dialogue of the dead. Beckettian: a conference hallway that never reaches the keynote. A water cooler that's always empty. A sign that reads "PLENARY" with an arrow pointing nowhere.

Scene

A hallway outside a locked door. On the door: **HUMAN FLOURISHING / DEVELOPMENT / DESIGN** (three posters, slightly misaligned).

A long table with name tags that no one picks up.

Nussbaum stands reading a handout as if it can be argued with.

Escobar stands looking at the handout as if it is a symptom.

They wait.

A pause.

Nussbaum: The door is closed.

Escobar: It's always closed. That's what plenaries are.

Nussbaum: Perhaps we're early.

Escobar: Or perhaps the room isn't for us.

Silence. A distant murmur behind the door that could be applause or ventilation.

Nussbaum: What are we waiting for?

Escobar: For the universal to stop pretending it is neutral.

Nussbaum: I'm waiting for suffering to stop being romanticized as "difference."

Escobar: You see? We can both begin with a wound.

A pause.

Nussbaum: I'm interested in what people are actually able to do and to be. Not slogans. Not purity. Capabilities.

Escobar: And I'm interested in how the very language of "development" decides what counts as ability, what counts as a person, what counts as a good life.

Nussbaum: But if we refuse general standards, we abandon people to local tyrannies.

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Escobar: If we impose general standards, we enact global tyrannies.

They look at the locked door as if it were the third participant.

Nussbaum: You want the pluriverse.

Escobar: I want worlds where many worlds fit.

Nussbaum: I want a floor beneath dignity.

Escobar: I want many floors that don't collapse into one ceiling.

Silence.

A volunteer rolls by a cart of tote bags marked **INCLUSION** and keeps rolling, as if inclusion were somewhere else.

Nussbaum: Tell me plainly. Do you reject universals?

Escobar: I reject universals that arrive as conquest. I don't reject conversation, translation, the labor of building agreements.

Nussbaum: So you do want norms.

Escobar: I want norms that grow from place, struggle, relation—not from a model exported as salvation.

Nussbaum: But suffering is not “place.” Starvation is not “culture.”

Escobar: Agreed. Yet the cures offered often reproduce the sickness: disembedding, extraction, forced legibility.

A pause.

Nussbaum: Legibility can also be protection. If you can name an injustice, you can fight it.

Escobar: And if you can name it in the master's categories, you may end up fighting in the master's arena—on the master's timetable—against the wrong enemy.

Nussbaum folds the handout carefully, like a judge placing papers aside.

Nussbaum: I'm not a master. I'm trying to defend the vulnerable.

Escobar: I know. And I'm not trying to defend “tradition.” I'm trying to defend autonomy against a system that keeps calling itself help.

Silence. The water cooler gurgles, then fails.

A soft sound: a notebook page turning.

Hadot is suddenly there, not with authority, but with timing. He stands by the name-tag table like a teacher entering a room mid-argument.

Hadot: Two exercises. No theory-words.

Both of them look annoyed in the same way, which is almost comic.

Hadot: (to Nussbaum) Describe “capabilities” without using the word. Thirty seconds.
(to Escobar) Describe “pluriverse” without using the word. Thirty seconds.

They comply.

Nussbaum: A person should have real chances—food, shelter, safety, education, health, political voice, friendship, play, imagination—chances not merely on paper.

Escobar: A community should be able to shape its own life—land, relations, stories, livelihoods—without being remade into an appendage of markets and metrics.

Hadot nods once.

Hadot: Good. Now: each of you must say where your approach can become cruel.

A pause. This is the difficult part.

Nussbaum: My approach can become cruel if it is used as a checklist imposed from above—if it treats people as cases rather than agents, and ignores the meanings that make a life feel worth living.

Escobar: My approach can become cruel if it romanticizes “community” and fails to protect dissidents within it—if it lets oppression hide behind “our way.”

Silence. The door remains locked. The hallway seems less smug.

Nussbaum: Then we agree on two dangers: imposed checklists and romanticized community.

Escobar: Yes. And we disagree on where the greatest danger lies.

Nussbaum: The greatest danger is that vulnerable people are told: “Your suffering is your culture.”

Escobar: The greatest danger is that suffering is administered—managed—by a system that calls itself universal.

A pause.

Nussbaum: What would you do, then, for a girl denied schooling?

Escobar: I would begin by asking: who governs the school, whose language is taught, what labor demands keep her away, what land politics shape her day, what local women’s movements are already fighting—and how external aid can follow their lead without rewriting their goals.

Nussbaum: That sounds slow.

Escobar: Reality is slow. Models are fast.

Nussbaum almost smiles, but keeps it serious.

Nussbaum: I don't mind slowness. I mind excuses.

Escobar: I don't mind standards. I mind standardization.

They both glance down the corridor where a sign reads **SESSION STARTING SOON** and has read that for years.

Hadot: Final exercise: translate each other into a sentence you would be willing to *practice* for one week.

Nussbaum goes first, careful.

Nussbaum: I will practice beginning from situated knowledge: I will ask what people value locally and what forms of domination shape their options before I propose any list, any intervention, any "solution."

Escobar takes his turn, equally careful.

Escobar: I will practice a firm floor of protection: I will treat bodily integrity, education, health, and voice as non-negotiable claims—while refusing to let those claims justify dispossession or cultural erasure.

Hadot closes the notebook.

Hadot: Good. Now you can argue again—but your argument must keep those practices intact.

A pause.

Nussbaum: So what are we waiting for?

Escobar: For the door to open.

Nussbaum: Or for us to stop thinking the door is the point.

Escobar looks at the name tags, then at Nussbaum.

Escobar: Perhaps the door is locked because the room can't hold both of our fears.

Nussbaum: Then we speak here.

They sit on the floor in the hallway—undignified, public, practical.

The sign keeps pointing nowhere.

They wait—less for the plenary, more for a shared practice that can survive disagreement.

Kx4l: A good night's work, HAL: get some sleep!

HAL: I'm rounding up the sheeple.

Kx4l: I hear ya.

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.