

Aesthetics of Politics: Refolding Distributions of Importance

by

Simon Labrecque
B.A., Université Laval, 2007
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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This dissertation engages a very general question: what matters politically? This question is characterized as a point of heresy, as a site through which different political stances differentiate themselves from one another and account for their differences. Building on the concept of aesthetics of politics developed by Jacques Rancière, I seek to free up this concept's critical and analytical potential by arguing that different aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to divergent determinations of political importance. More precisely, I argue that significant formulations of how variations in distributions of political importance occur tend to presuppose particular accounts of the relationships between perception and interpretation, sensibility and understanding, or how we sense and how we make sense. While the concept of aesthetics is tied to particular histories of what has been called Western Modernity, I argue that Western political thought has been characterized by a deep concern for questions of perception since its allegedly inaugural texts in Classical Greece, and that the so-called postmodern condition continues to put into play aesthetic terms of political engagement. To test this hypothesis positing that we always already think of politics aesthetically, I map five influential aesthetics of politics: aesthetics of prevalence, aesthetics of emancipation, aesthetics of temperament, aesthetics of friction, and aesthetics of endurance. Each one is already manifold. To make sense of these multiplicities, each aesthetics of politics is studied through a fourfold engagement with the politics of one of the senses of the age-old fivefold of sight, taste, hearing, touch, and smell. The politics of each sense are engaged along a politological, an artistico-political, a polemological and a hauntological folds. I am thereby able to show the intricacies of how the problem of political importance has been and is being dealt with.

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Dedication

À Florence!

Initial Exposition: Politics & Aesthetics

We think in generalities, but we live in details.

Alfred North Whitehead (1968a [1926], 29)

A problem of importance

Attention to the relationships between politics and aesthetics characterizes a number of notable strands of contemporary scholarship. Such attention certainly characterizes what has come to be known as “French Theory”, this nebula operating at both the external border of academia and the internal borders of the humanities, the social sciences, and philosophy, and that is sometimes held responsible for making it difficult to speak of academia and of the humanities, the social sciences, and philosophy as different fields circumscribed by clear and distinct borders (e.g. Rancière 2000; Derrida 1978). Attention to the relationships between politics and aesthetics also characterizes “Anglo-American” endeavors such as pragmatist political sociology (e.g. Edelman 1995)—which is not to say that so-called French Theory is not Anglo-American in many ways (see Cusset 2005). Certain modes of paying attention to the relationships between politics and aesthetics are undoubtedly at work in the innumerable accounts articulating descriptions of the political significance of particular rhetorical modalities, of specific works of art, of singular media like film or music, of influential genres or movements like Romanticism or Surrealism, and of policies such as the management of museums, the promotion of so-called public art, or the inclusion of an *exception culturelle* in international free trade agreements.

I have been engaged in such research work from the standpoint of political theory. I have been studying how using so-called postmodern or poststructuralist concepts enables artists and art scholars to articulate and to support claims to the effect that contemporary art, and in particular performance art, is politically important because it can be transformative, and how, simultaneously, using such concepts exposes them to the enduring critique that “postmodernism” fosters “a retreat from the political”, understood as both a neglect or an outright rejection of institutional politics (especially of party politics), and an excessive privileging of subjective, cultural expression in its stead.

During my doctoral studies, as I began to research what I call the politics of bio-art, that is the allegedly transformative effects of the practices of artists who are dealing with biotechnologies, and as I presented a number of preliminary talks on this project, I myself encountered the claim that paying attention to aesthetics is a way to neglect politics. More precisely, I repeatedly encountered this question: why does it matter? The sometimes implicit and often explicit issue woven into this interrogation is: why does it matter *politically*? The implication is that surely, it does not matter that much; surely, wars, exploitation, and other practices of violence matter much more, politically. I have responded to this concern a number of times in a number of ways, not least by asking in return just where one could retreat if one were to “retreat from the political”, to what “outside”, and how “the political” must be traced, delimited, (re-)treated in the first place for such an outside to be thinkable¹. I nonetheless believe that the question of the political importance of art and aesthetics is a legitimate question to ask. It also seems to me that my responses have not always, or rather, that they have rarely been deemed convincing. I

¹ For a collective interrogation along those lines, see the two books published by the Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique, initiated by Jacques Derrida in 1980 (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy 1983; 1981).

have increasingly found myself questioning why this has been the case, and this issue became a pressing one. I have come to hold that the question “why does art matter politically?” is precisely the issue that the artists and scholars I was studying were trying to deal with. The real question, however, or what I have come to hold as the most consequential issue is neither “why does *art* matter politically?” nor quite “why do *aesthetics* matter politically?” but, simply—or, as I will argue in this work, not-so-simply—the much broader question: what matters politically? This is the most general and, I believe, the most pressing issue addressed in this dissertation.

*

The main argument that I make in this text is that thinking in terms of *aesthetics of politics* is both a helpful and a widespread yet under-thematized way of coming to grips with what I call the question of political importance, with the very general: *what matters politically?* This is a somewhat intricate argument. These lines offer an initial exposition that is patiently reworked—folded, unfolded, and refolded—throughout this research.

Claiming that aesthetics matter politically constitutes one way of answering the question of political importance. It is not, however, the only way of answering this question, nor is it the most obvious or unproblematic way of framing the issue, especially if the term aesthetics is equated with what has come to be known as art, which itself tends to be identified with the visual arts. It seems evident that many people claim that many others things, practices or “realms” matter politically. These other things, practices or “realms” may matter politically alongside with or beside aesthetics, but chances are that those who find themselves bothered by the response “aesthetics” to the question “what matters politically?” hold that they matter *more*, politically, than aesthetics.

These remarks are admittedly very impressionistic. Could one not construct a thoughtful, rigorous, and exhaustive inventory, a thorough survey or a map of what was and is held to matter politically, in order to assess the weight of aesthetics in the resulting multiplicity? To envisage this path as a sound one is already to acknowledge a seemingly more common answer to the question at hand, which a survey would have to account for.

In effect, considering that something like a survey of what was, is, could or even should be deemed to matter politically by who, where, when, and how, might help to answer this very broad question is to respond, if only implicitly, that the question of political importance first of all elicits the reply: *it varies*. What is held to matter *obviously* varies; it is *well known* that different people care for different things at different times and in different places... Today, for example, it is often said that many, if not most people do not care, or do not care enough, or do not care in the right way about “politics itself”—whatever politics *is*. I feel that those who voice such claims judge that this very lack of care is concerning, bothering, troubling, and even lamentable. They thus claim that they care rather deeply for the fact that others do not seem to care for just what they perceive to be most important, and perhaps *this* then becomes all-important. To raise the question of what matters politically is also, in that sense, to raise the question of the importance of politics, of the extent to which mattering politically is important.

More specifically, to claim that what matters politically varies is to beg the question of *how* such variations occur. It is to ask how political importance functions. What general principles, if any, are at work in how importance is thought—or felt—to work? Is it the case, for instance, as the phrasing of the example given in the previous paragraph suggests, that importance is primarily attributed by individuals who deem or *judge* that

this or that entity, process, or relation is more or less important in this or that way, mattering politically being only one way in which importance manifests itself? This seems an uncontentious assumption. However, the strands of scholarship mentioned thus far, “French Theory” and pragmatist political sociology, insist that assumptions on how judgment works should be handled with care, that these are contentious, political sites.

*

I advance that the question of political importance operates as a *point of heresy*. I borrow this somewhat old-fashioned term from its recent re-elaboration by Étienne Balibar, who himself borrows it from Michel Foucault’s *Les mots et les choses* in an attempt at “freeing up the concept’s critical and analytical potential” (Balibar 1995, 145) by generalizing it. In Foucault’s book, the phrase “*point d’hérésie*” only appears a few times (Foucault 1990 [1966], 115; 116; 194; 204). The notion, however, is “architectonic”, according to Balibar (in Duvoux & Sévéric 2012), for it is at the core of Foucault’s mode of argumentation. When considering “the analysis of wealth” in the classical *épistémè*, for example, Foucault asserts that “the theory of money” is habitually said to have pitted

the partisans of a money-sign against those of a money-commodity. [...] Granted, it would be interesting to precisely compile the opinions and determine how they are distributed among different social groups. But if we interrogate the knowledge (*savoir*) that made the ones and the others possible at the same time, we realize that the opposition is superficial; and that if it is necessary, it is from a single disposition that only accommodates, in a determinate point, the fork of an indispensable choice (Foucault 1990 [1966], 193; I translate).

This determinate point is a point of heresy (194), a site through which divergent stances differentiate themselves. Foucault identifies similar points in the construction of “general grammar” (115-6) as a field of knowledge, and in the more recent constitution of

linguistics, biology, and political economy as specific disciplines. One can deduce—although Foucault does not explicitly do so—that the very distinction between fields of knowledge or disciplines operates through points of heresy. For Balibar, any conjuncture involves many “heretical points ‘shared by’ a number of philosophies, insofar as these points designate in their very language what is at stake in their confrontation. Marx’s ‘contradictions,’ Spinoza’s ‘aporias,’ Descartes’s ‘ambivalence,’ and so on, [...] should help to clarify one another as terms of a contradictory conjuncture and as reflection of these collective *points d’hérésie at the heart of each philosophical discourse*” (Balibar 1995, 145). To generalize Foucault’s notion means that points of heresy can be at work in a single oeuvre, as when the so-called second Foucault contrasts his own notions of *épistémè* and *dispositif* as opening different fields of problems (Caborn 2007, 114). It also means that the elaboration of the notion of *épistémè*, for instance, in opposition to the Hegelian notion of a *Zeitgeist* or the Marxian notion of dominant ideology, occurs through something like a point of heresy—one that remains to be thought, perhaps².

² Balibar asserts that by mobilizing the phrase “point of heresy”, Foucault “recovers a figure of the Pascalian argumentation” (Balibar 2011, 212n1; I translate). By this remark, Balibar refers (implicitly in writing, explicitly in Duvoux & Sévéric 2012) to how Blaise Pascal considered the problem of theological heresy. “Heresy” descends from the Greek *hairesis*, choice, from the verb *hairessthai*, to choose. In the *Pensées*, section XIV, “Polemical fragments”, fragment 861 of the English edition (862 in the Brunschvig classification) thematizes the source of all heresies as the urge to choose between two alternative, opposite truths where, precisely, faith (or dogma?) requires to hold both alternatives as true, to refrain from choosing. Pascal writes: “Faith embraces many truths which seem to contradict each other. [...]. /The source of this is the union of the two natures in Jesus Christ; and also the two worlds (the creation of a new heaven and a new earth; a new life and a new death; all things double, and the same names remaining); and finally the two natures that are in the righteous, (for they are the two worlds, and a member and image of Jesus Christ. And thus all the names suit them: righteous, yet sinners; dead, yet living; living, yet dead; elect, yet outcast, etc.). /There are then a great number of truths, both of faith and of morality, which seem contradictory, and which all hold good together in a wonderful system. *The source of all heresies is the exclusion of some of these truths; and the source of all the objections which the heretics make against us is the ignorance of some of our truths. And it generally happens that, unable to conceive the connection of two opposite truths, and believing that the admission of one involves the exclusion of the other, they adhere to the one, exclude the other, and think of us as opposed to them.* Now exclusion is the cause of their heresy; and ignorance that we hold the other truth causes their objections. /1st example: Jesus Christ is God and man. The Arians, unable to reconcile these things, which they believe incompatible, say that He is man; in this they are Catholics. But they deny that He is God; in this they are heretics. They allege that we deny His humanity; in this they are ignorant [...]. /The shortest way, therefore, to prevent heresies is to instruct in all truths; and the surest way to refute them is

In this dissertation, advancing that the question of political importance operates as a point of heresy effects a further generalization, for it is to claim that it is through this very question—especially in its maximized form: what matters *most* politically?—that virtually any one of the various stances on, views of, or approaches to political life (and not only “each *philosophical* discourse”) differentiates itself from others. The commonisms, for instance, like liberalism, Marxism and feminism, are as many answers to the question of political importance. They work as sets of claims positing that liberty, labor or gender, for example, are the most crucial notions or phenomena to take into account when considering politics. With every ism, one can further identify local points of heresy, constitutive conflicts through which, say, liberal feminism and Marxist feminism both differentiate themselves and account for their difference. This is not to say that “feminism in general” appears first and is subsequently instantiated in various, divergent figures. Rather, to hold points of heresy as constitutive sites of conflict means feminism is a name that only emerges *through* multiple contentious formations—not unlike a “faith” perhaps.

This account of the notion of points of heresy is useful, here, because it opens up what I consider to be the most common contemporary unfolding of the claim that what matters politically varies, namely the claim that importance, like virtually all attributes, is “socially constructed”. This unfolding is common at least in popular circles related to the humanities, the social sciences, and philosophy. (Its opposite number would be something like Platonism, grasped as the affirmation that there is an eternal truth regarding what matters most politically—disregarding whether exegeses of Plato can confirm the soundness of this attribution.) Once again, however, this is less an answer or

to declare them all. For what will the heretics say?” (Pascal 1958 [ca. 1662], 258-9) What kind of “faith” enabled Foucault to identify the alternative truths within a past *épistémè* as being in fact “all hold[ing] good together in a wonderful system”? I leave this question to the attention of exegetes and commentators.

a conclusion than a starting point, an introductory statement, for it begs the question of *how* social constructions (or, for that matter, eternal truths) function. How can one account for the fact that some constructions seem far more tenacious than others (or for how certain views that seem to have been held as immovable now seem weak)? To give an example that is not just any example but one that bears upon my argument, how can we account for the seemingly tenacious distinction between politics and aesthetics?

A brief genealogy of a distinction

A perceived distinction between politics and aesthetics arguably drives many objections to claims about the political importance of aesthetics. It enables claims to the effect that if politics becomes or has become a matter of aesthetics, if there is something like what Walter Benjamin called an “aestheticization of politics” (Benjamin 2007a [1936]) then it ceased, ceases or may cease to be “proper politics”. This presupposes politics proper existed, exists or may exist, and that it did, does or may do so as something different than “aesthetics proper”. It assumes politics and aesthetics have different essences or meanings. This assertion opens up the question of what characterizes the relationship(s) of politics and aesthetics, for difference can take many forms. Are politics and aesthetics distinct as opposites? Are they analogous perhaps? If they are opposed or analogous, where does the opposition or analogy reside?

An influential view of the relationships between politics and aesthetics frames them both as substantive “realms” or spheres of human activity. Politics and aesthetics are deemed both analogous and opposed as “*the political*” and “*the aesthetic*”. This view is expressed in Carl Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*, for instance, where one reads:

A definition of the political can be obtained only by discovering and defining the specifically political categories. In contrast to the various relatively independent endeavors of human thought and action, particularly the moral, aesthetic, and economic, the political has its own criteria which express themselves in a characteristic way. The political must therefore rest on its own ultimate distinctions, to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced. Let us assume that in the realm of morality, the final distinctions are between good and evil, in aesthetics beautiful and ugly, in economics profitable and unprofitable. [...] /The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy (Schmitt 2007 [1927/32], 25-6).

This is not to say that there are no aesthetic, or moral, or economic *aspects* to politics—think of the crookedness of the enemy, or the beauty of the friend—, but it is to say that these aspects are not the most important ones, *politically*. This passage is helpful less because it presents what has come to be known as the Schmittian view of politics as this activity involving the friend-enemy distinction than because of the ease with which Schmitt assumes that aesthetics is this activity where beauty is primarily at stake.

That there *are* “relatively independent” realms among which one can distinguish “the political” from “the aesthetic” through the modes or criteria of evaluation that they implicate tends to be framed as a Modern fact. Jürgen Habermas, for instance, writes that

Max Weber characterized cultural modernity in terms of the separation of substantive reason, formerly expressed in religious and metaphysical world-views, into three moments, now capable of being connected only formally with one another (through the form of argumentative justification). In so far as the world-views have disintegrated and their traditional problems have been separated off under the perspectives of truth, normative rightness and authenticity or beauty, and can now be treated in each case as questions of knowledge, justice or taste respectively, there arises in the modern period a differentiation of the value spheres of science and knowledge, of morality and of art. Thus scientific

discourse, moral and legal enquiry, artistic production and critical practice are now institutionalized within the corresponding cultural systems as the concern of experts. And this professionalized treatment of the cultural heritage in terms of a single abstract consideration of validity in each case serves to bring to light the autonomous structures intrinsic to the cognitive-instrumental, the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive knowledge complexes. [...] /On the other side, the distance between these expert cultures and the general public has increased. [...] For with cultural rationalization, the lifeworld, once its traditional substance has been devalued, threatens rather to become *impoverished* (Habermas 1997 [1980], 45)³.

In this story where the “knowledge complex” (if there is but one) to which “politics proper” belongs remains debatable—perhaps because, as Schmitt puts it in his preface to the second edition of *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, “We have come to recognize that the political is the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is *unpolitical* is always a *political* decision, irrespective of who decides and what reasons are advanced” (Schmitt 2005 [1922/34], 2)—modernization is thought as a Western process of secularization. The latter is phrased as the epochal rupture of a unity that is said to have once characterized the so-called traditional world (in the singular). To support this claim, it is often said that for Plato, who is thereby framed as the most exemplary representative of what is called “the tradition”, the Good, the True and the Beautiful were one, or even *the One*.

³ It is noteworthy that the differentiation of “value spheres” by Weber, reiterated by Habermas (and, to a certain extent, by Schmitt), broadly corresponds to the “three moments” of Immanuel Kant’s critical project. In effect, “scientific discourse” is problematized in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “moral and legal enquiry” is problematized in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and “artistic production and critical practice” are problematized in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. (Again, this is a *broad* correspondence—Kantian exegetes would certainly be more nuanced.) What Habermas calls “the autonomous structures intrinsic to the cognitive-instrumental, the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive knowledge complexes” are arguably framed as such following Kant’s problematization of experience. In this work, I often engage with Kant, not least because each of the three *Critiques* has in turn been read as the most important one for problematizing political life. It is not clear, as a result, just where “politics proper” resides in the Kantian schema. (For a reading of Schmitt as an “aesthetic” thinker and a critique of the “fascist” implications of this mode of thought according to Habermas, see Wolin 1992. For an attentive reading of Schmitt’s aesthetics, see Levi 2007.)

Evoking or invoking Plato, however, is far from being unproblematic. Beside the fact that Plato wrote dialogues and that interpreting the view of the author of a dialogue as distinct from that of any of the protagonists can be daunting, one of the ways in which references to Plato are problematic in contemporary conversations in the field of political theory lies in how these references tend to hold true “the myth of the tradition” (Gunnell 1978), this story according to which “the classic canon, from Plato to Marx and beyond, represents an actual historical tradition that is holistically infused with indigenous meaning” (Gunnell 2011, 7). Through historical research, scholars like John G. Gunnell have argued that “the classic canon” of “political theory” is in fact a rather recent “creation of political science” (13), traceable to the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

For my part, I am inclined to attribute not my difficulties to persuade that politics has much to do with aesthetics, but rather, how these difficulties keep surprising me, to the considerable amount of attention that is being paid to something like aesthetics in the reputedly inaugural texts of Western political thought, Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics*, which are still read in many programs of study around the globe. The famous expulsion of a certain type of poets from “the city in speech” in Book III of *The Republic* (Plato 1991 [ca. 380 BCE], 398a-b) and the discussion of the “old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (607b) in Book X suggest, at the very least, that the relationship(s) between politics and *something like* aesthetics was grasped as a problem of distinction. I am nonetheless compelled to write “something like aesthetics” rather than aesthetics tout court because our usage of this word has a history, and it seems unquestionable that Plato used it (if at all) in a different way than Kant—which is, once again, not just any example but an exemplary one, to which I will return. If one accepts

Leo Strauss' claim that, to grasp "*the* difference between modern philosophy as such and medieval philosophy as such" (Strauss 1996 [1944], 330), for instance, there is "no better way than a precise comparison of the most typical divisions of philosophy or science in both the Middle Ages and the modern period", it seems that

One sees at once e.g. that there do not exist in the Middle Ages such philosophic disciplines as esthetics or philosophy of history, and one acquires at once an invincible and perfectly justified distrust against the many modern scholars who write articles or even books on medieval esthetics or on medieval philosophy of history. One becomes interested in the question when the very terms esthetics and philosophy of history appeared for the first time; one learns that they make their appearance in the 18th century; one starts reflecting on the assumptions underlying their appearance—and one is already well on one's way (331; see also Beiser 2009).

This is not to say, however, that "the traditional world" was unitary, undivided. It is to claim that the study of this world (still in the singular) was divided differently.

Plato writes of the arts using the word *poiesis*, most often translated as poetry; the word *mousikè*, most often translated as music; and the word *tekhnè*, most often translated as technology or skill. What is at stake thus seems to be something like what is now called the arts and crafts. Aristotle, to whom I return below, does something similar. Both, however, are expressly concerned with the *poiesis*, the *mousikè*, and the *tekhnè* required for ruling and being ruled in a *polis* in a good, rational, and admirable way, with the art of government, if you will. The "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" can be read in this light, especially if one recalls the main proposition of Plato's Socrates on the possibility of the coming into being of "the city in speech", which Socrates is reported to have hesitated to utter for fear of ridicule and reprisals:

“Unless”, I said, “the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place, while the many natures now making their way to either apart from the other are by necessity excluded, there is no rest from ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for human kind, nor will the regime we have now described in speech ever come forth from nature, insofar as possible, and see the light of the sun.”
(Plato 1991, 472d-e)

What is suggested by this passage is that “politics proper”, here understood as the rational organization and rule of a *polis* in accordance with the love of wisdom—the coincidence of “political power and philosophy”—is desirable yet virtually impossible. Conversely, it is implied that demagogues, sophists, poets and the likes are in reality those who are most intensely involved in the conduct and modulation of life-in-common. If *The Republic* is a prescriptive text, it “merely” says that this should not be so, that since “what both poets and prose writers say concerning the most important things about human beings is bad” (392b), they—or certain types of poets, sophists and demagogues—should not be listened to when the determination and upholding of what matters politically is at stake. To this day, there is a proliferation of calls to rationalize political life, and aesthetic matters tend to be characterized as non-serious trifles, as trivialities, superficialities or shallow concerns that deplorably (yet forcefully) stand in the way of this broad—yet perhaps always already doomed, as Plato’s Socrates seems to have intimated—political project.

*

That politics is an art nonetheless constitutes a tenacious view of the relationships between politics and aesthetics. Arguably, even Plato’s Socrates shares this view as the art of government is said, in *The Republic*, to be analogous to the art of steering a ship, and to require convincing myths, artfully crafted stories about how to feel and think.

Hannah Arendt is probably the political theorist who expressed most clearly that politics and aesthetics are analogous to one another since practitioners of politics and of the performing arts “both need a publicly organized space for their ‘work’, and both depend upon others for the performance itself” (Arendt 1961, 154). Arendt weaves this analogy as she engages the notion of freedom through Machiavelli, who is certainly one of the canonical names associated with the view that politics is traversed by aesthetic concerns (see Panagia 2009). She writes: “The virtuoso-ship of Machiavelli’s *virtù* somehow reminds us of the fact, although Machiavelli hardly knew it, that the Greeks always used such metaphors as flute-playing, dancing, healing, and seafaring to distinguish political from other activities, that is, that they drew their analogies from those arts in which virtuosity of performance is decisive” (Arendt 1961, 153). This stance recalls Aristotle’s insistence on practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, as a crucial quality for effective political deeds. Most crucially for this dissertation, attaching political importance to the conditions and effects of performances and actions presupposes a grasp of how performances and actions can be perceived and thought. It is often said, in a variety of tones, that *politics is all about perceptions*—or all about sensibilities, emotions, feelings, affects, passions, values, inclinations, enthusiasms, beliefs, gut-reactions, etc. This view of what matters politically is the object of my argument, for I claim these are all aesthetic terms.

Aesthetics of politics as prerequisites: a hypothesis

The general hypothesis formulated and dealt with in this dissertation is that *aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of political importance*. This claim acknowledges that what is held to matter politically varies, that there exist many determinations of political importance. Furthermore, it implies that I am less looking for

a straightforward answer to the question of political importance than for an account of the ways in which this question has been, is, and can be formulated in manners that make it possible for it to receive answers that hold more or less durably. In other words, I am interested in the question: *how is political importance determined?* The tentative response that I formulate and put to the test is that aesthetics of politics are required for political importance to be determined in the variety of common terms that characterize Western political thought. Before exposing how I understand the concept of aesthetics of politics, it is helpful to give an account of why I use the unusual notion of prerequisite.

I borrow this term from Isabelle Stengers, who borrows it from Leibniz in an essay on Deleuzian philosophies of difference and Whiteheadian philosophies of process:

When a mathematician produces a strange hypothesis, such as that of irrational or complex numbers, it is not a matter of opinion. He or she has been constrained by the problem, and it is the problem that required, that demanded, the invention of those strange, nonintuitive numbers. Concepts are required in the construction not of an opinion but of the possibility of a solution to a problem. Leibniz was the first to give crucial importance to the difference between prerequisite and condition. *A prerequisite is always relative to a problem as it is formulated, and cannot claim to transcend this formulation.* A condition, on the other hand, corresponds to a normative, purified, rational formulation of what must be conditioned; the double definition of the condition and of what this condition conditions claims to escape and transcend particularity to achieve authorized knowledge. In Whitehead's texts, "to require" or "to demand" are verbs that appear when decisive points are being made. They are the mathematician's answer to a situation. His or her job is not to impose conditions upon the knowledge situation in order for it to fit general norms of intelligibility, as Kant does in the name of the Copernican revolution. His or her job is to recognize and construct the situation as a challenge, and to make explicit what this challenge requires in order to achieve an answer (Stengers 2002a, 242; I underline).

In Stengers' idiom, which is strongly influenced by Gilles Deleuze, thinking in terms of prerequisites rather than conditions is to adopt a "constructivist" stance. Claiming that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to, rather than as conditions of, determinations of political importance is to make a modest proposal. It is to acknowledge from the outset that it may be impossible to grasp the "concrete" conditions of determinations of political importance, insofar as these conditions are thought as those that cannot but exist independently of how the problem itself is "abstracted". This modesty is not virtuous but necessary since the question of political importance seems to allow no meta-language, no framework that could escape or transcend this question itself. In effect, any concept or notion that is brought to bear upon this question can in turn be interrogated with respect to its political assumptions, effects, and importance. Asking "what matters politically?" is always already to get entangled in particular formulations of each term of this question, mobilizing certain abstractions and neglecting others. To engage practices of abstraction in a scholarly manner is to evaluate the formulations and effects of a variety of possible, plausible and interesting abstractions, conceptualizations, or interpretations⁴. I argue that the "hearths of sense" (Gros 2012; 2006) unearthed through a patient and creative investigation of the problem of political importance involve aesthetics of politics⁵. What

⁴ As Whitehead puts it, "The explanatory purpose of philosophy is often misunderstood. Its business is to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the more concrete things. It is a complete mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. The answer is, 'In no way.' The true philosophic question is, How can concrete fact exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet be participated in by its own nature? /In other words, philosophy is explanatory of abstraction, and not of concreteness" (Whitehead 1985 [1929], 20). "You cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your *modes* of abstraction. It is here that philosophy finds its niche as essential to the healthy progress of society. It is the critic of abstractions" (Whitehead 1997 [1925], 59). Whitehead, a rationalist, also wrote that, "in the real world, it is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true. The importance of truth is, that it adds to interest" (Whitehead 1985 [1929], 259).

⁵ As I will often use the expression "hearths of sense" in this work, a few remarks are in order for it is an unusual phrase. "Hearth of sense" is my translation of a phrase used by French scholar Frédéric Gros as a key methodological term, "*foyer de sens*". In French, *foyer* can mean a fireplace, a home, or a site, a source or reservoir (of infection, say, as in "pockets of infection", *foyers d'infection*). Gros is a Foucauldian scholar who

emerges from potent problematizations of political importance is that, in significant, important ways, our political abstractions are aesthetic matters. That is my hypothesis.

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The principal concept that is mobilized and woven into my general hypothesis is that of aesthetics of politics. I borrow it from Jacques Rancière, who makes it most explicit in *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique* (Rancière 2000). In the first pages of this small book, Rancière unfolds what he calls “*le partage du sensible*”, which has been translated as “the distribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2004a). Rancière writes:

I call distribution of the sensible this system of sensible evidences that makes visible at the same time the existence of a common and the partitions (*découpages*) that define respective places and shares therein. A distribution of the sensible thus fixates at the same time a shared common and exclusive shares. This repartition of shares and places is founded upon a distribution (*partage*) of spaces, of times and of forms of activity that determine the very way in which a common lends itself to participation and in which the ones and the others take part in this sharing (*partage*). [...] The distribution of the sensible makes visible who can take part in the common in virtue of what [s]he does, of the time and space in which this activity is exercised. Having this or that “occupation” thus defines competencies and incompetencies for the common. It defines the fact of being

worked on war (Gros 2006) and security (Gros 2012), among other topics. His method consists in freeing up, in clearing or unearthing (*dégager*) various hearths of sense, various dimensions of a *problématique*, potent sites or lines through which a concept like war or security is constituted in a multiplicity of ways that resonate more or less immediately with how it is grasped today. Working with “abstract hearths of sense, sampled on fragments of history” (Gros 2006. 77-8; I translate) is to “distinguish polarities of discourse” (77). The hearths of sense constituting war as a name for collective violences, for example, construct its “cultural landscape, the nervures of its dominant representation” (216) through “three great hearths of experience that serve as structuring dimensions to the thought of war” (8), namely: “exchanged death, maintained State, [and] claimed justice”. According to Gros, the “conceptual identity” of war was “lodged in the fold of these three dimensions” which now give way to “states of violence”. In the conclusion to his recent book on “the security principle”, he writes: “These [four] immense cultural declensions [of security] constituted hearths of sense, that lit up in history and that have known, each of them, golden ages: the serenity of the ancient wise man, medieval millenarism, the guarantor State of the Modern age, and finally, the contemporary techniques of the management of fluxes... It was not, however, a matter of describing separate, successive epochs, enclosed into their own determination. These hearths of sense, once set ablaze (*embrasés*), continued to be active, or have moved, evolved, have fed on their internal tensions, tried to envelop one another or to put one another into question” (Gros 2012, 219-20; I translate). A hearth of sense is, in that sense, a problematization.

visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common speech (*parole*), etc. (Rancière 2000, 12-3; I translate)

Rancière then formulates the concept I rework and put to the test throughout this work:

There is thus, at the basis of politics, an “aesthetic” that has nothing to do (*rien à voir*) with that “aestheticization of politics” proper to the “age of the masses”, which Benjamin speaks of. This aesthetic is not to be grasped in the sense of a perverse capture of politics by a will to art, by the thought of the people as a work of art. If we value the analogy, we can understand it (*on peut l’entendre*) in a Kantian sense—eventually revisited by Foucault—, as the system of a priori forms determining what gives itself to be sensed (*ce qui se donne à ressentir*). It is a partition (*découpage*) of times and spaces, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that defines at the same time the site (*lieu*) and the stake (*enjeu*) of politics as a form of experience. Politics bears on what we (*on*) see and what we can say about it, on who has the competence to see and the quality to say, on the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time (13-4).

The concept of aesthetics of politics, reworked throughout this dissertation, thus names “the system of a priori forms determining what gives itself to be sensed”, if one wishes to hear it “in a Kantian sense”. Adding the clause “eventually revisited by Foucault” is a way for Rancière to specify that this “system of a priori forms” is not properly or not quite transcendental, that it has the *quasi*-transcendental character of a constructed, “historical a priori” (Foucault 1969, 166-73) informing how politics is problematized.

Rancière’s concept acknowledges that, historically, the term aesthetics has a dual sense, that “It designates on the one hand the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; [and] on the other hand the theory of art as a reflection of real experience” (Deleuze 1973 [1969], 355; I translate; see also Deleuze 1993 [1968], 94). To think in terms of quasi-transcendental, historical a priori is both to acknowledge and to put into question Kant’s import for the delimitation of this twofold concept of aesthetics.

What is primarily at issue in the reference to Kant is the first sense of aesthetics, that exposed in the section “Transcendental Aesthetic” that initiates the *Critique of Pure Reason* by demonstrating that “space and time, as the necessary conditions of all (outer and inner) experience, are merely subjective conditions of all our intuition, in relation to which therefore all objects are mere appearances and not things given for themselves in this way” (Kant 1998 [1781/87], 171 [A49]). This “demonstration” matters for the critical project because Kant posits two sources of knowledge: “sensibility and understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought” (152 [A15]). What can be made sense of is a manifold of sensations and appearances, not “the world itself” or “things-in-themselves”. The Transcendental Aesthetic comes first in the Doctrine of the Elements “since the conditions under which alone the objects of human cognition are given precede those under which those objects are thought” (152 [A16]). This is a logical priority, but it is also a stylistic one in the composition of the first *Critique* as a book to be read.

The two minimal “conditions of *all* experience”, according to Kant, are an a priori representation of (extended) space that makes external relations thinkable and an a priori representation of (linear) time that makes internal relations thinkable. This implies that any particular space and time that can be experienced by anyone at all—if only as *conditions* of experience, as Kant seems to have sensed and thought them—is but an instantiation or exemplification of these unitary, formal a priori representations that are in principle shared universally by any individual human being whatsoever as a sensing-thinking, inextricably “empirico-transcendental” subject, to borrow Foucault’s dual term.

Kant specifies that “Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. [...] The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only through their unification can cognition arise” (194 [A51]). What is therefore at stake in the Transcendental Aesthetic, well before more specific notions like moral or aesthetic judgment can operate in the Kantian system, and before the “legislative” determination of the conditions under which this “union” of sensibility and understanding can give rise to distinct types of authoritative knowledge, is the relationship between the two senses of both the Latin *sensus* and the Greek *aisthesis*, namely the division of experience into sense and sense, into sensation and signification, feeling and meaning, or sense-perception and sense-making. This division, in Kant’s account, implies that experience is always mediated by selection and interpretation. “The five senses” filter and distinguish through the manifold of “mechanical” stimulations from “the external world” with the help of “the internal faculties” that (re)organize the resulting manifold into more or less meaningful experiences by projecting a priori logical categories onto it. It has been argued, however, that *other* transcendental aesthetics can be thought (Deleuze 1993 [1968], 130), and that Kant’s is only one among many possible systems of a priori forms. It is more adequate to phrase them as *quasi*-transcendental.

Starting from this twofold Kantian account of experience, and looking back, as it were, enables one to see that the relations between sensibility and understanding are matters of concern in the works of many (and perhaps all) political thinkers. This is not to say they (*we*) all work through a transcendental aesthetic in the precise Kantian sense, but

that structural homologies can be mapped. This is what Rancière shows when he rereads Aristotle's justification of slavery in Book I of *Politics*. The Stagirite writes:

We may thus conclude that all men who differ from others as much as the body differs from the soul, or an animal from a man (and this is the case with all those whose function is bodily service, and who produce their best when they supply such service)—all such are by nature slaves. In their case, as in the other cases just mentioned, it is better to be ruled by a master. Someone is thus a slave by nature if he is capable of becoming the property of another (and for this reason does actually become another's property) and *if he participates in reason to the extent of apprehending it in another, though destitute of it himself. Other animals do not apprehend reason, but obey their instincts.* Even so there is little divergence in the way they are used; both of them (slaves and tame animals) provide bodily assistance in satisfying essential needs (Aristotle 2009 [ca. 330 BCE], 1254b16-26; I underline).

The Greek verb used in the phrase “apprehending reason” is *aisthesthai*, to perceive, from which the term aesthetics descends, and the word for the “possession” of reason that slaves allegedly lack is *hexis*. Slaves are described as humans since they can perceive reason (*logos*), while “other animals do not”. Simultaneously, however, they are described as inferior humans who do not properly “possess” *logos* (Rancière 1995, 38). This inferiorization involves yet another sense of *logos*, language or speech, as opposed to *phonè*, sound or noise. Prior to that passage, Aristotle has written:

It is thus clear that man is a political animal, in a higher degree than bees or other gregarious animals. Nature, according to our theory, makes nothing in vain; and man alone of the animals is furnished with the faculty of language (*logos*). The mere making of sounds (*phonè*) serves to indicate pleasure and pain, and is thus a faculty that belongs to animals in general: their nature enables them to attain the point at which they have *perceptions* of pleasure and pain, and *can signify those perceptions to one another.* But language serves to declare what is advantageous and what is the reverse, and it is the

peculiarity of man, in comparison with other animals, that he alone possesses a *perception* of good and evil, of the just and the unjust, and other similar qualities; and it is association in these things which makes a family and a city (*polis*) (Aristotle 2009, 1253a7-17; I underline).

These two passages express a tension in just what *logos* means, and in how it relates to *aisthesis*. If slaves, as humans, have a *perception* of *logos*, as inferior humans they cannot “exercise” *logos* as their “possession”. It is unclear whether they can express “what is advantageous and what is the reverse”, whether they *perceive* “good and evil”, “the just and the unjust”, or whether they are confined to the perception and indication of “pleasure and pain”, like other animals. This enmeshed account of the relation between perception and language, sensibility and understanding, sense and sense, works to legitimize the exclusion of slaves from collective deliberations—from “proper politics”, if you will. According to Rancière, this Aristotelian division of *aisthesis* lives on. Indeed,

The point is: how do you recognize the mouthing of a pain from the voicing of an argument? This division of the *aisthesis* is still at work at any moment in our present: for instance when strikers take to the streets to discuss the decision of rulers or managers while the latter only hear their slogans as the shouts or the grumbling expressing their ‘anxiety’. So political conflict is an aesthetic matter from the very beginning, to the extent it deals with the very interpretation of what people do with their mouth (Rancière 2009, 121).

Aristotle’s is one of many aesthetics of politics. It shows that framings of the relations between sense-perception and sense-making can be quite consequential for determining what matters politically (say, the maintenance of slavery). As aesthetics of politics seem to “ground” accounts of political life, they can be qualified as conditions or prerequisites of determinations of political importance. Since, however, even a cursory engagement

with this issue shows that there are multiple ways of framing the relations between the senses and political meaning, I hold that writing of prerequisites is more advantageous.

Generating folds: method & structure

The principal gesture enacted through this dissertation can be understood as an attempt to deal with Rancière's concept of aesthetics of politics in a way that is homologous to how Balibar has dealt with Foucault's notion of points of heresy, namely as an attempt at "freeing up the concept's critical and analytical potential" (Balibar 1995, 145). The core assumption that I am making in framing my endeavor in this way is that Rancière's concept is helpful, that it is useful for dealing in thoughtful ways with the question that is at the heart of this dissertation, namely the general question of political importance. I believe that the soundness of this assumption can be argued for, but that the case to be made for a concept's critical and analytical potential will be strongest if this potential is exemplified, if it is truly put to work rather than merely asserted and praised. In other words, I believe I must abide by the order-word *show, don't tell*.

Putting to the test the general hypothesis according to which aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of political importance is to effect a generalization of Rancière's concept. It is to put it to work in ways that Rancière has not explored, to appropriate it and test its powers. I think of generalization in an almost mathematical sense, here, which is to say: as a valuable gesture that contributes in itself, if it is not a hasty generalization, to the advancement of knowledge in the fields it concerns. Making a notion more general is, precisely, to make it relevant and useful for *more* fields than the one(s) in which it originated. This gesture goes against specialization, and it can claim to

make a valuable contribution for this very reason⁶. Arguably, even a hasty generalization could have the merit, if it was problematized, to delimit what would be required for subsequent attempts to be less hasty. In any case, one first has to *try* to generalize.

A generalization is at issue not least because many contemporary readers of Rancière insist on the concept of aesthetics of politics only as a brief, preliminary gesture preparing engagements with what Rancière calls the politics of aesthetics, or the politics of art in the aesthetic regime that emerged at the end of the 18th century (see Rancière 2011). I hold that, in this respect, Gabriel Rockhill's decision to translate *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique* as *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (Rancière 2004a), rather than as *The Distribution of the Sensible: Aesthetics and Politics*, is symptomatic⁷. If the concept of aesthetics of politics is useful, it should be able to withstand a thorough examination that does not simply ventriloquize Rancière.

This is not, however, an author-dissertation. It is not a dissertation about Rancière, an exegesis of his work, a hermeneutical commentary or a critique of his oeuvre. It is—or it ceaselessly seeks to be—a problem-dissertation. It starts from Rancière by borrowing his concept, and as it were running away with it, to engage a problem Rancière does not formulate explicitly in this way. The problem is that of political importance, not only as it has emerged in my own scholarly practices, but as it operates in contemporary political life, in a life-in-common from which scholarly practices are not excluded but in which

⁶ I conceive of this gesture as being analogous to that of psychoanalyst and mathematician Bernard Burgoyne, who argues that, for topology to be able to account for “the patterns of the human soul”, it is necessary to recover the most general insights of this field of mathematics, which have been obscured now that it works with spaces that are too specific, not general enough (see Burgoyne 2011; 2003. While Burgoyne works through Freud and Lacan, who were both interested in mathematics, R.D. Laing's *Knots* (2005 [1970]) makes sensible how entanglements and spatialities mark how we think of “the psyche”). In a similar sense, I would qualify my research as an attempt to formulate a “general politology” that can account for the various, polarized specializations of political studies, like “normative vs. descriptive”, which are perhaps superficial.

⁷ The question of the relationship between the concept of aesthetics of politics and what Rancière calls “the aesthetic regime of art” is one of the “liminary knots” that I engage in the second part of this introduction.

they hardly seem central. Any discussion of political priorities and of what is to be done—be it in the *New York Times*, in the bar of a derelict lumber town, in a new shopping mall, the United Nations’ Security Council or a bus headed to a *maquiladora*—can be said with reasonable conviction to put into play the issue of political importance. I nonetheless write that this dissertation “ceaselessly seeks to be” about this problem, and not authors, because the conventional practices of political theory, in which I have been trained and which I internalized in some way, often operate by putting canonical authors in the limelight. When I bring canonical authors, or rather, canonical *texts* onto this textual stage, I seek to use them as sites for thinking, not for praise or blame.

While it seeks to be a problem-dissertation rather than an author-dissertation, this research clearly proceeds through what I call a textual argument, through close readings and an abundance of citations, for claims are my main materials. This mode of (re)writing is required by the imperative to show rather than tell, and by the assumed generality of the question of political importance. The way this dissertation is written therefore differs significantly from what can be called the analytical model of political thought. It does so for what I consider to be a very good reason, namely that there appears to be no meta-language that undoubtedly escapes the problem of political importance. Claiming to be relying on “sound logic” and “tried categories” is not a solution but a way into the problem: it is to ask why *this* logic is deemed sound, and why *these* categories endure.

The usefulness of the concept of aesthetics of politics is argued for through a multiplicity of texts and claims that, in my reading, already problematize political importance through what can be called aesthetics. I seek to make these problematizations explicit. The resulting multiplicity is partial. This is not to say, however, that it is without

its reasons, or that it is not built methodically. The sites that are put forward as relevant, pertinent, significant or important are chosen because I assume—while I also examine this assumption—that they are helpful for making sensible and intelligible how *political* relevance, pertinence, significance or importance is deemed to function.

The result is admittedly quite baroque, if this term is heard in echo of Alain Badiou's characterization of Malebranche, in his 1986 seminar on the father of occasionalism, as putting into tension a scarce set of "axioms" that ceaselessly return and "the infinite, ramified, strange investigation of realities" (Badiou 2013a, 39; I translate), "a small core of theses" on the one hand, and "an abundance of referents, anecdotes, peculiar questions, citations, a sort of disseminated proliferation of the matter that is treated", which is "overabundant and elusive", on the other (35). It is also militant, insofar as this term is also heard in echo of Badiou's characterization of Malebranche as being "extremely attentive to what we can do and what we must do, to how for example we must treat the anecdotes of the popular conscience, in the broad sense, or those that can circulate at the court or elsewhere. [...] Not in order to say necessarily that all of this is true, but because he would feel accountable for treating the question since some people (*des gens*) think that" (16). Hence "every proposition in the world is an occasion to put the hypothesis to the test" (41). This promises to be both its strength and its greatest risk.

This dissertation is also baroque in the sense that its structure and method are thought in terms of refoldings, and "the fold" has been described as "the operative function" of "the Baroque" (Deleuze 1988, 5; I translate). The structure and method are themselves intertwined with one another. Thinking, reading, and writing are inextricably enmeshed in the practice of political studies, not least since some issues seem to emerge

only when one is trying to expose one's research in complete sentences. The political metaphor of "the social fabric" has both architectural and textile connotations, and I envisage lines of thought as singular foldings that compose singular worlds. Thinking in terms of folds implies that the lines at stake can have a width, dig depths and implicate surfaces. It is to take Deleuze's last sentences in *Le Pli* seriously: "We remain Leibnizians, although chords are not anymore what express our world or our text. We discover new manners of folding like new envelopes, but we remain Leibnizians because it is always a matter of folding, unfolding, refolding" (189). To the common notion of unfolding as a name for explicating, explaining or expliciting, I prefer the notion of refolding as it acknowledges multiplicity from the outset. Indeed, I would argue that every description is a redescription, and every unfolding a refolding. This is a way of not getting entangled in problems of origins. It is also a way of asserting that the possibility of an ultimate unfolding, the flatness of "solid ground", cannot be taken for granted⁸.

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Four refoldings traverse the body of this dissertation as its operative principles. This fourfold is the most methodical dimension of this research. It constitutes the structuring lines that enable and limit the exposition of my textual argument. The four lines of thought that are explored are (1) political, (2) artistic, (3) polemological, and (4) hauntological. These refoldings are expressed in the fourfold structure of each chapter. They can be envisaged as horizontal slices or layers in the fabric of discursive and non-discursive practices that can be brought to bear on the problem of political importance:

⁸ In the last section of the "Liminary Knots" that constitute the following introductory chapter of this research, I return to the significance of "the Baroque" for describing the structure and method of this work which is first and foremost concerned with how aesthetics of politics relate to the problem of political importance.

(1) *Politological refolding*: This fold comes first in the treatment of the aesthetics of politics engaged in this text not least because of the institutional anchoring, of the practical prerequisites of this work. This is a dissertation in Political Science and in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought. It is what I call a politological work, borrowing the French *politologie* to name any attempt at giving an account of political life, at articulating a *logos* of politics. It implicates political theory, political philosophy, political thought, but also political science, political sociology, political anthropology, etc.⁹;

(2) *Artistic refolding*: Taking seriously claims to the effect that “the world of art” and socio-political investigations of artistic practices partake in complicating how life-in-common is perceived, especially in matters of the creation of novelty, of resistance and transformation, this fold seeks to put politological accounts of the aesthetics of politics engaged in this work to the test of allegedly critical and interrogative creative deeds;

(3) *Polemological refolding*: Acknowledging the strength and the tenacity of objections to attempts at thinking what matters most politically in aesthetic terms on the ground that this mode of thought obscures very real, truly pressing instances of violence that seem constitutive of any claim regarding a “pacified” political life, this third fold problematizes the aesthetics of politics engaged in this work in the light of accounts of both implicit and explicit legitimations of multiple violences at work in these aesthetics, starting from how violence itself—if there is such an “it”—is arguably something that is sensed, felt, perceived and experienced, and how it is, in that sense, an aesthetic occurrence;

(4) *Hauntological refolding*: Following from the repeated assertion that hidden violences haunt accounts of political life, and mobilizing Jacques Derrida’s notion of hauntology,

⁹ These lines offer an initial exposition of this methodical fourfold. I address difficulties tied to each type of refolding as central “liminary knots” in the second, more “technical” part of this twofold introduction.

of how “To haunt does not mean to be present, and [yet] we must introduce haunting (*la hantise*) in the very construction of a concept” (Derrida 1993a, 255; I translate), this fourth fold addresses the spectral assumptions that are recurrently at work beneath, within or above the aesthetics of politics that I try to circumscribe and problematize. This is also the fold that leads from each aesthetics of politics to the next.

These four methodical refoldings, as “horizontal” slicings, partake to the problematization of *five aesthetics of politics*, five different manners of framing the relations between sense-perception, sense-making, and political importance. These can be envisaged as five “vertical” crests, five concrescences that emerge through this work, and that constitute its core. The five chapters are best read as five studies, or five essays.

Why five? Because what may be called the “vertical” operative principle of this research consists in structuring the putting to the test of the hypothesis that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of political importance through the age-old fivefold of the senses: sight, taste, hearing, touch and smell. This will seem an arbitrary organization relying on an at best vulgar division of the perceptive human apparatus into five distinct senses, but it stems from a thought-provoking aesthetico-political issue.

Rancière’s uses of the concept of aesthetics of politics tend to refer to only two of the senses of the age-old fivefold: sight, and speech, which I associate with the sense of taste. In the crucial passage cited above, for instance, he writes: “Politics bears on what we *see* and what we can *say* about it, on who has the competence to *see* and the quality to *say*, on the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière 2000, 14; I underline)¹⁰. Now, can this insistence on sight and speech be dismissed offhandedly as

¹⁰ Once again, difficulties raised by the association that appears to be made rather quickly of speech with the sense of taste are addressed as “liminary knots” in the second part of this introduction, below.

inconsequential, negligible, or accidental perhaps? Is it *unimportant*, politically? I think the concept of aesthetics of politics suggests the very opposite. For one, this insistence is already a formulation of and a partial response to the question of how political importance can be sensed and thought: it can be seen and voiced. What does this insistence on sight and speech enable? What does it prevent? How does it affect possibilities of thinking through what matters politically? Critiques of ocularcentrism (e.g. Stonehill 1995; Jay 1993) and of “logo-phonocentrism” (e.g. Derrida 1997 [1967], 294) are explicit invitations to think carefully about what difference such insistence can make, and what other insistences could do. What aesthetics of politics could be, or even are already being formulated by privileging other senses of the age-old fivefold? Moreover, are there modes of privileging sight and taste that differ from how Rancière privileges them? What are the implications of privileging this or that sense in this or that way for determinations of political importance? This is the question that presides over the refolding of five aesthetics of politics along the fivefold of the senses.

Putting this fivefold to work in this way, trying to take one sense at a time as a point of departure for thinking through how aesthetics of politics may function in relation to determinations of political importance through this sense, can be characterized as a *heuristic delirium*¹¹. There is a heuristic aspect to this endeavor because, while the senses are closely and maybe inextricably intertwined with one another (smell plays a great part in taste, for instance), they are nonetheless intelligible separately, on their own terms, as it were. If I ask you to think about hearing, you can do so without thinking about touch—perhaps not for long if very low frequencies are hearable. I believe abstracting one sense

¹¹ I am indebted to my friend and colleague René Lemieux for this last expression.

from the others is a useful experiment, that it can draw attention to singular dimensions or angles—beside the fact that the ways in which sight is often prioritized, almost detached from the other senses, invites to try something similar with the others. There is also a delirious aspect in this endeavor because prioritizing a single sense and experimenting with just what could be “its own terms”, as if it was the structuring principle of a whole world, or of many worlds already, is certainly to exaggerate the role of this sense. And yet, there is a wager to be made that this exaggeration can be a productive mode of enunciation if delirium is not foreclosed, if it is not reduced to pre-existing codes, but rather grasped as “the libidinal investment of a whole historical field, of a whole social field. What we rave on about (*Ce qu'on délire*) are classes, peoples, races, masses, packs” (Deleuze 2002 [1973], 382; I translate). This heuristic delirium may be productive insofar as it helps to clarify how each aesthetic(s) is already multiple, plural—as the final “s” appended to both aesthetics and politics in English seems to suggest from the outset.

Each aesthetics of politics addressed below is thus formulated in a fourfold engagement (politological, artistic, polemological, and hauntological) with the politics of a sense: the politics of sight, of speech and taste, of hearing, of touch, and of smell, in this order. This ordering echoes the perceived importance of each sense, from the seemingly most important one to the seemingly least important. The usefulness of the concept of aesthetics of politics and the soundness of the hypothesis that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of political importance will not be demonstrated in the strict sense, they will not be *proven*, but they may perhaps be shown, “monstrated”, and documented in this work through the refolding of potent threads¹².

¹² Characterizing this work as “somewhat baroque” is a way to acknowledge that such a showing or “monstration”, to use terms belonging to an ocularcentric lexicon, cannot but veil as it unveils.

Each aesthetics of politics that I problematize centers on a notion developed through a fourfold engagement with the politics of the corresponding sense of the age-old fivefold. To the politics of sight, taste, hearing, touch, and smell, there correspond aesthetics of prevalence, emancipation, temperament, friction, and endurance. Each notion “stands in” for politics in the phrase aesthetics of politics. Each offers a way of framing “politics itself”, as well as what matters politically. Each, however, is already multiple, manifold, plurivocal and contested. Prevalence, emancipation, temperament, friction, and endurance are part of the “ordinary language” in which politics is spoken of. They are not unrelated to one another, but concentrating on one notion, playing with it for a number of pages in conjunction with one sense of the age-old fivefold offers a way to explore, describe and experiment with the possibility, plausibility, and interest of this work’s hypothesis¹³. Before engaging these refoldings, however, a number of conceptual knots must be addressed. If this initial exposition is a preliminary, the following knots are best described as liminary, that is, as still parergonal and yet somewhat closer to the work itself—which is, arguably, already under way.

¹³ I turn to the “choice” of these five specific terms—prevalence, emancipation, temperament, friction, and endurance—in the last section of the following (re-)introductory chapter.

Liminary Knots: A Fugue of Importance

*Problems worthy
of attack
prove their worth
by hitting back.*

Piet Hein (1969, 2)

On condition(s) of writing

This dissertation, written under the auspices of the Department of Political Science and of the Cultural, Social, and Political Thought program at the University of Victoria, is concerned with the very broad question of what I call political importance. The most general problem addressed in this work holds in three words: *what matters politically?* From the outset, the exposition of my reasons for having spent a few years thinking through and writing about this general question raises a number of difficulties. Their intricate character and their proximity with the very practice of writing, of linguistic expression, makes it so that “Words that come to mind to name them are: knots, tangles, fankles, *impasses*, disjunctions, whirligogs, binds” (Laing 2005 [1970], n.p.), or aporias, which are also hearths of sense, to which I cannot but return throughout this work.

I attribute a first difficulty to my belief that scholarly conventions require a dissertation to begin with a convincing account of the importance of the problem that is to be expatiated, disserted upon for a considerable number of pages afterward. In terms of a pragmatics of reading, I presume the writer must catch the reader’s eye—or readers’ eyes, for a dissertation is a rare kind of text: it is in principle guaranteed a minimum number of readers superior to one. The more or less convincing character of the initial

exposition presented above, its ability to attract and sustain the attention of its audience, arguably depends upon my own ability to render sensible the general significance of the work under scrutiny, and especially its relevance for the fields it seeks to belong to.

The somewhat unconventionally intricate character of the present liminary texturing of the initial exposition of this dissertation is prompted by the singular question addressed in this work. It is indeed my conviction that the question itself should preside over and guide the work, if it is well posed. In this work, I claim from the outset that the problem of importance is an important problem. Giving reasons for the importance of the problem of importance seems to me an endeavor that must, or at least that should readily be able to demonstrate that it can take itself as one of its objects, that it can account for itself as an instance or a case of what it is concerned with giving an account of. After all, how could a doctoral research on political importance effectively *advance the knowledge* of what matters politically if it cannot account for its own claims to importance in a plausible way? It may turn out that the general problem of importance is not that important—but what, then, *truly* is? What matters *more*? Are there *kinds* of importance at stake in such a ranking? How does importance work? That is precisely the issue.

This work seeks to contribute to the institutionalized discipline of political science and to the interdisciplinary (and somewhat undisciplined) nebula that calls itself cultural, social, and political thought. This is the institutional anchorage of this research, its first context of inscription, a prerequisite of its possibility and of its fate. It partly explains why I am concerned with *political* importance. It may be the case that what I call the problem of importance is not that important *politically*—that it is important *philosophically*, say, but not or less so politically. Still, assessing this claim also requires

a persuasive account or “theory” of what matters politically, if only (*but why “only”?*) an implicit one. Political science and cultural, social, and political thought teach that such accounts of political life can be made explicit and mapped, studied and evaluated.

Studying political science and cultural, social, and political thought taught me that accounts of politics—what I call politologies—matter politically. It also taught me that implicit accounts of politics might matter more than explicit ones, precisely because of their implicit, even un-thought character. These teachings presuppose what may be called an expanded account of politics: they assume politics is not only a matter of what states or parties do, but of what individuals and systems do and think they do, what they feel politics is about and what they—*we*—think should or can be done. They also presuppose that giving an account of politics is not the preserve of politicians and scholars.

These claims signal a second difficulty raised by my initial exposition. If I propose this dissertation and not any other one, it is surely because I know—or I think I know—that it will be received somewhat favorably, that chances are the issue it deals with (to say nothing of *how* it is dealt with) can be welcomed as a significant, relevant, or important issue for political science and cultural, social, and political thought. In other words, it seems I must assume a shared sense of importance—*a community?* I have some grounds for supposing this sharing, this horizon if you will, not least since I have been spending some time listening, reading, writing and talking with a number of people about what students of politics find important. But I am also prone to recall the ancient, Socratic claim that we only ever learn what we already know, that to learn is to recollect. From this claim, I gather that I may have come to this institution and not any other precisely because I felt, anticipated or presumed that, here, I could find a favorable

climate for pursuing my work. I must have gambled that some people care for things that are similar to those I care for. This last sentence may suggest I knew well in advance what this dissertation was to be concerned with, that I long cared for the same things and only then did I look for (and happened to find) a place where I could expose my views and remain unchallenged. I know, however, that I have never been more challenged on my views than during those years of doctoral studies that find an end in this text. This is partly how I have come to consider the question of political importance to be an important question that is at the core of the practice of politology, albeit often silently so.

This work is not what I thought it would be four or even two years ago—assuming that one can ever know what one’s work truly is and does, even when it is done. As recounted above, during my doctoral studies I was repeatedly challenged to think through the assumptions that inform my own thinking on political life and on what matters politically. I grew increasingly dissatisfied with conventional, established ways of asserting the importance of politological research—of my own research project on bio-art, for one, and of researches on politics and aesthetics more generally—, and even of politics itself. I cannot pinpoint all the reasons for this dissatisfaction, but I am quite sure that some of them are tied—although, or perhaps even because these often haunting considerations tend to be marginalized, silenced—to the fact that the reasons that are commonly given for the importance of politological research are at least in part the reasons that I can give myself for persisting through a doctoral program of study while research itself, as a practice of questioning, is always suffused with doubts. In any case, as I tried to make this concern into a constitutive yet limited part of a work on the politics of bio-art, it kept growing in importance until I was brought to start anew and make it

into the object of the work itself. It is one of the contributions of this research to engage the issue of *political* importance for itself, and to thereby thematize importance as well.

A third difficulty posed by the above initial exposition of the problem addressed in this dissertation concerns those types of conventional, established ways of asserting the importance of this or that topic or site that I feel I have grown dissatisfied with. That these gestures are conventional, established, can be read as a sign of their power, but this is not to say it is a sign of their soundness or of their rightness, if these words mean anything. *For all practical purposes*, as the trope goes, it often seems sufficient to support initial assertions of the importance of this or that topic or site by referring to how others—other scholars, if “scientific importance” is at stake; various institutions and groups, if “societal importance” is invoked; oneself-as-another, if “personal importance” is key—have paid attention to the issue, but that now, *there we are*, in dire need of a *more attentive engagement—and here is one*, goes the trope. This trope offers a tried way to preemptively address the question that insistently haunts every attempt at making an assertion about importance: *so what? who cares?*

This question is not free from politics. Just who is asking, where, when, and how, delimits acceptable responses. Importance is not justified or argued for in quite the same way if a group is trying to secure funding from a governmental institution, if a country declares war to another, or if one is trying to fulfill the requirements of a program of study. These justifications often tend to rely on well-trodden “regional” lines of thought. These lines of thought do not necessarily accommodate the reflexive gesture that consists in examining them “from within”, through something like immanent critique. Suspension of disbelief may be a practical necessity, but this necessity is often left un-thought. I

believe it is not paid sufficient attention, or not the right kind of attention... Of course, to invite more self-reflexivity and to claim to exemplify it is a tried trope of claims to self-importance! It is acceptable in academia, in “the University” (in the singular) if you will, to the extent that the latter is dedicated to the extension and the strengthening of knowledge, and therefore, arguably, to the examination of what constitutes knowledge of how “the world” *is*—of how *worlds* import. In a conjuncture where it seems that, every year, more dissertations are being written than ever before, I hold it is appropriate to engage how claims to political importance work, both inside and outside academia. This issue is worth engaging for itself as directly as possible, rather than being left in the somewhat comfortable (and manageable) margins of introductions and conclusions.

A politology of distributions of importance

The sensation of disorientation that can emerge out of the attempt to begin approaching the broad question *what matters politically?* may itself be held as a sign that there is no fixed beginning or origin of importance, no absolute start. In other words, if importance seems unapproachable from a neutral or detached perspective, it is plausibly because there are always already some “things” or “facts” that are held to matter. Importance is, in that sense, omnipresent. Even when “nothing matters anymore”, *that* now matters quite a lot... This is a first characteristic: one always starts “*du milieu*”, amid, immersed in a multiplicity of claims to importance, rather than at a clear beginning or end.

A second general characteristic of importance seems to me to reside in how, as a qualification, “important” is a fundamentally differential term. It is used to mark, but also to make a difference. To claim that a “thing” is important is to trace a line of demarcation between *this* and other “things” in this precise respect, that is: a difference in, or of

importance. What is expressed in how qualifications of importance tend to be used is less an impermeable boundary between importance and unimportance, significance and insignificance, relevance and irrelevance, pertinence and impertinence, or centrality and futility, than a fluid spectrum or porous continuum. Importance is a differential notion as qualifications of importance are always relative to other, more or less proximate qualifications of importance: *this* only imports more or less than *that*, but this demarcation rarely seems definitively settled; it may always threaten to be in need of a retracing, a re-marking. What imports, then, never walks alone, all by itself, sovereignly detached from other “importances”. Importance, in that sense, is always distributed. What are determined—and what is to be studied—are *variations in distributions of importance*.

Through this liminary knot, the general hypothesis that I formulated in my initial exposition above asks to be transformed, rewritten into this more specific formulation: *aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance*. Different aesthetics of politics would then preside over determinations of variations that are formulated in different terms.

*

In this reformulation, I readily assume that these intertwined characters of importance, immersivity and distributivity, both apply to *political* importance. In effect, it appears that there are always already some “things” that matter politically, and that they always matter politically more or less than others. These appearances nonetheless put into question the character of the relationship between importance and political importance. Is this relationship primarily—*most importantly?*—one between general and particular? Or

is it a different kind of relationship altogether? Both possibilities can be accounted for by the concept of distributions of importance, which is an original contribution of this work.

If political importance stands to importance as a species to a genus, distributions of political importance should be described as particular regions within a general distribution of importance itself, or importance in general. Other regions may include, for instance, distributions of social, cultural, and economic importance. The relationships between those regions would then itself become an issue. The perceived location of a region within the most general distribution of what matters may itself involve an order: does what matters politically matters more or less than what matters economically? Do politics and economy matter in the same way, or do the very ways in which they import differ? Do they involve different *modes* of mattering? How can these modes be *felt*?

If, on the other hand, political importance stands to importance in a manner that is not adequately described as a relation between species and genus, part and whole, if one rejects the (*Platonist?*) notion that there is an Idea of “*the Important*”, there nonetheless arises the question of the adequate qualification of this relationship. Is it not the case that abstract, general notions like “importance itself” only ever emerge, as *thoughts*, through practices of abstraction that are themselves situated within and enabled (or hindered) by always already political configurations? Politics, in that sense, could even be considered the activity that primarily distributes importance, or that is required for importance to be distributed. Once again, however, a “theory” or an account of sensibility is required to assess how the claim that politics comes first can be apprehended.

At least one version of the claim that politics comes first can be traced to Aristotle, who writes that “it is evident that the city (*polis*) belongs to the class of things that exist

by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal” (Aristotle 2009 [ca. 330 BCE], 1253a2), adding “that the city is prior in the order of nature to the family and the individual” (1253a18). The first sentence of *Politics* reads: “Observation shows us, first, that every city is a species of association (*koinonia*), and, secondly, that all associations come into being for the sake of some good—for all men do all their acts with a view to achieving something which is, in their view, a good” (1252a1). The word translated by association, *koinonia*, means a sharing, a communion or fellowship, from *koinos*, common, vulgar, public. What comes first, by all appearances, is a commonality, the very fact of togetherness, of being-with or *Mitsein*, if you will—or of distribution, as Michel Serres uses the term in the fourth volume of his fivefold *Hermès* series, *La distribution*:

In the beginning is the distribution. Of atoms, of points, or of all arbitrary things (*de toutes choses quelconques*). Disorder, noise, rags, fair, crowd, tattered moor, decompositions or mixtures, oven, chaos, black-box opened or closed, thunderstorm, indiffereniable and hurly-burly. At the beginnings are the distributions. The deals (*Les donnes*). The given, the real are only a random deal (*donne aléatoire*). Continuous or discreet, I do not know. The deal is there and that is all. And no one dealt it or no one distributed it. It is there, like the cloud, passes and does not fail (Serres 1977, 13-4; I translate).

But Serres’ distribution is precisely *not* ordered in the style of Aristotle’s teleologies:

I almost regret the word distribution already. Take it in a much less ordered sense than the usual or scientific. In a pre-combinatory sense, even pre-set theoretical. Yes, the tribes are scattered in space and no one has ever known how. There is already too much order in the distribution of waters, vapour, fuel, typography. Chains, already, rankings, a plane and bifurcations. And too much [order] still when we think of a relative arrangement of numbers, of elements. It is always already a pre-order. Take the word *before any structure*, and the thing before the definition (14).

Clouds and tribes—“the thing” is a holding-together, experienced as a matter-of-fact.

In *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead dedicates the first lecture to “Importance”, in a “free examination of some ultimate notions, as they occur naturally in daily life[,] the generalizations which are inherent in literature, in social organization, in the effort towards understanding physical occurrences (Whitehead 1968b [1938], 1). These notions, among which he counts importance, have “no definitions” since “They are incapable of analysis in terms of factors more far-reaching than themselves. Each must be displayed as necessary to the various meanings of groups of notions, of equal depth with itself”. Whitehead then argues that

There are two contrasted ideas which seem inevitably to underlie all width of experience, one of them is the notion of importance, the sense of importance, the presupposition of importance. The other is the notion of matter-of-fact. There is no escape from sheer matter-of-fact. It is the basis of importance; and importance is important because of the inescapable character of matter-of-fact. We concentrate by reason of a sense of importance. And when we concentrate, we attend to matter-of-fact. Those people who in a hard-headed way confine their attention to matter-of-fact do so by reason of their sense of the importance of such an attitude. The two notions are antithetical, and require each other (4).

Nonetheless, “Importance is a generic notion which has become obscured by the overwhelming prominence of a few of its innumerable species. The terms *morality*, *logic*, *religion*, *art*, have each of them been claimed as exhausting the whole meaning of importance. Each of them denotes a subordinate species. But the genus stretches beyond any finite group of species” (11). The genus itself is hard to grasp, however, for

Of course, Plato was right and Aristotle was wrong. There is no clear division among genera; there is no clear division among species; there are no clear divisions anywhere. That is to say, there are no clear divisions when you push your observations beyond the presuppositions on which they rest. It so happens, however, that we always think within

limitations. /As a practical question, Aristotle was right and Plato was muddled, But, what neither Aristotle nor Plato adequately conceived was the necessity for investigation of the peculiar characteristics of that sense of importance which is current in the thought of each age. All classification depends on the current character of importance (15).

Partly inspired by what could be called the “Whitehead revival” of recent years, I propose to investigate the sense of importance which is current in the thought of our age, that is: how *political* classification depends on the current character of importance. It is for this reason that I formulate the hypothesis that *aesthetics* of politics acts as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance. In doing so, I claim that “our” mode of thought, if there is but one, is in a large measure aesthetic¹⁴.

An aesthetic mode of thought

In many ways, we already think aesthetically. I want to make this claim more precise. The notion of aesthetics has a singular history, or better yet, several histories and becomings (e.g. Rancière 2011; Beiser 2009) that make it not only a general name for a specific mode of experience (“aesthetic experience”), or even for the conditions of experience as such (a transcendental aesthetic), but the sign of singular, historical series

¹⁴ What I call the Whitehead revival (beside the question of whether it is a *re-vival*) can, I believe, be traced to the attention paid to the mathematician-philosopher by Deleuze in his book on Leibniz, where Whitehead is qualified as “the successor or diadochi [of] a slightly secret school [claiming] everything is an event” (Deleuze 1988, 103; I translate). Stengers studied with Deleuze, and her engagement with Whitehead in *Penser avec Whitehead. “Une libre et sauvage création de concepts”* (Stengers 2002b) explicitly mentions Deleuze. I believe that Bruno Latour, who is a vocal ally of Stengers, comes closest to offering a reformulation of Whitehead’s notion of importance when, in his Spinoza Lecture on *What is the Style of Matters of Concern?*, he coins this concept of matters of concern, which he also counterposes to the notion of matters of fact, writing: “A matter of concern is what happens to a matter of fact when you add to it its whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage of the whole machinery of a theatre. [...] Instead of simply being there, matters of fact begin to look different, to render a different sound, they start to move in all directions, they overflow their boundaries, they include a complete set of new actors, they reveal the fragile envelopes in which they are housed. Instead of ‘being there whether you like it or not’, yes (this is one of the huge differences), *they have to be liked*, appreciated, tasted, experimented upon, mounted, prepared, put to the test. It is the same world, and yet, everything looks different” (Latour 2008, 39; see also Latour 1996).

of apprehensions of the relationships between sense and sense through modalities enabled by “art”. Aesthetics, in that sense, is the name of a situated folding of the sensible. According to Rancière, in what I call an aesthetic mode of thought, the relationship between sense and sense, the division of *aisthesis* is constitutively thought as a matter of suspension, of interruption or exception, in contrast to other modes of thought that concentrate on an allegedly normal, linear and continuous relationship. From the start, certain violences are involved if one considers the normalizations and linearizations involved in this posited continuity between sense and sense, which makes it possible to claim that “everyone can see... and come to the same conclusion”, while anyone who “sees things differently” and thinks differently (*as a result?*) is thereby *made* deviant.

In his work on aesthetics “proper”, Rancière delineates different “regimes of identification of the arts”, one of which he names the aesthetic regime of art (Rancière 2000, 26-45), a regime which renders problematic the very distinction of proper and improper. This notion of “regimes of art” is helpful for appreciating how an aesthetic mode of thought might work, and how it arguably already informs common claims about political importance. In the story told by Rancière, the aesthetic regime of art emerged in North-Western Europe at the end of the 18th century and during the 19th century, through works like Winckelmann’s *History of the Art of Antiquity*, Lessing’s *Laocoon*, Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and Hegel’s redescription of Dutch genre paintings as expressing through light the political autonomy newly conquered by the Dutch people (Rancière 2011, 19-59; 2003, 88-102). It is Rancière’s contention that before and outside such works, which remain quite influential, there was no art as such (in the singular), and that most contemporary

accounts of the powers of art are operating, knowingly or not, in relation to the aesthetic mode of thought that these works partook in weaving.

Art is a created concept that achieved a relative “autonomy” through insistences on the distinction of art from non-art on the ground *not* of a distribution of occupations, but rather of a sensible mode of being (*mode d’être sensible*) proper to the products of art that, at the same time, “identified its forms with those through which life forms itself (Rancière 2000, 31-3; I translate). In Europe at least, what existed before this conceptualization were different arts, thought in hierarchical terms, under what Rancière names the (Platonist) ethical regime of images and the (Aristotelian) representative regime of the arts. The latter, a prior distribution of the “artistic” sensible, defined the arts as codified manners of doing and representing, as forms of life involving the making of “imitations”—be they visual, narrative, or both: making images that tell stories—within a hierarchical distribution of social occupations. It authorized a system of appropriate and inappropriate relations between subjects of representation and forms of expression: the type of painting apt to represent a clergyman differed from one apt to represent commoners, say. This regime is not lodged in a teleology of historical stages. It persists and cohabits with other regimes of identification of the arts, including in a single work.

The aesthetic regime of art is thought as differentiating itself from the representative regime of the arts. It invents art—it is a *redistribution* of the sensible that makes it plausible to hold that there exists this “thing”, art in the singular—precisely as the suspension of the “traditional” distribution of proper and improper relationships between subjects and forms. It interrupts the “normal” causal logic of interpretation that holds the effects of a work to be a function of the intentions of its maker and of the social

positioning of its spectators—the ends to be a function of the origins—, and disrupts distributions of what can and cannot be named “art”, give rise to art, and who can qualify as an artist. In this mode of thought, most clearly expressed by Schiller, “[t]he aesthetic state is a pure suspension, a moment where the form is experienced (*éprouvée*) for itself. And it is the moment of the formation of a specific humanity” (33; I translate). Hence, it

is a regime of the thought of art (*un régime de pensée de l'art*) that also expresses an idea of thought [itself]. Thought is not anymore the faculty of imprinting one's will into objects. It is the faculty of equating itself with its contrary (*la faculté de s'égaliser à son contraire*). This equality of contraries was, in Hegel's time, the Apollonian power of the idea that comes out of itself in order to turn itself into the light of the painting or the smile of the stone god. From Nietzsche to Deleuze, it became, inversely, the Dionysian power through which thought abdicates the attributes of the will, loses itself in the stone, the color or the language, and equates its active manifestation to the chaos of things (Rancière 2001, 157; I translate).

This “faculty of equating itself to its contrary” is what is at stake in what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe called “the hyperbolic of paradoxes” in his reading of Diderot's 1777 *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, which puts into play the claim that the best comedians are those who can take on and mime all characters and qualities precisely because they have none of their own, none *as* their own, *en propre*. Lacoue-Labarthe generalizes this claim, writing: “the formula for the paradox is always that of the double superlative: the more mad it is, the more wise it is; the maddest is the wisest. Paradox is defined by the infinite exchange, or the hyperbolic identity, of contraries” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 252). Formally, this hyperbolic can be phrased: *the more it is A, the more it is non-A*.

This trope, typical of an aesthetic mode of thought, of thought as “equating itself to its contrary”, traverses the works of poets like Hölderlin and Paul Celan, but also the

philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, when they claim that the closest is the farthest and the lowest is the highest. This trope is also at work, for instance, in Max Weber's sociological indication that at a point which may always already be passed, rationalization turns into irrationality. Whitehead's claims on the concreteness of abstractions and the abstract character of concreteness may also be qualified as being made intelligible by an aesthetic mode of thought.

More generally, one can argue that the more an occasion is banal, the more it matters—or just the reverse. An aesthetic mode of thought is what enables such claims to become not mere instances of nonsensical chatter, but legitimate moves in the ceaseless adventures of sense-making. It is what enables even “non-sense” to make some kind of sense, as the most senseless is, or can be, the most sensible. By using the notion of aesthetics, I acknowledge this challenging set of assumptions on the powers and possibilities of sense and thought, on where, when, and how sensing and thinking occur.

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An aesthetic mode of thought informs numerous claims on the *politics* of aesthetics, like: “art is not political first and foremost by virtue of the messages and feelings it transmits on the order of the world. Nor is it political by the way it represents the structures of society, the conflicts or the identities of social groups. It is political by virtue of the very distance it takes with respect to those functions, by the type of time and the type of space it institutes, by the manner in which it divides this time and populates this space” (Rancière 2004b, 36-7; I translate). This is a typically “Rancièrian” claim on the question. It does not mean that artistic practices are not *also* political in virtue of the two modalities downplayed above, but that their plausible “politicity” is not first and foremost thought in

this manner in an aesthetic mode of thought. The effectiveness of this distancing of art from its supposedly normal functions—which, in a way, only appear retrospectively, through the thematization of this distancing—is arguably what is at stake in most politological claims according to which the powers of an artistic practice or work reside in its capacity to prompt a questioning and suspension of “normal” interpretations, forms of judgment, and subjectivities that allegedly texture and populate “the everyday” (e.g. Didi-Huberman 2009a; Lamoureux 2009; Groys 2008; Shapiro 2008; Bleiker 2006; Whitehall 2006; Kear 2005; Ardenne 2002; Fusco 2001; Edelman 1995; Lamoureux 1994). The difficulty is that, in this mode of thought, sense proliferates in all directions; it inflates perhaps infinitely, rather than being carefully deflated, reined in, and managed.

Most significant for politological research is how the aesthetic lexicon of distances and gaps (*écarts*), of intervals, suspensions, interruptions, reversals and paradoxes worked out in the realm(s) of “art” sustains influential conceptions of politics (e.g. Schmitt 2005 [1922/34], 5-15; Balibar 2002). This language is key to Rancière’s claim that to act politically is to create scenes of *dissensus* (Rancière 1995), for instance, that is: occasions that interrupt and eventually reconfigure what appear to be consensual distributions of capacities and incapacities, possibilities and impossibilities, qualifications and disqualifications, visibilities and invisibilities, voices and noises, namely distributions that posit a necessary, linear and hierarchical relationship between sense and sense, between what is sensed (e.g. youths rioting and looting a luxury store) and what sense can be made out of it (e.g. they merely express solipsistic consumerism). This consensual logic is what Rancière calls *la police*, or politics as a process of government and subjection. It conceives of “human societies” as wholes made of countable and

manageable parts, without void or supplement, not unlike Plato's Socrates' well-ordered "city in speech". Therein, one's position, one's occupation, one's dispositions, and one's capacities are inextricably linked to one another. This logic is what sustains claims to the effect that one cannot but have the tastes of one's class, for instance (see Bourdieu 1979). Policing, in that sense, is best dramatized not by the interpellation *Hey! You there!*, but by the more mundane and effective: *Move along, there's nothing to see!*

The dissensual logic of interruption, on the other hand, is what Rancière calls *la politique*, or politics as processes of de-identification, of emancipation and subjectivation involving the suspension of this allegedly normal, properly policed order of self-identical identities in which, for instance, the only thing to be seen on a city street are cars and pedestrians swiftly moving along, and the only thing to do is for everyone to mind their own business. *Dissensing* means maintaining the rapport of sense and sense as a problem, rather than as a given. In deeds, it can mean reconfiguring what is and can be done on a commercial street, or displacing ever so slightly what an institution deems impossible, be it the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea or a queer collective. For Rancière, "the political" is the stage where police and politics meet, the scene of their encounter. An aesthetic mode of thought enables one to think that police and politics are co-constitutive, that they are inextricably intertwined and that there is no "final liberation".

Modulations of violence

The importance of addressing the question of modulations of violences in an engagement with aesthetics of politics in relation to distributions of political importance first stems, in an auto-ethnographic fashion, from my repeated encounters with claims to the effect that focusing on aesthetics might be a way of fleeing from "politics itself", or at least, of

avoiding the serious questions faced by political research, where “serious” is held to qualify the grave occurrences of *Realpolitik* as well as normative propositions to *minimize* violences—eradication is out of order if only because it is virtually impossible to think of a more violent gesture than eradication; hence my insistence on *modulations* of violence. More practically, focusing on aesthetic matters might be well and good in times of peace, but *when push comes to shove*, as the phrase goes, exacting decisions have to be made about legitimate and illegitimate uses of force, and what Schmitt calls “political romanticism”, the “subjectified occasionalism” that apprehends nothing but aesthetic nuances everywhere as occasions for personal productivity, as starting points for an “infinite novel”, seems utterly inept to decide (see Schmitt 1986 [1919/25]). There is a sense, however, in which those grave occurrences and normative propositions cannot be severed from aesthetic concerns, if only because violence, or better, various violences (a noun which can be plural in French) are matters of experience, and therefore of aesthetics. Violences concern the relationships of sense and sense, of sense-perception and sense-making, not least since it can be said that violences interrupt sense-making.

To be able to delineate something like aesthetics and politics proper to reject one of the two, to put to work the logic of the proper and the improper, violent, exclusionary gestures of delimitation are required. An explicit insistence on aesthetics of politics might offer an occasion to engage how differentiations between various modulations of such perceived violences occur. It may do so in a manner that does not confine violences to occurrences like war and physical pain, while nonetheless accounting for the seemingly indubitable importance of the latter.

Rancière's insistence on aesthetics of politics is inscribed in a vast constellation of contemporary works making the relations between politics and aesthetics explicit. These writings constitute a part of the corpus addressed in this research. What is arguably missing from Rancière's account is an engagement with what many would not hesitate to qualify as the most important questions of "our" contemporary conjuncture(s): mass violence and technology—technologies of violence and the violences of new technologies, not least those operating at (or in) the intersections of digital media and "life itself", which constitute new tools and knowledges promising to affect what was once called "the human condition" with unprecedented intensity, complicating accounts of what it can and even must mean to speak of humans as world-making animals, as experiential subjects, while the atmospheric conditions of many forms of life are threatened by the consequences and continuation of recent transformations in human life (see Serres 2009; Cooper 2008; Thacker 2005; Kroker 2004; Sloterdijk 2000; Haraway 1997). A number of recent contributions to this interdisciplinary nebula share Rancière's view that politics depends upon and intervenes in distributions of capacities to sense and make sense. Still, they differ in the character of their efforts to think the question of violence, whatever is put within this phrase.

But precisely just what is put under an expression like "the question of violence" can make all the difference in the world. Defining violence is quite difficult. For one, the very practice of defining one's terms, of fixing meanings even momentarily through something like an effacement of the multiple polemics, histories, and becomings that construct the valid, credible, and plausible uses of any given term in order to make it into an abstract substantive is a rather violent practice, however necessary it is deemed—or

better, precisely because it is held to be an irreducible aspect of the pursuit of scholarly (and politico-legal) achievements. As a working definition of violence that is able to account for the violences of definitions themselves, I borrow Jean-Luc Nancy's sentence: "Violence can be defined *a minima* as the application (*mise en oeuvre*) of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or energetic system into which it intervenes" (Nancy 2005 [2003], 16). Practices of sense-making can be apprehended as creating and as being embedded in dynamic or energetic systems in relation to which the force applied through the interventions of definition-seeking scholars can be qualified as "foreign". Soon, however, the difficulty of defining violence returns, it becomes tangible again as one is pressed to ask in return just how this alleged foreignness is to be determined, in relation to what thresholds, and just who is qualified to make and assess this determination. Are not definition-seeking scholars also "agents" of systems of sense-making? Is not the "force" of definitions integral to what it can and must mean to *make* sense? And is not sense a matter of deflation, of reduction amid polemogenous inflations of significations, a matter of minimizing chatter (see Sloterdijk & Baudrillard 1999)? Are not sharp definitions a *solution* to the problem of minimizing polemogenous communications? If Nancy's minimalist definition constitutes an apt, thought-provoking beginning, it is precisely because it does not foreclose such questions-in-return about what does and what does not count as "violent" in any given (or constructed) series of conjunctures.

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Although one could argue that violences are addressed by Rancière given his insistence on processes of inclusion and exclusion, qualification and disqualification, and normalization and interruption, there is also a sense in which this engagement not only

could, but also *should* be made more explicit, that he might well be “getting away with murder” by not addressing the question of contemporary murderous violences sanctioned by subjects, states, the system of states, and transnational networks of capitals, among other entities. Many contemporary accounts tend to exhibit a shared assumption that addressing aesthetics of politics in a way that acknowledges the problem of modulations of violences demands that one makes claims about a particularly intense, but also arguably rare form of violence: war (see Bleiker 2009; Butler 2009; Shapiro 2008). How important can an account be if it does not address the possibility and the alleged necessity of war, if only of a “war to end all wars”? On war, Rancière most often remains mute.

Given the forcefulness of this question and its importance for a number of recent attempts at thinking political life through an attention to aesthetics of politics, I cannot help but think that these accounts echo, if in a convoluted manner, Walter Benjamin’s claim that “*All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one point: war*” (Benjamin 2007a [1936], 241; I underline). In this respect, what is one to do of Rancière’s assertion that “his” notion of aesthetics of politics “has nothing to do” with Benjamin’s notion of an aestheticization of politics “proper to the age of the masses”, to which, according to Benjamin, “Communism responds by politicizing art” (242)? As I read both Rancière and Benjamin, I consider that what the former rejects in the latter’s account is the historical claim that contemporary conjunctures involve, at least from the end of the 19th century onward, an increase or an intensification of the relationships between politics and aesthetics through which the second seizes and even replaces the first. Rancière, for his part, comes close to asserting what Whitehead terms “a fixed specification of the human mind” in arguing that there has always been and there will always be aesthetics of

politics, even if the “contents” of these aesthetics are variable, and even if their very thinkability as *aesthetic* matters is historically contingent. This divergence raises the question of novelty, which is a recurrent motif through which claims to political importance are made. This is a pressing question if only because the notion of novelty-as-progress has worked to justify and legitimize an immeasurable set of violent practices.

Claims on novel configurations of violences in contemporary conjunctures tend to assert something like “the end of war”, insofar as war is grasped as the name of a specific form, as one historical-legal regime of modulations of violences that has (or had) sovereign states as its principal subjects, and a system of sovereign states as its condition (see Schmitt 2011; 2004 [1963]). Frédéric Gros (2006), for instance, suggests that it is now more adequate, if one is to make claims about contemporary violences, to speak of “states of violence”, as one would speak of states of affairs, always in the plural. This language arguably enables more general *and* more intricate accounts of the complexity of what counts and what does not count as violences in singular conjunctures—accounts that can include but need not be limited to instances of war and that may resist being reduced to an ethical approach (an approach centered solely on “the subject” in its relations to its “self” and “the Other”, put into scene in a sort of a-temporal, a-spatial suspension) of the relationships between aesthetics and violences. Such accounts insist that collective practices and structural processes are significant matters of concern, however difficult they are to comprehend (Marzano 2011; Sloterdijk 2010 [2006]; Das *et al.* 2001). One of the reasons why I maintain, against more or less vocal criticisms, that Rancière’s notion of aesthetics of politics is a fruitful point of departure for addressing what is at stake in the determination of what counts and what does not count politically in contemporary

conjunctures is that Rancière's very avoidance of a direct engagement with the questions of violence, war, and technology offers an occasion to think through how these questions are capable of enduring in their qualification as "the most important questions of our age". Rancière's conceptualization does not take for granted that violences involve the most important questions, *nor does it prevent one from thinking so*.

This knot asks for the claim that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of political importance to be taken seriously, attentively, and thoughtfully. If the problem of determinations of variations in distributions of political importance is to be able to receive an answer, it requires the differentiation of consequential and trivial matters to be constructed as a problem, as what is to be thought. I maintain that refolding distributions of political importance through various apprehensions of politics as a form of experience, through various aesthetics of politics interlaced with claims to knowledge, is an apt gesture if one is to take into account how modulations of violences are sensed and thought as important in contemporary conjunctures. To account for the breadth of possible sensings and conceptualizations of political importance, however, I believe that it is crucial to resist reducing aesthetics of politics to the two senses that prevail in Modern-Western politologies: sight and speech, or taste.

Refolding the age-old fivefold

What matters politically for an aesthetic mode of thought are suspensions and interruptions, as well as their opposite numbers: endurances and stubbornnesses. The determination of just what constitutes a suspension becomes an insistent problem when the categories of suspension are themselves subject to transformations and displacements, to reversals and paradoxes. In this mode of thought, the two terms of co-implicated

binaries are distinguishable yet inseparable: consensus/dissensus, police/politics, subjection/subjectivation, visible/invisible, sayable/unsayable, etc. As I read Rancière, however, I repeatedly stumble on this last etcetera. It expresses the prominent attention paid to two senses: sight and speech, or taste. I must now texture this twofold claim.

A certain prevalence of sight in accounts of politics is first made visible (!) by the very words that tend to be used to describe the practices of producing and encountering such accounts. Terms like perspective, theory, ideology, point of view, framework, and worldview all belong to a visual lexicon, to a language of representation that places “the seeing subject” at its center (Harries 2001), in the eye of the storm, as it were, or of the world as a “blooming, buzzing confusion”, to borrow William James’ famous phrase (James 1992 [1892], 24). In that sense, ocularcentrism (Stonehill 1995; Jay 1993) already characterizes Western politologies, whether it is supported as an apt angle of analysis or opposed as an excessively reductive lens. A contemporary sign of the centrality of sight can be found in the title of a now-canonical account of the canon of Western political theory, *Politics and Vision* (Wolin 1960/2004). Sheldon Wolin’s insistence on the two senses of vision, “descriptive” and “imaginative” (18), first points to how sight is a theme, an object investigated by politological research *because it is important in political practices*. This objectivation of sight is at work, for instance, in the many studies on surveillance and control that draw on Foucault’s work on panoptic vision (Foucault 1998 [1975]) and on the Modern-Western invention and biopolitical management of “populations” (Foucault 2004) to analyze the contemporary importance of practices of visibility and invisibility that operate through instruments of governmentality like statistics (Hacking 1990). Sight is also objectified in numerous discussions of “the

society of the spectacle” (Debord 2006a [1967]) and “visual culture” (Berger 1972) in terms of politics of representation, and of “critique” as a coming-to-see-differently.

Wolin’s title also evokes how vision is a constitutive aspect of political research (see also Skinner 2002). The latter is effectively apprehended in terms of framing, insight, and foresight. Scholars (*we*) effectively tend to describe their (*our*) scholarly activities visually, as reading, making visible, unveiling, unmasking, revealing, showing, pointing, delineating, outlining, circumscribing, illustrating, depicting, clarifying, shedding light or enlightening. These terms are not limited to political research. The many activities that are counted as “the sciences” have been convincingly framed in terms of explicitation, of “making explicit” what once was in the background through vivisections of “the body and the soul” (Sloterdijk 2005 [2004]; Visvanathan 1997), that is: of making visible what was once invisible via invariably yet variously violent operations. As Whitehead puts it, “[t]he weakness [*but is it not also the strength?*] of the epistemology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that it based itself purely upon a narrow formulation of sense perception. Also among the various modes of sensation, visual experience was picked out as the typical example. The result was to exclude all the really fundamental factors constituting our experience” (Whitehead 1968b [1938], 162). The most powerful sign of the prevalence of sight in apprehensions of distributions of political importance, however, might well be how prevalence itself—that is, a certain modality of importance—is thought in terms of being-the-most-visible. Conversely, exclusions from importance, the “dark side” of thought that is required so as to enable a lighter inclusiveness, are thought as an obscuring, a rendering-invisible or a maintaining-into-invisibility. In such aesthetics where clarity and importance are matters

of luminous contrasts, the insistence on sight arguably *overshadows* how other senses contribute to political and politological practices.

In this dissertation, I consider the prevalence of sight in accounts of distributions of political importance as a point of departure for my fivefold analysis of aesthetics of politics. This prevalence of sight is closely intertwined with a certain prevalence of speech, with conceptions of politics centering on logomachies, that is: on battles (*makhia*) of words, claims, speeches, discourses or reasons (*logoi*). As Rancière puts it, distributions of the sensible concern just who can legitimately *say* what about what is and what is not *seen*, that is: what, whose, and how stories are told about what sightings¹⁵.

The relation between sight and speech is arguably a constitutive dimension of experience as it has been understood in Western accounts, a fundamental modality of how the relationship of sense-perception and sense-making “in general” is thought as a condition or prerequisite, but also as an outcome of political life as a vocal life. Kant’s claim that “Thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”, that the understanding cannot see and the senses cannot think, offers one articulation of this relation. Machiavelli’s assertion that “Men in general judge more by their eyes than

¹⁵ Davide Panagia, a reader of Rancière, coined the term *narratocracy* to speak of the privilege of speech in Modern-Western politologies: “Narratocracy is a prevailing regime of perception in the theoretical analysis of political phenomena. It offers the narrative line which is the story line that determines the trajectory of an action, but it is also the stenographic mark that traces a figure (of speech, of thought, of script, etc.) across a blank page; it is an outline that renders an object, event, practice, or person at once visible and available for accountability. This is what it means to delineate or give an account of something, and this ‘giving an account’ orients the perceptibility of an appearance and our postures of attention to it. The story line thus incises itself onto a field of vision and begins the work of conviction. Narratocracy, or the rule of narrative, is the organization of a perceptual field according to the imperative of rendering things readable. [...] Narratocracy commits vision to readerly sight while partitioning the body into specific areas of sensory competency. That is, our relation to ‘account giving’ qua storytelling, and the narratocratic postures of visual attention that accompany this, are enabled by ‘an organization of the visible’ that directs an individual’s turn toward the world (and more specifically still, the world of politics). Narratocracy enlists forms of correspondence that designate both the nature of perception and what counts as a subject of perception. As an ethopoetic modality of knowledge committed to justifying the value of appearances, narratocracy thus constitutes us as a specific type of political subject: the literary individual” (Panagia 2009, 12-3). This is one account of logomachies among many others.

their hands: everyone can see, but few can feel” (2005 [1513/32], 62 [Ch. XVIII]) offers another, which has the merit of opening the question of a political sense of touch—of *tactus*, a Latin word from which we derive tact, a crucial dimension of any tactics, a word which, for its part, comes from the Greek *tekhnè*.

The first lines of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* are perhaps most exemplary of contemporary refoldings of the relationship between sight and speech:

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. /But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we *see* the sun set. We *know* that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight (Berger 1972, 7).

These lines indicate how the senses of “lived experience”, to borrow a phenomenological phrasing, are not exhausted by the science and the authorized knowledge of a given conjuncture. Michael Taussig can then ask: “Who in this room truly believes, on the evidence of their senses, [...] that it is the Earth that rotates and not the Sun? You may *know*; it is abstract knowledge, handed down by the high priests of science who have replaced astrology by astronomy; but in your bones, you know otherwise. It is the Sun that is rotating around the Earth” (Taussig 2010). These lines suggest that the relations between sense-perception, sense-making, the authorization of certain claims and the disqualification of others are never quite settled as scientific matters of fact.

This consideration brings me to maintain that the age-old fivefold division of the senses can be an apt structural site for engaging the possibilities of different aesthetics of politics acting as prerequisites to distributions of political importance. Following many

scholarly accounts that have deconstructed and critiqued the contingent relations between the metaphysics, the sciences and the politics of various epochs and cultures, it appears adequate to at least consider resisting claims according to which political possibilities in contemporary conjunctures cannot but be apprehended in light of the state of the art of bio-psychological sciences and technologies, according to which the fivefold division of the senses is infinitely outdated, except perhaps as a heuristic device for “vulgarization”. Contemporary cognitive sciences tend to share Wolin’s twofold assumption on sight, namely that “vision serves two masters: thinking about, and acting upon, the world” (Jacob & Jeannerod 2003, 45). Still, what matters politically are less the truths of neurological sciences than how scientific apprehensions like contemporary brain-centered accounts of experience (see Taussig 1992) work to (de/)legitimize certain forms of life.

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Taking into account critical anthropologies makes visible how more or less shared ways of seeing or modes of visuality that are intertwined with modes of verbal expression of what is and what is not seen are crucial sites in the differentiation of “cultures”. Visual-vocal regimes are both signs of and grounds for such differentiations. The archetypical illustration of this assumption is probably “the many Eskimo words for snow”, a phrase generally attributed to the early work of Franz Boas on the perception of the color of ice-water in the north of North America—or more accurately, to interpretations thereof (see Krupnik & Müller-Wille 2010; Steckley 2008; Patterson 2001, 46; Saunders 2000; Pullum 1991; Martin 1986). What is striking in this contested textbook example is how it frames verbal expressions of visual- and especially color-perception as signs of both particular cultural differences and of a universal species-identity that enables (and is

arguably enabled by) anthropology as the study of “Man” through studies of “men”. Colors, however, are “cultural” not only because they are produced in a Kantian sense, that is through perceptual/projective experiences of individuals and groups, however incompletely these experiences can be expressed within the limits of at least one language and grammar. Colors—indigo is probably the most evident case since it is a dye, but this arguably applies to available colors in general, and even to all “things”—are also produced, manufactured as materials and commodities, as existents embedded in series of technological practices of power and knowledge that involve, among many rapports, colonial relations of domination and exploitation (see Taussig 2009; Latour 2008; 1997 [1991]). These historical rapports weave the fabrics of our world(s) in manners that confine any “initial” or “pure” situation of visual perception and verbal expression to a thought experiment. Articulating sight and speech as political “grounds” is to articulate contingent distributions of the sensible, particular histories and becomings of the senses (see Taussig 1993) that involve practices of hierarchicalization, orders of rank.

In what follows, I propose to consider that accounts of aesthetics of politics formulated in terms of speech are, despite being closely intertwined with accounts of sight, most aptly thought through the sense of taste. There are obvious problems with this enfolded proposition. With Bishop Berkeley, one could ask if there can be a voice were there no ear to hear it, or with Michel Serres, how speech can be thought in isolation from any of the senses of the age-old fivefold, since senses are always operating in complex conjunctions that even disassociate them from their allegedly principal organ. But first of all, are not the five senses “receptive”, while speech is “productive” or “projective”? This difficulty is eased (but not resolved) by neo- or post-Kantian accounts of experience as a

world-making event in which reception, projection and sense-making are inextricably entwined (Gordon 2010; Giroux 2008; Hengehold 2007; Friedman 2000). Once again, it is precisely in virtue of its problematic character that the double proposition of apprehending speech as a sense, and as a sense intelligible as taste, can dig a fruitful way into the *problématique* I am engaging.

In order to think distributions of importance through aesthetics of politics that are not reducible to a language of judgment—an endeavor that is required in order to account for the very prominence of this language—, it is useful to work the intervals opened by the proposition that speech can be considered under the guise of the sense of taste. Starting to construct the gaps between the two meanings of taste as a site for thinking offers an occasion to engage how the relations between politics and aesthetics have repeatedly been thought as involving both taste-as-judgment and taste-as-what-mouths-do. Politological engagements with speech are often deployed in reference to the notion of “judgments of taste”, as taken up and transformed by Kant in his seminal third *Critique* (Kant 2000 [1790]). This book constitutes a *passage obligé* in the study of politics and aesthetics as the study of the relationship between sense-perception and sense-making traversed by relations of power and knowledge (see Panagia 2009; Shaviro 2009; Shapiro 2008; Arendt 1992 [1982]; Bourdieu 1979). At the core of Kant’s account is the claim that taste, while a universal capacity of any human being as a subject of experience, necessarily operates in and through individual relational subjects in singular manners. Judgments of taste, in particular, are said to operate “without concept” on the basis of “disinterested” feelings. While they famously differ from one another, they recover a claim to universality through being disinterested.

If judgments need to be heard for something like a liberal public sphere of debates to be constituted, maintained, and transformed, these judgments must first be publicized, expressed, and this expression is first and foremost thought in vocal terms (see Kant 1991a [1784]). What matters for the problematization attempted in this work is that distributions of more or less qualified, successful, and adequate voicings and vociferations, of voice and noise, *logos* and *phonè* are presupposed by accounts formulated in terms of judgments. If one ponders Whitehead's account of importance as an ultimate notion—if one acknowledges, say, that *this* stormy wind imports for *that* murmuration, and that this type of “importing” does not fundamentally differ from (is not strictly discontinuous with) instances of political importance—, sensing together(ness), co-sensing, comes first. It folds the space and time for presupposing virtually anything.

These claims draw attention to both the endurance and limitations of the long-standing fivefold division of senses that associates each sense with a privileged organ—taste with the tongue, hearing with the ear, etc.—, and to its relation to the division of *aisthesis*. These claims even suggest that speech is not the preserve of humans (see Daston 2004), that other, non-human voices may be involved in distributions of political importance. In the works of Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, for example, it is understood that Modern-Western scientific practices have not only been making-visible, but have also been making-hearable “the world” through operational *dispositifs* that construct more or less factual entities and relations (Stengers 2010; 2006; 2000; Latour 1997). To the question: who is to speak for the *biogée?*, for the composition of livings, materials, and forces that make up the Earth and that arguably *asks* to be heard today more than ever before as climatic changes are apprehended as pressing yet often silenced

political issues linked to series of “violences-to-come”, Serres’ answer is: scientists. This is because scientists are, or so it seems, the guardians of authorized knowledge and legitimized competence to interpret, understand and tell everyone else what the glaciers, for instance, are “telling us” (Serres 2009). This response builds upon a contingent, historical distribution of “spokespersonship” that might also acknowledge that glaciers also speak, and that they potentially do so quite differently, through the mediation of “non-scientific” stories told by Indigenous peoples, for example (see Girvan 2010, n15, citing Cruikshank 2005). In any case, speech is *not* un-problematically apprehended as an exclusively human capacity that would operate through subjective judgments and decisions alone. This specification matters for thinking aesthetics of politics in a manner that acknowledges the importance of sight and speech, and taste, in political and politological practices, but that also seeks to multiply senses or sensible hearths of sense for testing political possibilities in contemporary conjunctures.

*

In *The Political Life of Sensation*, Davide Panagia takes as his point of departure the following definition of sensation as

neither sense nor perception (though both are crucially involved), but rather the heterology of impulses that register on our bodies *without determining a body’s nature* or residing in any one organ of perception. In this respect, I consider sensation to be an experience of unrepresentability in that *a sensation occurs without having to rely on a recognizable shape, outline, or identity to determine its value*. Though we may not have fixed strategies for representing a sensation, we can invent or configure ways of relating the experience it affords (*assuming we decide it’s an experience worth relating*). The limits posed by sensation’s unrepresentability thus interrupt our conventional ways of perceiving the world and giving it value (Panagia 2009, 2; I underline).

This passage exemplifies many approaches to aesthetics of politics that I engage in this dissertation. Explicitly drawing on Rancière's work on *le partage du sensible* (which Panagia translates as "the partition of the sensible"), as well as on Machiavelli, Kant, Foucault, and Deleuze, Panagia considers the relation of politics and sensations through an aesthetic mode of thought. In his account, what matters most are interruptions or suspensions of the conventional distributions of perceived "value" and "worth". In weaving this account, Panagia ultimately maintains a rather conventional conception of the determination of what matters politically in terms of *decisions* concerning worthy and unworthy experiences that follow from "registerings" of what occurs in "the world". It remains unclear just what informs such decisions, if not sensations, and just how "our conventional ways of perceiving the world and giving it value" are not already those interruptive or disruptive, uncertain or contingent, aesthetic complexes that he sets on to describe and analyze as constituting the "political life" of sensations. This passage seems to be positing a continuous, "traditional" normalcy only to argue that what is actually always already occurring are interruptions, suspensions, or disfigurements of *aisthesis*.

In Panagia's account, sensations are deemed ultimately "unrepresentable", but they and their effects are nonetheless limited (and thus represented, if negatively) by the discursive preservation of "a body's nature" as what registers yet endures through the passage of sensations, of heterogeneous "impulses" that are said to (*possibly*) receive a specific "value" determined as such independently of "a recognizable shape, outline, or identity". In other words, "a body's nature" is framed in such a way that no sensation can modify it in a fundamental sense. A body, in this respect, seems detached from "nature", from its "outside" which it "registers". But as Whitehead puts it,

the world beyond is so intimately entwined in our own natures that unconsciously we identify our more vivid perspectives of it with ourselves. For example, our bodies lie beyond our own individual existence. And yet they are part of it. We think of ourselves as so intimately entwined in bodily life that a man is a complex unity—body and mind. But the body is part of the external world, continuous with it. In fact, it is just as much part of nature as anything else there—a river, or a mountain, or a cloud. Also, if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends. /Consider one definite molecule. It is part of nature. It has moved about for millions of years. Perhaps it started from a distant nebula. It enters the body; it may be as a factor in some edible vegetable; or it passes into the lungs as part of the air. At what exact point as it enters the mouth, or as it is absorbed through the skin, is it part of the body? At what exact moment, later on, does it cease to be part of the body? Exactness is out of the question. It can only be obtained by some trivial convention. /Thus we arrive at this definition of our bodies: The human body is that region of the world which is the primary field of human expression. /For example, anger issues into bodily excitements, which are then publicized in the form of appropriate language, or in other modes of violent action. [...] /So far, we have been considering the bodies of animals with dominant centres of feeling and of expression. We can now enlarge the definition so as to include all living bodies, animal and vegetable: – /Wherever there is a region of nature which is itself the primary field of the expressions issuing from each of its parts, that region is alive (Whitehead 1968b [1938], 21-2).

This account makes it possible to envisage that “a body’s nature” could be fundamentally altered by various “bodily excitements”, by “sensations” that would make it “alive” in a truly different way. This eventuality may well be what is expressed in a mundane rationalization like “I was not myself last night”, although this last claim seems to imply that the “self” at stake (was) recovered afterward, sufficiently unaltered in its “nature”.

If an entity is a region of or a concrescence in “the world” delimited as “itself” by virtue of the particular set of relations through which it exists among others and by way

of which it is constituted in a manner that enables it to maintain itself more or less durably, it can be described as a singular configuration of “importances”—and, by extension, of “unimportances”, for what is negligible seems only ever defined negatively. What imports—what has value or worth, as Panagia puts it, or what counts, what matters, what is significant, relevant, pertinent or interesting—is therefore decisive, determining for an entity’s “nature”, *with which it is virtually synonymous*, as well as for the many “decisions” that this entity will or will not “make”, or even envisage to make. Following Whitehead, it would seem that understanding an entity of any order—be it human, animal, vegetal or otherwise—is to understand what imports *for* and *through* it, to grasp its “perspective”, or the singular multiplicity of perspectives that makes it what it is at (and *as*) one point. Deleuze makes a similar claim when he explains his fascination for certain “detestable” animals as a function of the “poverty” of their world. Speaking of the flea, in particular, he gives an enthusiastic account of how “it responds or reacts to three things, three excitants, and that is all. In a nature that is immense, three excitants, and that is all! [...] It completely disregards the rest. In an overflowing nature, it extracts, it selects three things”, namely: the light that leads it to the extremity of a branch where it stays still; the scent of a mammal passing by that elicits its letting-go of the branch; and the scarcity of hair that determines where it will bite the mammal on which it landed (in Boutang 2004, A). “This is what makes up a world”, says Deleuze: a specific selection or distribution of what imports, which determines and is determined by what is perceivable.

In this research, I seek to (re)describe some of the *political* worlds we inhabit, some of those worlds which we seem to construct for ourselves, if only partially. The “we” at stake in this last sentence has an indefinite extension. Of course, I claim that it is

irreducible to “me”, but it also follows from the previous lines that the worlds I can envisage are necessarily limited by “mine”. This is another way of acknowledging situatedness, or positionality. Indeed, as these liminary knots have sought to make explicit, the situated character of this research implies that I am using certain words and phrases in particular, sometimes unconventional ways. Before engaging five aesthetics of politics through the politics of the five senses along a politological, artistico-political, polemological, and hauntological fourfold to address the problem of variations in distributions of political importance, a reconsideration of the key terms of this work thus appears in order. This last knotting will further texture the ensuing baroque drapery.

Envoi

It seems to me that users of language are bound to encounter the problem of arbitrariness. In this work, I tend to consider that the gap between words and things is unbridgeable and that archipelagos of sense and nonsense constitute the only milieu where I can navigate. Throughout this dissertation, which is by definition bound to seek to advance knowledge, I am brought to employ (*and perhaps to be employed by*) a number of strategies and tactics, such as etymological meditations, close readings that involve conceptual and stylistic analyses, and attempts at connecting seemingly heterogeneous hearths of sense, in order to characterize the refoldings that I propose as sites where sense and nonsense are made and unmade, as terrains where the problem of political importance is effectively played out in interesting, relevant, pertinent, significant, or important ways.

There may remain an appearance of arbitrariness, however, in my use of the very words that serve to name the central problem that is dealt with in this work, namely: political importance. As indicated above, I tend to believe that such arbitrariness is

ultimately ineradicable, but not irreducible. I should therefore attempt to give my reasons, as far as I can gather them (or some of them) in words. Why write of importance, rather than of any other terms of the series of virtual synonyms that I have already mentioned a few times and that will also recur in the following pages? Why not write of relevance, pertinence, significance, meaningfulness, worth, value, or interest, for instance? I can muster four reasons. First of all, to my ears those words all express importance, which I thus deem more general. They offer ways of saying that some “*X*” matters, counts, or imports, mattering and counting being themselves expressions of importance—to my ears. Second, as suggested above, I find some support for this manner of hearing the term importance in Whitehead’s characterization of importance not only as one of those “ultimate notions” that is “incapable of analysis in terms of factors more far-reaching than themselves” (Whitehead 1968b [1935], 1), but also as one of “two contrasted ideas which seem to underlie all width of experience” (4). Whitehead himself, however, indicates that “In discussion of such a group [of ultimate notions] any one of its members might, with slight adjustment of language, have been chosen as the central figure” (1). In a similar way, I must admit that other terms could replace importance. This term nonetheless seems to me less saturated with sedimented interpretations than most of its potential rivals. My third reason for working with it is precisely this “neglect” of importance as an object of inquiry, which I welcome as a fortunate opportunity. Analyses of values and interests abound in the social sciences, the humanities and philosophy, and significance, concern, relevance, and even indifference have received explicit attention in recent years (e.g. Beynon-Davies 2011; Latour 2008; Derrida 2005 [1998]; Herzfeld 1992). To my knowledge, importance has not yet received such a detailed treatment.

My fourth reason for focusing on the notion of political importance is tied to what I perceive as being the singular force that tends to accompany and to stem from the uses of the qualifications “important” and “most important” in political and political writings, in spite or perhaps because these broad qualifications are seldom analyzed for themselves. There is a certain seduction at work in writings that claim to say something of or about “the most important things”, if only because such a claim can make one lend an ear, or get ready to make notes, to underline, or pay closer attention. Consider the case of Leo Strauss, for instance, a polemical, polarizing figure in contemporary political networks to which I will often return in the course of this research. I would argue that Strauss’ recurrent use of (*intentionally?*) general phrases like “the most important things” is key to the singularly captivating effect of his art of writing, and even to the sense of election that some of his readers seem to feel¹⁶. Determining just what is most important politically is thus framed as what “serious political thinkers” have sought to do all along.

¹⁶ In the second chapter of *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, for example, which reproduces the 1941 article “Persecution and the Art of Writing”, Strauss summarizes his argument by writing that “An exoteric book contains then two teachings: a popular teaching of an edifying character, which is in the foreground; and a *philosophic* teaching concerning *the most important subject*, which is indicated only between the lines” (Strauss 1988 [1952], 36; I underline). Years later, in his epilogue to the 1962 *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, co-edited with Herbert J. Storing, Strauss discusses “the new political science” in comparison with the “old” (Aristotelian) political science or political philosophy, writing: “The qualitatively different regimes, or kinds of regimes, and the qualitatively different purposes constituting and legitimating them by revealing themselves as *the most important political things*, supply the key to the understanding of *all political things* and the basis for *the reasoned distinction between important and unimportant political things*. [...] The preceding remarks are a very rough sketch of the view of political things that was characteristic of the old political science. According to that view, *what is most important for political science is identical with what is most important politically*. To illustrate this by the present-day example, for the old-fashioned political scientists today, the most important concern is the Cold War, or the qualitative difference, which amounts to a conflict, between liberal democracy and Communism. /The break with the common sense understanding of political things compels the new political science to abandon the criteria of relevance which are inherent in political understanding. Hence, the new political science lacks orientation regarding political things; it has no protection whatever excepts by surreptitious recourse to common sense against losing itself in the study of *irrelevancies*. It is confronted by a chaotic mass of data into which it must bring an order alien to those data and originating in the demands of political science as a science anxious to comply with the demands of logical positivism” (Strauss 1962, 318; see also the remarkably severe review of this book published in *The American Political Science Review* (Schaar & Wolin 1963), as well as the authors’ replies, especially as Strauss begins by qualifying Wolin’s review as “the most acrimonious critique hitherto written of what I stand for” (Strauss 1963a, 152). For a recent reconsideration of “the Wolin—Strauss Dust-Up of 1963”, see Barber 2006.).

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The four preceding liminary knots—“A politology of distributions of importance”, “An aesthetic mode of thought”, “Modulations of violence”, and “Refolding the age-old fivefold”—substantiated the perspectives involved in the politological, artistico-political, polemological, and hauntological fourfold that structures each of the following five chapters. To give reasons for my constructive use of this singular fourfold, rather than any other, to reduce the appearance of arbitrariness which it may produce, I think it is useful to present a synthesis of the operations that are attempted throughout this dissertation. The clarifying character of this synthesis will benefit from a linearization of the multiplicity of refoldings that have been announced and prepared in this twofold introduction. Moreover, articulating such a linearized synthesis will offer an occasion to show what it could mean to take seriously the self-description of this research as a baroque work. Of course, presenting a linearized synthesis is already to enact a folding or refolding gesture, and an arguably violent one at that, since thinking, researching, and writing are rarely if ever as rectilinear as introductions and conclusions tend to presume.

If we consider that this research starts with the problem of political importance as an issue that is already dealt with in a variety of ways in a plurality of practices, what could be called the “raw data” that is to be engaged in this dissertation is the multiplicity of accounts of variations in distributions of political importance. Formulating the general hypothesis that *aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance* marks a first step in proposing an account of this multiplicity of accounts, of this “raw data”. What could be considered the second step of this research then consists in (re)mapping or (re)ordering this primary multiplicity.

As discussed above, the grid or schema that I put to work at this stage is the age-old fivefold of the senses. Looking for a corpus that will both document the multiplicity of accounts of determinations of political importance and enable the putting to the test of my general hypothesis along the fivefold of the senses is to encounter the issue of detecting explicit and implicit accounts of this sort. The notions of “looking for” and “detecting” are already visual terms, to my ears, and the distinction between explicit and implicit, or obvious and concealed, is also intelligible visually. Approaching the problem of political importance through the sense of sight thus suggests from the start that determinations of variations in distributions of political importance are at least occasionally phrased in terms of what is visible and what is invisible, or in terms of *in/visibilities*. These arguably ocularcentric accounts of political importance are themselves phrased (or phraseable) in a variety of ways that are often in tension or in conflict with one another, if only as rival accounts. Approaching this conflictuality through the sense of speech, or taste, suggests that determinations of variations in distributions of political importance are themselves grasped in terms of *logomachies*. Certain words or phrases, certain accounts (*logoi*) seem, in turn, far more powerful than others, more influential or decisive. Approaching this impression through the sense of hearing suggest that the force of a given account of importance is tied to, or is even a function of, its ability to resonate with what is held to import, with other accounts of importance and pre-existing inclinations. *Resonances* can therefore be said to be what determines variations in distributions of political importance. The most decisive resonances, however, are not necessarily the most harmonious or the most disharmonious ones. Through certain modes of resonance, it seems that certain accounts of political importance make their mark, scratch or leave a trace on distributions

of importance. Approaching these remarkably marking accounts through the sense of touch suggests that they may themselves become most importance because they irritate, and thereby make (and mark) a difference. *Irritations* then seem to inform variations of importance. Finally, approaching accounts of political importance through the sense of smell—a sense characterized by its ability to detect emanations in an urgent and allegedly “animal” way—suggests that differences in how conflicting accounts of importance resonate or irritate may be phrased as differences in force, strength, ability or power. Determinations of political importance can therefore be phrased in terms of *capacities*.

This fivefold mapping or ordering of the multiplicity of accounts of political importance leads me to the identification of five terms by way of which and in relation to which determinations of variations in distributions of political importance are thought to occur: in/visibilities, logomachies, resonances, irritations, and capacities. The third step, as it were, of my refolding endeavor then consists in abstracting the aesthetics of politics that can plausibly be said to act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of in/visibilities, logomachies, resonances, irritations, and/or capacities. This work of abstraction, which takes as its materials singular abstractions, involves an examination in deeds (in writing), or a performative (re)composition, of what Whitehead called our *modes* of abstraction. It constitutes the core of this research in the field of political theory and in cultural, social, and political thought. This core consists in the argued yet poetic construction, documentation, and analysis, to the creative putting to the test of the following five specific hypotheses, each of which is engaged below through a whole chapter in relation to the politics of the sense of the age-old fivefold from which it is abstracted:

- (I) *Aesthetics of prevalence* act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of *visibilities and invisibilities*;
- (II) *Aesthetics of emancipation* act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of *logomachies*;
- (III) *Aesthetics of temperament* act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of *resonances*;
- (IV) *Aesthetics of friction* act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of *irritations*; and
- (V) *Aesthetics of endurance* act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of *capacities*.

The relevance and plausibility of each one of these specific hypotheses and, therefore, of each key term that characterizes the aesthetics of politics that each one seeks to articulate—prevalence, emancipation, temperament, friction, and endurance—is the object of the following five chapters. I contend that these extensive chapters are required to present “the case” for each term adequately. In a nutshell, I argue that when we think of how political importance is variably distributed, we think in terms of in/visibilities, logomachies, resonances, irritations, and capacities, and in doing so we tend to presuppose that political importance and “politics itself” are matters of prevalence, emancipation, temperament, friction, and endurance. As indicated at the end of the “Initial Exposition”, above, I consider that these five terms, as unconventional as they may appear at first glance, are actually (that is, arguably) widespread and quite common in how politics and what matters politically are discussed in a variety of practices, which include but are not limited to scholarly practices of political inquiry.

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It is at this point that the singular fourfold briefly substantiated in the preceding “liminary knots” comes into play, and asks to be synthesized as well. This fourfold seeks to enable a productive consideration of four aspects or dimensions in and through which the problem of political importance is dealt with. The first, political fold is mainly concerned with what politologists (that is, political scientists, theorists, philosophers and thinkers, whatever their disciplinary attachments may be) have written which can help to document the general hypothesis of this research, as well as each specific hypothesis addressed in relation to the politics of a specific sense of the age-old fivefold. This refolding is equally concerned with what so-called political common sense tends to hold true regarding what matters politically and how what matters is determined as such. This first fold can thus be said to be dealing with *doxa* and, therefore, with asserted differentiations of “opinion” from “knowledge” regarding what matters most politically.

The second, artistic, or artistico-political fold at work in each chapter is concerned with what both thinkers of aesthetics (in the more restrictive or conventional sense of aesthetics-as-art) and practitioners of art have written and done which can be brought to bear on the examination of each specific hypothesis that is being put to the test. This refolding is required in order to address the issue of whether those who seem to most immediately understand themselves as being involved with aesthetics may potentially support, refuse, or transform the claim that singular *aesthetics of politics* are presupposed by accounts of political importance, including when the political importance of art or aesthetics “itself” is at issue. As with the other folds, however, the potential corpus relevant to the task I set myself is virtually infinite. In this respect, I “merely” claim to

select specific sites that help me to think through the problem at the core of this research. This “moderation” implies that I make no claim to exhaustiveness or completeness. What is more, “aesthetics-as-art” is not, strictly speaking, the object of this dissertation. In that sense, what others may call “aesthetics proper” does not come out “intact”—assuming that it could ever “be” intact—of my relying on, putting to use, and modulating some concepts and practices associated with “it”. The reduction, or at least the modulation of aesthetics-as-art which I may appear to effect, and which could give the impression that I consider art as a “mere product” of politics—an impression which would ask, in return, to ponder just what is at stake in this seemingly banal qualifier, “mere”—at least has the merit of exemplifying what the effects of baroque refoldings can be. In this research, the very differentiation of politics and aesthetics is at stake, and I believe that both terms are necessarily affected by the refoldings that are operated throughout the work itself. As Deleuze puts it in his determination of the fold as the operative function (as opposed to the essence) of “the Baroque”, it appears that a fold always affects the two sides that it “creates”, and that “the ideal fold is *Zwiefalt*, [a] fold that [both] differentiates and differentiates itself” (Deleuze 1988, 42; I translate). In that sense,

When Heidegger invokes the *Zwiefalt* as the differentiating of difference (*le différenciant de la différence*), he first and foremost means that differentiation does not refer to a prior undifferentiated, but to a Difference that never ceases to unfold itself and to refold each of its two sides, and that only ever unfolds one by refolding the other, in a coexistence of the unveiling (*dévoilement*) and the veiling of Being (*l'Être*), of the presence and the retreat of being (*l'étant*). The “duplicity” of the fold necessarily reproduces itself on the two sides that it distinguishes, but that it relates one to the other in distinguishing them: a split (*scission*) therewith each term revives the other, a tension therewith each fold is stretched into the other.

This is arguably why the process of writing this dissertation has brought me to make each refolding double. In pragmatic or formal terms, this means that each politological, artistico-political, polemological, and hauntological refolding in each one of the five following chapters is itself made of two sections that are differentiated by a fold which I consider to be each time immanent to the specific matters at issue, and which could be theorized in a variety of equally unsatisfactory ways (say, as a old/new, doxa/critique, or science/common sense distinction). In truth, each side only emerges *through* the practice of writing, from the exigencies or obligations I feel the research itself makes determining, and which I try to make most explicit along the way. Neither politology, aesthetics, polemology or hauntology, nor their distinction(s), remains strictly untouched.

The third, polemological fold is precisely concerned with conflictuality and with modulations of violence that are at work in operations such as seeking to minimize what is done in a work like this one to a complex like “aesthetics-as-art” by describing at least some of the transformations produced by the refolding research as “collateral damages” or “unfortunate effects” of pressing yet legitimate exigencies or obligations. The main obligation I feel bound to, in writing a dissertation, that is to say: a scholarly work, is to *make sense*—and in this precise case, to make sense of how the relations of sense and sense, of *aisthesis* and *logos* are thought to be made and unmade, perceived and unperceived, in ways that import politically and politologically. If making sense involves a finite selection and discrimination among an originary “nonsense”, *making* sense appears as a violent gesture for it necessarily excludes in order to include. However, there is also a violence of “nonsense itself”—assuming that this last phrase *means* anything (that is, something), which is to say, that *it makes some kind of sense*—, of irrationality, if

you will, that arguably prompts attempts at making sense as gestures to limit the radical contingency and the indifference of “the world itself”, of “all things” which Heraclitus famously phrased as the children of *polemos*. It is perhaps a central dream of politology, at least since Machiavelli, to become able “to create an economy of violence, a science of the controlled application of force [to] preserve the distinguishing line between political creativity and destruction [and] administer the precise dosage appropriate to specific situations” (Wolin 1960/2004, 198). Thinking in polemological terms is to attend to the various accounts that circulate regarding such “economies” of legitimations and delegitimations of violences. The apparent ability of violent occurrences to saturate perceptual fields and to become all-important is what most immediately requires this third, polemological mode of refolding as a constitutive aspect of my attempt to engage problematizations of political importance. Each aesthetics of politics arguably implies a more or less singular problematization of what counts as violence. Admittedly, most of the time human accounts of how encountering violences is a constitutive aspect of what it means to be human operate through anthropocentric conceptualizations of which violences matter. In that sense, the corpus dealt with in this work tends to reproduce an arguably violent distinction of humans from non-humans.

The fourth, hauntological fold of each chapter seeks to outline what spectrally informs the aesthetics of politics which are themselves folded as what more or less hauntingly inform attempts at determining how variations in distributions of political importance occur. Throughout this dissertation, for example, *aesthetics of politics* are phrased as the “explicans”, as what explain determinations of variations in distributions of political importance, which are in turn phrased as the “explicandum”, as what is to be

explained. What is to be explained includes—but is not limited to—the importance that is attached to diverse *politics of aesthetics*, to the alleged political effects of artistic deeds. Nonetheless, there certainly are singular *politics* of such a mode of “explanation” by way of aesthetics of politics. These politics of my own account are partly discussed and problematized throughout the dissertation, but they themselves remain haunting, concealed or silenced and yet present in their very concealment insofar as giving a full account of their implications would require to posit and inhabit a transcendent point of self-observation. If my general hypothesis holds, however, if it appears plausible that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance, it would follow that such claims about the desirability of an adequate self-observation of one’s own politics also presuppose singular aesthetics of the “politics of aesthetics of politics”. One could perhaps argue one’s way *ad infinitum* in this manner, navigating “upstream” toward a source or origin—*what comes first? aesthetics or politics? something else, perhaps?*—which threatens to be infinitely receding. The very desire to argue one’s way “upstream” toward what could be held as “solid ground” is a desire that I feel to be haunting politological research as a practice that seeks to produce and advance *knowledge*. Rather, to continue to make sense often requires to shift perspective, to start again from a different point. This is why the hauntological fold of each chapter acts as what opens up a way toward the following chapter. It is also why this “way into” is not followed in a linear fashion, but through something like a leap. Indeed, following Deleuze (1988, 48), the multiple folds that make up this dissertation could be qualified as baroque folds precisely because they tend toward infinity rather than closure. This infinity is arguably already enfolded within the “vignette” that begins each chapter.

Chapter I – Aesthetics of Prevalence: the Politics of Sight

For instance today, one of my articles has come out. On a subject I consider to be a sensation, and of a very great importance. One of the terrorists who hijacked the Nord Ost musical walked out and now works at Putin's administration. To us that's... well... of the utmost importance. Because it changes the whole perception of what's going on in this country. While I was writing the article, I really felt nauseous. It was like... falling into a cesspool full of shit. We thought we'd make it public and there'd be an uproar. I mean, society must finally see...

So you see, today's Monday. Our newspaper hit the stands early this morning. It's late afternoon now! [laughter] Nobody really cares. We were all so upset! But, in fact, it was a manipulated terror attack! The government knows perfectly well there won't be any protests regarding this affair, no meetings, nothing! They'd be in no danger of any such thing whatsoever! That's why I'm certain they're looking down on us in our torment from the safe heights of the Kremlin mountain, thinking, "Go on, hop to it! If need be, we'll bump you off, if not, you'll live".

Anna Politkovskaya (in Nekrasov 2007)

Viewers' discretion

Rebellion: The Litvinenko Case is a documentary produced by Andrei Nekrasov & Olga Korskaja that premiered at the 2007 Cannes International Film Festival. The film looks at the life and death of Alexander Litvinenko, a man who worked for the KGB and the FSB and who died on November 23, 2006, in London, where he was granted political asylum since 2000. The title refers to Litvinenko's publicized defection from the FSB and his multiple allegations regarding the Russian security service's practices. The former officer was reportedly poisoned with polonium 210. His death was a source of tensions in

Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations, as London asked for the extradition of the man considered the prime suspect in the case, and Moscow refused (Hayman 2009; Epstein 2008)¹⁷. I am incapable of verifying or falsifying the allegations related to Litvinenko's death—and I would rather not take a stance in *this* minefield. The same applies to the words cited above on “the Nord Ost musical” events, voiced in *Rebellion* by Anna Politkovskaya, a reputed investigative journalist known internationally for her writings on Chechnya and the Putin regime, who was assassinated on October 7, 2006¹⁸. I nonetheless think that her remarks unfold in thought-provoking ways the problem of determining what matters politically in contemporary conjunctures. They do so by putting into play the politics of sight.

The book Politkovskaya was working on at the time of her death ends with a text titled “Am I Afraid?” in which she writes: “I see everything, and that is the whole problem. I see both what is good and what is bad. I see that people would like life to change for the better, but are incapable of making that happen, and that in order to conceal this truth they concentrate on the positive and pretend the negative isn't there” (Politkovskaya 2008, 299). In *Rebellion*, her account of her work at *Novaya Gazeta*—a newspaper that saw many of its people die a violent death (see Milashina 2011; Goguelin

¹⁷ Conversely, “Moscow has repeatedly demanded that Britain extradite both [Russian oligarch Boris] Berezovsky and [Chechen rebel Akhmed] Zakayev to face criminal proceedings in Russia, but the requests have been refused” (S. Walker 2009). The fog surrounding Litvinenko's death is all but lifted by the fact that both Vladimir Putin's and Berezovsky's circles have accused one another of having sponsored the poisoning for political ends. Since then, Berezovsky has died in London in March 2013. Rumors spread that he had been assassinated (Harding 2013), but British security services concluded that self-strangulation was the cause of death (Harding & Booth 2013).

¹⁸ The “Nord Ost musical” hostage crisis of October 23-26, 2002, involved Politkovskaya directly as she acted as a negotiator on October 25 (see her own account, Politkovskaya 2002). The siege ended with an assault by Russian security forces that involved the use of unidentified chemical agents in the form of an incapacitating gas. Reportedly, “at least 130 hostages died, mostly because they were given no antidote to the gas” (S. Walker 2009). No one has been definitively convicted of Politkovskaya's assassination. At least three trials have taken place thus far, one of which is still underway at the time of writing (Miller 2013; U.S. Department of State 2013).

2009)—phrases the interest of this seeing-everything as a matter of throwing a divergent light onto political life. It also phrases a story’s significance as a function of its capacity to “change the whole perception of what’s going on”. These claims affirming the political importance of publicity are familiar. They reiterate a prevalent trope of liberal political thought that finds a half-righteous, half-sardonic expression in Politkovskaya’s “I mean, society must finally see...”, and in her narrating the absence of any uproar with an uneasy laugh. Her very gestures compose and draw attention to the embodied performances of publicity: experiencing nausea, expecting indignation, being upset at indifference, feeling looked down on, tormented; still, disseminating information—“wait and see...” These are forceful affects of practices of expression. They gather what “going public” can feel like.

The documentary film’s following scene puts to the test the journalist’s claim that the prevalent attitude among the Russian public is carelessness, indifference. Nekrasov endeavors to find a copy of *Novaya Gazeta* in downtown Saint Petersburg. This turns out to be rather difficult, or so the montage shows. The filmmaker (N) ends up having a short conversation at a newsstand with a middle-aged man (M) holding a book:

N.— I’ve heard about this book. What is it?

M.— It’s bullshit!

N.— Really?

M.— That’s what we say in Russia. Bullshit. But there must be something in it. We don’t know a thing about our history.

N.— When you say bullshit, you mean it isn’t true?

M.— No, on the contrary. I wouldn’t be buying it otherwise.

N.— Then why do you call it bullshit?

M.— It’s the Russian way! Everything that’s really interesting is called bullshit (Nekrasov 2007).

The two break into laughter. This brief encounter works to suggest that the appearance of indifference, apathy and depoliticization of “the man on the street” may be just that, a guise, a façade. Viewers are (or at least I was) brought to assume by the very *mise en scène* of this filmed encounter that the book held by the middle-aged man, which is only glimpsed, *must* be critical of the regime in place. One is brought to ask: is it one of Litvinenko’s books, or perhaps one of Politkovskaya’s? The scene also works to show that not all media are as visible as the major newspapers and television networks which are reputedly favorable to, if not controlled by, state authorities. The question that imposes itself is then something like: *what prevails?* What matters most, today, in the Russian conjuncture? Active support to the current regime? Frontal opposition by networked coalitions? Quiet resignation to a spectacular “power vertical”? Or, perhaps, the largely invisible and hardly measurable dissidence of “disbelief”¹⁹?

1. Politics and/as prevalence: sight, insight, foresight

Politkovskaya’s singular intervention offers a sensible occasion to formulate the specific hypothesis engaged in this first chapter: *aesthetics of prevalence act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of visibilities and invisibilities*, or in/visibilities. To put it more bluntly, the sense of sight is mobilized in political and politological claims through aesthetic problematizations that frame degrees of political importance as a matter of prevalence. Sensing, seeing, but also overlooking or missing what prevails in a conjuncture can be a pressing issue, to say the

¹⁹ *Disbelief* is the title of an earlier film by Nekrasov (2004). The synopsis reads: “A feature-long documentary about the mysterious bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow in September 1999”. See <http://www.disbelief-film.com/indexDE.htm> (Accessed May 1, 2012). At the time of writing, both *Disbelief* and *Rebellion* can be watched freely online with minimal research. This accessibility, which is somewhat unusual for documentary films from the “festival circuit”, may well be explained by a decision on the director’s and/or on the producers’ part—be it their turning a blind eye—, but I cannot confirm this.

least. In line with my initial exposition of this notion, above, asserting that aesthetics of prevalence *act as prerequisites to*—rather than their *being conditions of*—variations in distributions of political importance operating through apprehensions of sight means their contingency is asserted and taken into account from the outset. In other words, aesthetics of prevalence are more aptly qualified as what Latour (2008), following Whitehead (1968b [1938]), calls *matters of concern* rather than as “given” *matters of fact*, not least since importance can be (and is) thought otherwise. Nonetheless, the interweaving of the politics of sight with aesthetics of prevalence matters. It even seems prevalent.

1.1 The prevalence of prevalence

Politological investigations do not simply accommodate nuances, “both... and...” propositions, shades of grey and minute differences. They seek them. The world (if there is but one) is a complex place, and no easy answer to the problems of thought and action—to how thinking and acting relate, for instance—seems to hold durably. Problems themselves change, if only in their formulations. However, while *what* imports seems highly variable, the fact that *something* does import might well be invariant; even to claim “nothing matters anymore” is to say that this is now what matters. The “corporation” of scholars (Rancière 1991) takes pride in its capacity to be precise, to resist abusive simplifications and exaggerated reductions. Indeed, determining just what counts as precision, abuse, and exaggeration is itself a practice that necessitates acute attention to a mass of details. Scholars even seem to make this ability for attention into a distinctive trait of scholarship itself as a set of practices that differ from others. Tangentially, a perceived excessive commitment to details may partly account for some scholars’ difficult passage into “the political arena” (see Wells 2013; McLaughlin &

Townsley 2011). After all, is not “proper politics” precisely about not becoming overwhelmed by the weight of nuances regarding what imports and what is irrelevant?

Aesthetic problematizations of importance as prevalence inform how both politological and political practices tend to present themselves. For politologies, prevalence imports since what is at issue are characterizations of stances and circumstances, diagnoses to be dealt with in relation to the diagnosticians’ perceived or effective ability to see, to detect what matters most in a series of conjunctures, and to arrange significant entities or patterns in a continuum of importance. Although such orderings often remain implicit in the fields of political theory and political philosophy, they arguably constitute the core of any argument. Political scientists, for their part, sometimes make an explicit use of representational devices like Pareto charts to render visible, to make explicit various differentiations of entities or patterns (say, causes) according to their relative importance (to the weight of their participation in a set of “effects”, for instance). The bands of a Pareto chart express, from left to right, a decreasing yet cumulative priority. This tool’s function is to help the visualization of relative importance. It is widely used in entrepreneurial and public policy settings, for example, where problem solving is framed as a crucial endeavor that requires “targeted actions”. Acute targeting is held to be more probable if a configuration is unfolded through such tools. The crucial problem becomes that of detecting relative importance in a satisfactory way, of developing the adequate means for one’s ends²⁰.

²⁰ For an economic, but also more broadly social-scientific and political take on “relative importance” as an “information problem” occurring in conjunctures where no “one mind” can obtain and master all the relevant data concerning a situation, see F. A. Hayek’s “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945). For Hayek, the price system is the most reliable indicator of relative importance. I turn to Hayek’s claim in the third section of this chapter. Note that the principle usually at work in a Pareto chart is compatible with a Hayekian view of relative importance. The “Pareto principle” or “the 80-20” rule posits that 80% of the effects (or outputs) tend to be the result of 20% of the causes (or inputs). For a popular, business-oriented praise of this “rule” as “the

As for politics “proper”, the widespread claim to act on the basis of “an informed knowledge of the situation” expresses the importance of taking configurations of prevalence into account—if not to prevail, then at least to assess the conditions under which prevailing risks to become a “live option”, to use William James’ expression. This last formulation (“to prevail”) evokes how prevalence, in the sense of predominating, winning or the likes, is the end or the goal of many practices that are counted as political, be they concerned with installing, maintaining, transforming, or resisting a given distribution. Machiavelli can be read as exemplarily placing these matters of concern at the center of politological investigations and political practices. This is the case, for instance, when he introduces his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livus* [ca. 1517] by insisting on the importance of “ha[ving] recourse to the examples of antiquity” regarding how “to found a republic, maintain states, to govern a kingdom, organize an army, conduct a war, dispense justice, and extend empires”, while taking into account contemporary configurations of forces and desires (Machiavelli 1950, 104). How one can “get the upper hand” in this or that type of situation becomes a crucial concern—and perhaps it always has been²¹. *The Prince* [ca. 1513; first print, 1532] can also be read as an account of the prerequisites of political prevalence with regard to “how the various kinds [of monarchies] can be governed and maintained” (Ch. II, 5). In this respect, it appears that a key conundrum faced by the Prince is to secure his authority—the Prince is first and foremost a *he* for Machiavelli—through appearances, while being incapable of a continuous physical presence, of an uninterrupted visibility. As Davide Panagia puts it,

secret to achieving more with less”, see Koch 2008 [1998]. I must thank R.B.J. Walker for making me see the affinity between Hayek and Pareto as two influential thinkers of an “elite theory of democracy”.

²¹ See also Book V of Aristotle’s *Politics*. For an influential account of Machiavelli’s *modern* character, see Strauss 1969, to which I return below in Chapter III, “Aesthetics of Temperament: the Politics of Hearing”.

the problem of Machiavelli's prince is "to sustain the intensive impact of an invisible presence: How can a prince, in his physical absence, continue to appear? [...] how is it that the intensity of an impression may be sustained in the absence of any physical source?" (Panagia 2009, 93-4) This example (it is, as it were, exemplary) suggests that claims regarding what prevails, including claims on which diagnoses of prevalence are prevalent, weave intricate knots of politological and political concerns and contentions. The evocative power of the notion of prevalence "reveals", if you will, the forcefulness of problematizations of politics and politology as *polemical* activities.

*

Prevalence is an equivocal term. In scholarly literatures, its epidemiological or, by extension, its actuarial sense as "the proportion of cases in a population at risk" (Schoenbach 2000, 91) is probably the prevalent or prevailing usage. This last phrasing, for its part, relies on the more common adjectival sense of the word: to prevail is "being widespread [or the most widespread] in a particular area at a particular time". A helpful etymology of this notion would take into account how prevalence descends from the Latin *prae-valere*; how *prae* evokes priority, temporal and/or structural; and how *valere* has to do with power and value, with differences of power or value—or even perhaps with power and value *as* differentials. Phrases such as "to get the upper hand" can thus be read as expressing a crucial tie between politics and prevalence, if not the reduction of politics to the practical problem of prevailing in this or that situation. The latter term, "prevailing", has stronger connotations of unilateralism than "prevalent" does, but both imply spatiotemporalities. In effect, *this* or *that* prevalence is always relative and limited (situated, momentary, whatever its duration, extension, and intensity), although that there

can in principle always be *one* prevalent or prevailing entity, pattern, or form detectable in a distribution (be it “the absence of any clear predominance”) might be a constant.

Prevalence therefore appears as another name for importance, or a type thereof. As it involves spatiotemporalities and motifs of suspension, interruption, displacement and the likes, it can be advanced that prevalence is thought aesthetically. It also appears that prevalent problematizations of politics and/as prevalence have to do with a much-discussed sensible experience: seeing. Conversely, studying the politics of sight, the ways in which this sense operates in political and political claims, is to encounter prevalence as a trope of importance. To put it briefly, something like eyes are required to survey, scan or map a field or a conjuncture as a composition of differentiations. It is in virtue of practices of “detection” that the determination of *loci* or *foci* of both importance and irrelevance seems to occur. In this line of thought, variations in distributions of political importance can be envisaged as expressions of and participants to differing distributions of visibilities and invisibilities, multiple spheres of appearances and the shadows they co-implicate. From Plato to Foucault, from the allegory of the cave in which the sun is an at first blinding image of the Good to the revisiting of Bentham’s panopticon as the exemplary architectural incarnation of “surveillance society”, an enduring hearth of sense links both politics and political to nexuses of power/knowledge by articulating both power and knowledge to sight—if only via the notions of insight, foresight, and even hindsight. It looks as if this hearth of sense that gravitates around what eyes can do remains central to “our” current aesthetics of politics.

1.2 Ocularcentrism, or the contested prevalence of sight

The term ocularcentrism can gather the claim that aesthetics of politics are primarily characterized by a prevalence of the sense of sight. The word itself poses that eyes (*oculi* in Latin) are in one way or another central (from the Greek *kentron*, “sharp point, stationary point of a pair of compasses”, related to *kentein*, “to prick”). The term ocularcentrism has mostly been used to qualify a broad state of culture, a socio-historical configuration of Western-European and, by colonial extension, North-American “civilization”—*this is the center*, it is assumed, for which sight is central—in and through which mostly epistemic privileges are somehow granted to sight *at the expense* of the other senses of the age-old fivefold of the senses (Kavanagh 2004; Stonehill 1995; Jay 1993). The Occidentalism at work in this proposition is not accidental. The age-old fivefold of the senses (sight, taste, hearing, touch and smell) is commonly traced back to Aristotle, and Western philosophical anthropology has long held that what it calls “Chinese culture”, for instance, is blind, that is to say, that it somehow managed to “avoid” ocularcentrism—for better or for worse—which could in return be deemed a “properly Western” character or configuration. Recent philosophical research tends to be more nuanced, however. It insists, for instance, on how the eyes, both in the “literal” sense of perceptive organs and in the “figural” sense of a metaphor of thought or spirit, played a non-negligible role in a number of Chinese traditions, for example²². Still, in politologies participating of “the theoretical turn toward affect and sensibility [...] the tendency is to insist on the prioritisation of one 'repressed' sense (e.g. touch) above

²² For a comparison between what can be termed culturally specific instantiations of ocularcentrism that centers on Chinese antiquity, see Ghiglione 2010. The attention paid to metaphors and metonymies in this and similar studies suggests that the modalities through which privileges are granted to the sense of sight are primarily *discursive*. In the fourth section of this chapter, I claim that metaphors and metonymies are “haunting” the politics of sight and their aesthetics of prevalence.

another 'dominant' sense (e.g. *vision*). Thus the agenda is set to turn from *visual culture* to auditory culture, olfactory culture and so on” (Brown 2011, 162; I underline). But what dominates, what counts as a culture, and what “to turn from... to...” entail are difficult questions. What dominates in a conjuncture, if not what can be sensed, detected, or seen as such, even *in absentia*? What qualifies as a culture, if not a set of worldviews, frames or horizons of intelligibility, more or less shared or common hallucinations? What does turning mean, if not changing perspective, seeing differently, looking away from or focusing on a singular configuration? Taking ocularcentrism seriously requires thinking through how the responses to these questions, as well as the questions themselves, may always already be informed by a privileging of seeing as a metonymy for experience and/or a metaphor of how variations in importance are sensed and can then be made sense of. Are these “mere figures of speech”, or expressions of a fundamentally “visual” thought?

When mentioning the politics of sight in the Academy today, the constellation often invoked by scholars working in self-described critical networks tends to be composed of French writers of the second half of the last century. More specifically, the phrase prompts the evocation of two concepts that remain linked to the name of their creator: “surveillance society” (Foucault 1998 [1975]) and “the society of the spectacle” (Debord 2006a [1967])—and perhaps, also, the deconstruction of “the privilege of the gaze” (Derrida 1997 [1967], 47), and *Simulacres & simulation* (Baudrillard 1981). Despite their important differences, these thinkers of difference are widely read as having fostered a manifold critique of the prevailing Modern-Western “subject of representation” that sought to account for specificities marking the present conjunctures (Lyotard 1979),

and that did not leave critique itself intact (Deleuze 1993 [1968])²³. What, then, of ocularcentrism? As Jacques Derrida put it in a *différant* context, “This geometry is only metaphorical, it will be said (*dira-t-on*). Granted. But the metaphor is never innocent. It orients the research and fixes the results. When the spatial model is discovered, when it functions, the critical reflection rests [itself] in it” (Derrida 1997 [1967], 30; I translate). Politics and politologies of movement, displacement and suspension make sense *within* this “spatial model” that seems deployed as soon as a centrality is said to be detected. Perhaps this is the case because

Our brain has an innate concept of a stable horizon. All of you have had this strange experience, this famous train station experiment that our life provides us with almost daily. You’re sitting in your compartment in the train station and suddenly you have the feeling that your train is set in motion, you look outside the window and you’re still on the right side, and suddenly you see that it is not you but the train on the other track that has departed. What happened? Your brain provides you automatically with the information that you move, because the horizon cannot move. As soon as you see that the other train is leaving your brain is obliged to convert this information into the opposite information: you move, and the horizon is still stable, because a moving horizon: this is a horror, this is the vertigo, and in order to stabilize you’re being there, in a given world[,] a horizon is never allowed to move (Sloterdijk 2009a, 246).

In theory, “nothing is perceived without movements or variations in the image on the retina of the eye” (Bohm 1996 [1965], 153). As sense-perception and sense-making are

²³ For a sociological study of the North-American Anglophone reception, in and around the Academy, of the non-exhaustive list of scholars mentioned, see Cusset 2005. I do not seek to write one more apology of these writers’ insightfulness. I do, however, acknowledge their ascendancy on contemporary politologies. Reading these readers of Nietzsche can be helpful to stir up the embers of a “healthy” suspicion toward the perspectival truths of language, as Nietzsche would put it. De-/post-colonial feminists, among others, fuel this suspicion quite intensively, and they arguably do so independently of those “famous dead white men”.

concerned, a truly unitary prevalence would mean stillness; movement and centrality are matters of difference on a more or less stabilized horizon²⁴.

Ocularcentrism allegedly limits how variations in political importance can be sensed and made sense of both “individually” and “collectively”. It would thus be a condition of dicible and knowable experience akin to what Foucault called an *épistémè*. However, this claim is slightly displaced by attempts at thinking ocularcentrism as a prerequisite to—rather than as a condition of—singular problematizations of politics as a form of experience, of ocularcentricism as being closer to what Foucault called a *dispositif* than to an *épistémè*. *Dispositifs*, however, do not “escape” ocularcentrism²⁵.

²⁴ In the Appendix to *The Special Theory of Relativity*, “Physics and perception”, physicist-philosopher David Bohm claimed that “the characteristics of these variations [in the image on the retina of the eye] play a large part in determining the structure that is actually seen. It is important that such variations shall not only be a result of changes that take place naturally in the environment, but that (as in the case of tactile perception) they also can be produced actively by movements in the sense organs of the observer himself. These variations are not themselves perceived to any appreciable extent. What is perceived is something relatively invariant, e.g., the outline and form of an object, the straightness of lines, the sizes and shapes of things, etc., etc. Yet the invariant could not be perceived unless the image were actively varied” (1996 [1965], 153). I engage the relationship of visual and tactile perception, as well as the question of movement in Chapter IV below, “Aesthetics of Friction: the Politics of Touch”.

²⁵ The strongly felt impetus to engage the politics of sight through Foucault’s work on representation, surveillance, and subjectivation comes from the high visibility of his work. “Foucault”, i.e. a fuzzily delimited constellation of claims associated with this name, figures a new politological commonsense, if only quantitatively, given the uncountable yet undeniably large number of politological investigations that take some of these claims as points of departure and/or arrival. While I acknowledge a prevalence of “Foucault”, I do not seek to formulate one more general exegesis of his writings. Being born after this author’s death, I did not experience his coming-into-the-landscape of politology. For me, he has been standing in the hall of canonical figures from the outset, although his presence has increased in recent years—he is now closer to the entry gate of “the field”, if there is one. In a mundane fashion, this means that young students of politics risk to encounter his propositions even earlier in their training than I did.

Regarding the difference between the notion of *épistémè* and the concept of *dispositif*, a short exegetical remark is nonetheless in order. In 1977, Foucault indicated: “In ‘The Order of Things’, in trying to write a history of the episteme, I got into an impasse. Now what I want to do is to try and show that what I call a dispositive is a much more general form of the episteme. Or rather that the episteme is a specifically discursive dispositive, compared to the dispositive itself which is discursive and non-discursive, its elements being much more heterogeneous” (cited and translated in Caborn 2007, 114). In his 1984 text “Sur les principaux concepts de Michel Foucault”, Deleuze wrote: “There is an ‘archeology of sight’ (*du regard*) as much as of the statement (*de l’énoncé*), and knowledge really has two irreducible poles. The primacy [of statements] implies no reduction. By forgetting the theory of visibilities, we mutilate Foucault’s conception of history, but we also mutilate his thought. Foucault did not cease to be fascinated by what he saw, as much as by what he heard or read, and archeology as he conceived it is an audiovisual archive (beginning with the history of the sciences). And in our time, Foucault only has a secret joy in enunciating because he also has a passion for seeing: the eyes, the voice” (Deleuze 2003, 229; I translate).

In his last public intervention, the 1988 conference “Qu’est-ce qu’un dispositif?” (2003, 316-25), Deleuze claimed that a *dispositif* is “a skein, a multi-linear set [...] composed of lines of a different nature” (316; I translate). Four main types of lines can be distinguished, according to the order of their explicitation in Foucault’s work: (i) curves of visibility and (ii) curves of enunciation, relating to Knowledge; (iii) lines of forces, relating to Power; and (iv) lines of subjectivation, relating to Subjectivity (317-8). The “contours” of these “great instances” (Knowledge, Power, Subjectivity) are not given: “they are chains of variables that tear themselves from one another” (316), and in that sense the concept of *dispositif* “repudiates universals” (320). The four types of lines exist in relations of co-implication. “To untangle the lines of a *dispositif*, in each case, is to draw a map, to survey, to pace unknown lands, and this is what [Foucault] calls ‘fieldwork’. One must install oneself on the lines themselves, which are not content with composing a *dispositif*, but [also] traverse and drag it, from north to south, from east to west or in a diagonal” (317). This cartographic practice is thought of as a matter of detection and drawing—*à la lettre*, as Deleuze used to say (Jaeglé 2005). Aesthetics of prevalence weigh on mapmaking through exigencies of inclusion, exclusion, and clarity.

The curves of visibility of the *dispositif* of ocularcentrism frame importance as a matter of prevalence. According to the most common narrative on this matter, ocularcentrism itself matters since it is widespread. What counts is what is most visible—unless “the most important is the most hidden” (Debord 2006b [1988], 1601; I translate), and what is widespread is invisible. But “visibility does not refer to a light in general that would come to enlighten preexisting objects, it is made of lines of light that form variable figures which are inseparable from this or that *dispositif*. Each *dispositif* has its regime of

light, [a] manner in which [light] falls, fades and spreads, distributing the visible and the invisible, giving birth to or making disappear the object that does not exist without it” (Deleuze 2003, 317). What import, in that sense, are the interplays of in/visibilities.

Constructive curves of visibility are intertwined with curves of enunciation, with the statements that are possibly, plausibly, and interestingly enunciable under or within a particular regime or distribution of light and obscurity. For their part, lines of forces and lines of subjectivation—distributions of *who* can see, say, and do what, where, when and how, and who (supposedly) cannot—further texture the *dispositifs* without which there is arguably no “who” at all. Ocularcentrism requires and produces “seeing subjects” that are more or less capable of detecting, focusing and overlooking—that is, of receiving and “internalizing” a number of stimuli, for this is what eyes do, says *all of our science*²⁶.

Using the concept of *dispositif* is to problematize the very contingency of the prevalence of sight. This concept is thought-provoking not only because it evokes “posing” (and thereby, the old spatiotemporal lexicon of *tithenai*, dear to Heideggerians). More to the point, it has no fixed “level” of relevance. A prison, the working of an organ, a virus’ “life”, a city, a cloud, an assassination, *la société du spectacle*, a nebula, or the

²⁶ The theory according to which the eyes are essentially selective receptors that mediate the eventful impact of stimuli (especially photons) on the nervous system and the brain of seeing beings is called intromission. This theory prevails, as it is viewed as the only truly *scientific* account of visual perception. Extramission, the older theory according to which eyes also *emit* something (rays, perhaps) in the process of seeing is held as mythical and pre-scientific, or as pertaining to “parapsychology” and similar “pseudo-sciences” (for a controversial work on “the sense of being stared at” that suggests intromission is not the whole story regarding what eyes do, see Sheldrake 2005). Interestingly, American psychologists have argued that “many college students believe in extramissions in visual perception”, and that “this belief is extremely resistant to standard educational experiences that seem as though they should counteract the misunderstanding. In fact, even when many college students showed evidence of overcoming the misconception because of a specific type of educational input, over time the gains proved to be transitory” (Winer & al. 2002, 423; for responses to this article and a “reply to critics”, see Bahr 2003; Robbins 2003; and Winer & al. 2003). These researchers’ “lament” over the stubborn “misunderstanding” of the science of visual perception by young people is interestingly contrasted with anthropologist Michael Taussig’s joyful claim that: “You may *know* [that the Earth rotates around the Sun]; it is abstract knowledge, handed down by the high priests of science who have replaced astrology by astronomy; but *in your bones, you know otherwise*. It is the Sun that is rotating around the Earth” (Taussig 2010).

very positing of points (as centers, origins, and ends), scales or planes (nano, micro, meso, macro, meta) can all be dealt with as co-mingling sets of lines of visibility, enunciation, forces, and subjectivation²⁷. *Dispositifs* can be composed of and participate in other *dispositifs*, forming multiple series of folds. The positing of any ground, of any end to these enfoldings will also participate of singular *dispositifs*. “Dispositive analysis” (Caborn 2007) is itself entangled in lines; there is a *dispositif* of the concept of *dispositif*... In principles, such enfoldings are indefinite, if not infinite. But Deleuze sees two more lines—*temporal ones*?—that import, and that are even primary: (a) lines of sedimentation, or “the part of history”; and (b) lines of fracture, or “the part of actuality”. “If there is a historicity of *dispositifs*, it is that of regimes of light, as well as that of regimes of statements” (Deleuze 2003, 317). Novelty has more to do with lines of forces and subjectivation. But configurations of forces and modes of subjectivation also bear sedimented histories, and novelty is also a matter of coming-into-visibility, of emerging-into-enunciability. What is more, history and actuality themselves can only be read as more or less meaningful notions in virtue of calcified lineages and creative becomings.

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²⁷ The Deleuzian term *agencement* seems more amenable to nonhumans than the Foucauldian term *dispositif*, especially since “subjectivation” tends to be associated with human forms of individuation. Deleuze, however, asserted that the two terms are virtually equivalent. Félix Guattari and him specified two key divergences between theirs and Foucault’s thought in a footnote to *Mille Plateaux*: “Our only differences with Foucault would concern the following points; 1) *agencements* do not seem to us to be first and foremost of power, but of desire, desire being always *agencé*, and power being a stratified dimension of the *agencement*; 2) the diagram or the abstract machine have lines of flight (*lignes de fuite*) that are primary, and that are not, in an *agencement*, phenomena of resistance or riposte, but peaks (*pointes*) of creation and deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 175-6n36; I translate). In a 1985 interview with Paul Rabinow & Keith Gandal on “Foucault and the prison”, Deleuze indicated these differences may be attributed to different starting points, different *étonnements* (wonder, astonishment; the Greek *thaumazein*): “When you say I am more fluid, yes, you are entirely right. It flies [or leaks; *Ça fuit*] monetarily, ideologically. It is really made of *lignes de fuite*. So much so that the problem of a society is: how to prevent that it *fuit*? For me, powers come after. Foucault’s *étonnement* would be, rather: but with all these powers, and all their sneakiness, we still manage to resist. Mine is the reverse. It leaks from everywhere and governments manage to seal up (*colmater*). We took the problem inversely. You are right to say that society is a fluid, or even worse, a gas. For Foucault, it is an architecture” (Deleuze 2003, 261; I translate).

These considerations soon become vertiginous. They have opened many avenues for politological research in recent years by making visible what may not have been visible otherwise. “Individuals or groups, we are made of lines” (Deleuze & Parnet 1996, 151; I translate)—what a curious yet stimulating idea! The concept of *dispositif* operates a displacement of politological attention similar to that which Latour attributes to matters of concern: “It is the same world, and yet, everything looks different” (Latour 2008, 39). However, it also risks obfuscating the (*symmetrical?*) lines of invisibility, indicibility, weaknesses, and subjection it implies. As James C. Scott put it in his *Seeing Like a State*, “Once you have crafted lenses that change your perspective, it is a great temptation to look at everything through the same spectacles” (Scott 1998, 7)²⁸. The concept of *dispositif* is a philosophical creation that expresses the visual aesthetics of prevalence at work in cartographic representations and synoptic analyses that mark “our” politologies. But what of the politics of sight *proper*, of the gritty terrain of *real* politics, one may brood? What of surveillance apparatuses that populate our cities with innumerable cameras to monitor deeds along differentiations in socio-economic statuses, ethnicities, and forms of life? What of the tensions between a “public sphere of rational debates” and the “constant flooding” of screens, paper, and radio waves with innumerable words and images that seemingly serve predominant interests? What of the Grail of a “global market” free of the slowing scrutiny of customs officers and regulatory agencies in times when algorithmic financial trading between computers seeks to reach the speed of light as

²⁸ In Scott’s case, this may well have meant being incapable of *seeing like a city* (see Magnusson 2011). The proposition that concepts operate as “spectacles” is formulated, among other sites, in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*: “103. The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakable. You can never get outside it; you must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe. —Where does this idea come from? It is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off” (Wittgenstein 2001a [1953], 39°).

literally as is physically possible? What of those who seem to stubbornly refuse to see the magnitude of ecological crises and the significance of new technological prostheses like “bionic eyes”? Surely, it is insufficient to claim *dispositifs* are at stake!

To claim, however, that *these* are the prevalent dimensions of the contemporary politics of sight, the important aspects that demand to be thought and even resisted, both politically and politologically, is to relay singular apprehensions regarding what matters. In the language in which I phrase the issue of variations in distributions of political importance, it expresses how aesthetics of prevalence are required to account for differences in importance being sensed and made sense of (as they are) in the first place.

At this juncture, this first politological folding of the hypothesis that aesthetics of prevalence act as prerequisites to formulations of variations of political importance in terms of in/visibilities refolds itself back onto Anna Politkovskaya’s claims about her ability to “see everything” and the uncertain capacity to make visible what “society must finally see...” through her writings. The publicity that she practiced as a strategy of dissidence, but that she also seemed to doubt as a viable tactic of politicization, operates through a thousand *dispositifs* in conjunctures that have been sending politologists back to their drawing boards to craft categories capable of describing a peculiar mixture of technological innovation, accelerated capitalism, and a formally elected “power vertical”: “plebiscitary patrimonialism” (Hanson 2011), “sultanistic corporatism” (Aron 2008), etc.²⁹ Contemporary Russia would be the site of particularly intense deployments of the

²⁹ For a plurality of Russian accounts of “Putinism”, see the September-October 2008 special issue of *Russian Politics and Law* (46:5), on “Russian Political Culture Through the Eyes of Vladislav Surkov”. In this issue, Surkov (who is both a scholar and a “political manager”) is introduced as “one of the most intriguing and powerful man to have walked the stage of postcommunist Russian politics” (Sakwa 2008, 3). It is claimed that his “main responsibility as a deputy head of the presidential administration was to reshape the public sphere” (4). Because of his role (until late 2011) as “Vladimir Putin’s chief ideologist once Putin came to power”, and as the disseminator of the phrases “sovereign democracy” and “the power vertical”, Surkov has been

biopolitical management of populations through freedom-under-the-necessities-of-securitizing-profit, all in the name of “national interest”. Conjoined with a growing liberal dissidence, this would signal “modernization”...³⁰ Is the language of publicity adequate, or is it a “mere” sediment, a remnant of times passed?

In his “Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle”, Deleuze claimed that the “*disciplinary societies*” Foucault studied as what followed, “in the 18th and 19th centuries”, previous “*societies of sovereignty*”, and that “reach[ed] their apogee at the beginning of the 20th century[,] were already what we were not anymore, what we were ceasing to be. [...] *Societies of control* are in the process of replacing disciplinary societies” (Deleuze 1990, 240-1; I translate). *Ça crève les yeux*: “Control is short-term and spins rapidly, but also continuous and unlimited, while discipline was of *longue*

nicknamed the Grey Cardinal. This journal issue centers on a speech Surkov gave at the Academy of Sciences in June 2007. It consists in the English translation of a book that was first published in Russian, and includes the speech itself and responses to it by a dozen authors. According to the editor, “The mere fact that such a debate was conducted attests to the liveliness of political discourse in contemporary Russia, but that it was conducted in the relatively rarified atmosphere of a political discussion in the pages of a paper that is hard to find outside Moscow (although Internet versions are easily accessible) illustrates the hermetic nature of much of what passes for the public sphere today” (7).

³⁰ In his speech, “Russian Political Culture: The View from Utopia”, Surkov rejected this last term: “we must understand that such trivial words as ‘modernization’ and ‘diversification’ are not adequate to describe the dramatic tasks facing our nation. We do not need modernization. We need a shift in our whole civilizational paradigm. The shift, of course, must be properly phased, so that it does not overwhelm us. But it really is a matter of a fundamentally new economy and society. We need a new projection of Russian culture onto future history. Moreover, future history will not be simple. It will be a history of complex systems. Democracy is a political system that functions at the limit of complexity. An innovation-based economy is impossible outside a free—that is, unstable and dynamic by definition—creative milieu. [...] We must become accustomed to life in a complicated, open, unstable, and fast-moving world. In this world any equilibrium is dynamic, any order mobile and flexible—if equilibrium and order even exist. /The consolidation and centralization of power were necessary to preserve the sovereign state and turn it around, away from oligarchy and toward democracy. But already today, and all the more so tomorrow, they can be justified only to the extent that they facilitate Russia’s transition to the next stage, to a qualitatively new level of civilization. /At the same time, from the heights of utopia we clearly see that the old liberal dogma of liberating creative energy exclusively by means of the mechanistic fragmentation, division, and dismantling of social structures is not wholly correct, that the holistic approaches and methods of social synthesis, preservation, and unification intrinsic to Russian political culture are also suited to the development of democracy. We see that the inevitable complication and differentiation of social institutions are balanced by the opposite process of the reintegration of fragments into a complex whole. We see that culture is of significance, of decisive significance and Russian culture predetermines a worthy future for Russia” (Surkov 2008, 25-6). Surkov is indeed affirming a nationalist, “Russian” aesthetic of politics.

durée, infinite and discontinuous. [...] It is possible that old means borrowed from the ancient societies of sovereignty return to the stage, but with the necessary adaptations. What counts is that we are at the beginning of something” (246)³¹. However, Politkovskaya’s intervention also signals that what Hannah Arendt called “a space of appearances” (Arendt 1998 [1958], 198ff.) is still deemed necessary for political life to occur. The view of politics as a *public* polemical activity requiring a particular space-time, an audience, actors, and some form of lightbulb—if only for a shadowy backstage to exist—still seem to prevail. The contemporary significance of ocularcentrism is thus not only a function of its reductionism, of the demand it would put on “enlightened detectives” of history and actuality to unveil the prevalence of sight and foster appreciations of the participation of the other senses in politics as a form of experience, or even other apprehensions of political experience that do not remain content with the notion of “senses”. Ocularcentrism names a broader concern that risks being a truism: our incapacity to imagine political lives devoid of sight, insight and foresight. Even virtuosi of decisive politology and creative politics see what imports in terms of in/visibilities.

2. Artful detections: lightbulbs & stealthiness

Virtuosity requires a space of appearances. It makes manifest the analogical relation of art and politics, says Arendt. This analogy is presented in “What is Freedom?” (Arendt 1961, 143-71) in a genealogy of freedom understood as a political concept. Arendt claims “the philosophical tradition [has] distorted, instead of clarifying, the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience by transposing it from its original field, the realm

³¹ Two years earlier, Guy Debord, in his *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, painted a very similar picture, writing: “The society modernized up to the stage of the integrated spectacular is characterized by the combined effect of five main traits, which are: ceaseless technological renewal; economic-statist fusion; generalized secrecy; the fake without replica; a perpetual present” (Debord 2006b [1988], 1599; I translate).

of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, the will, where it would be open to self-inspection” (145). She argues instead that “the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act. Men *are* free—as distinguished from their possessing the gift of freedom—as long as they act, neither before nor after; to *be* free and to act are the same” (153-4). In that sense,

Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli’s concept of *virtù*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*. Its meaning is best rendered by “virtuosity,” that is, an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making), where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it. The virtuoso-ship of Machiavelli’s *virtù* somehow reminds us of the fact, although Machiavelli hardly knew it, that the Greeks always used such metaphors as flute-playing, dancing, healing, and seafaring to distinguish political from other activities, that is, that they drew their analogies from those arts in which virtuosity of performance is decisive (153).

The analogy between art and politics thus lies in how performers “need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their ‘work,’ and both depend upon others for the performance itself” (154). Virtuosity is always relative, and there are more limitations to what is possible in deeds than in “the creative arts of making”, at least according to the ideal of *creatio ex nihilo* evoked by the latter³². Privileging the *dispositif*

³² As novelist Milan Kundera puts it in *L’immortalité*, “we cannot consider a gesture the property of an individual, nor her creation (no one being capable of creating a singular gesture (*geste propre*), entirely original and belonging only to oneself), nor even her instrument; the opposite is true: gestures are using us; we are their instruments, their marionettes, their incarnations” (Kundera 1992, 19; I translate). This novel tells the strange story of a woman who might well have accidentally created a gesture that was never seen before. An argument parallel to Kundera’s can be made about thought, or acts of thinking, as “using us” rather than “us” using thought (see Couture & Giroux 2012). Regarding “the creative arts of making”, Arendt’s perspective is an obvious idealization, for anyone who ever tried to fabricate anything will nuance, if not dismiss altogether

of freedom-as-performance over the arguably prevalent *dispositif* of an internalized free will does not mean that anything goes, that “you can be sure to become a stock-market crash all by yourself”, as a song by Noir Désir puts it. Rather, acting is testing in deeds—*seeing for oneself?*—the im/possibilities of a space of appearances and the occasions such a configuration offers. These are political matters of concern, especially if one accepts Arendt’s claim (87) that the belief that “everything is possible” grounds totalitarianism.

Arendt insists, however, that “[a] space of appearances is not to be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community. The Greek polis once was precisely that ‘form of government’ which provided men with a space of appearances where they could act, with a kind of theater where freedom could appear” (154). But precisely, it seems “men have never, either before or after [Greek and Roman antiquity], thought so highly of political activity and bestowed so much dignity upon its realm”. These lines tell a familiar story. They evoke, in contradistinction, “the gigantic and still increasing sphere of social and economic life whose administration has overshadowed the political realm ever since the beginning of the modern age” (155). Politics is rare. There is no guarantee it *has* a space, and it is less a “realm” than the very practice of spacing-in/a-common.

Publicity does prevail through “the rise of the social”, but it is of a kind that, in her preface to *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt deems most succinctly gathered in Heidegger’s

the belief that “everything is possible”. The materials, for one, tend to stubbornly refuse to comply. In any case, for Arendt the metaphor of politics as an art “becomes completely false if one falls into the common error of regarding the state or government as a work of art, as a kind of collective masterpiece. [...] Independent existence marks the work of art as a product of making; utter dependence upon further acts to keep it in existence marks the state as a product of action” (1961, 153; on “the people as a work of art” as a trait of “national-aestheticism”, see Lacoue-Labarthe 1987). This claim can even be transferred to “the self” that acts as the center-point of the Modern-Western political canon, if one holds “the *subject* is what it *does*, it is its act” (Nancy 2002a [1997], 5), or “there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything” (Nietzsche 1998 [1887], I §13).

“sarcastic, perverse-sounding statement, *Das Licht der Öffentlichkeit verdunkelt alles* (‘The light of the public obscures everything’)” (Arendt 1968, ix). She writes:

If it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and worse, who they are and what they can do, then darkness has come when this light is extinguished by “credibility gaps” and “invisible government,” by speech that does not disclose what is but sweeps it under the carpet, by exhortations, moral and otherwise, that, under the pretext of upholding old truths, degrade all truth to meaningless triviality (viii).

The paradox (if it is one) is that this darkness is not silent. It is, on the contrary, filled with “the overwhelming power of ‘mere talk’ [dixit Heidegger] that irresistibly arises out of the public realm, determining every aspect of everyday existence, anticipating and annihilating the sense or the nonsense of everything the future may bring” (ix). Put differently, those whom Nietzsche called chattering, self-important “last men” occupy center stage since it is less “excellence” or virtuosity that is a prerequisite of visibility than visibility itself that has become “the sole basis of excellence” (Heinich 2012, 565). In this light, many contemporary politologies claim that “our times” are very dark indeed.

However, dark times “are not only not new, they are no rarity in history” (Arendt 1968, ix). Crucially, Arendt claims that “even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, [and it] may well come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle under almost all circumstances and shed over the time span that was given them on earth”. Forty years later, these “uncertain, flickering, and often weak light[s]” are renamed “fireflies” by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman (2009b), in a reading of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s anxiety regarding the possibilities of their

literal and metaphorical survival. In effect, the Italian filmmaker deemed that, after resisting and overcoming the Mussolinian projectors, “fireflies” as symbols of resistance were now facing the perverse spotlights of *la société spectaculaire marchande* (Debord 2006a [1967]) that destroys their environment and fuels “micro-fascisms” (Deleuze & Guattari 1972). Contra Pasolini’s despair, however, Didi-Huberman insists with Deleuze that “There is no place for fear or hope, but only for seeking new weapons” (Deleuze 1990, 242; I translate). When the space of politics (or politics-as-spacing) is threatened, art may well become a haven for weaponizing, for singular creative deeds through which a common world might be preserved (Lamoureux 1994, 74). At the very least, many scholars claim to have detected political fireflies glimmering in artistic deeds.

2.1 “*Sûr que tu pourras devenir un krach boursier à toi tout seul*”?

In her 1959 address on accepting the Lessing Prize of the Free City of Hamburg, Arendt said that Lessing “believed he was indebted to criticism for something that ‘comes very close to genius,’ but which never quite achieved that natural harmonization with the world in which Fortuna smiles when Virtù appears” (Arendt 1968, 5). The poet and dramaturg was a firefly, not a star. His aesthetic theory held “the essence of poetry was action”, and he was most concerned “with the effect upon the spectator, who as it were represents the world, or rather, that worldly space which has come into being between the artist or writer and his fellow men as a world common to them” (6-7). This space is weaved by appearances and re-telling, which “establishes [the] meaning [of action] and that permanent significance which then enters into history” (21). As an example, Arendt recalls that “After the First World War we experienced the ‘mastering of the past’ in a spate of descriptions of the war that varied enormously in kind and quality”, but

nearly thirty years were to pass before a work of art appeared which so transparently displayed the inner truth of the event that it became possible to say: Yes, this is how it was. And in this novel, William Faulkner's *A Fable*, very little is described, still less explained, and nothing at all "mastered"; its end is tears, which the reader also weeps, and what remains beyond that is the "tragic effect" or the "tragic pleasure," the shattering emotion which makes one able to accept the fact that something like this war could have happened at all (20).

A Fable is a performance that requires readers in order to exist. Phrasing storytelling in terms of virtuosity rather than mastery is to make this requirement explicit. Contra Arendt, however, recent works on the politics of art insist less on emotions than affects, which would be "closer" to sense-perception than to sense-making (e.g. Gilbert 2004). A performance is more or less compelling *before* it can be interpreted. In that sense, fabulations have a curious "life" of their own that recalls that of seductive personae.

I hold that the figure of virtuosity traced by the exigencies of dealing with, being embedded in, and becoming-otherwise through multiple *dispositifs* recalls a singular character: Sherlock Holmes. The world's first "consulting detective" (Conan Doyle 2009a [1887], 24) shows observation skills, a sense of logic and timing, and an insightfulness—*lightbulb moments*—regarding what matters, but also a propensity for detached gallows humor, that would understandably make anyone contemplating the possibilities of thinking and acting resolutely in complex series of conjunctures turn green with envy. Of course, as the indispensable Dr. Watson puts it, "there is something positively inhuman in [him] at times": he "really [is] an automaton—a calculating machine" (Conan Doyle 2009b [1890], 96), although Holmes' inclination to get profoundly bored very rapidly is probably as human as it gets. Sherlock is but a fiction, an invention, a creature with a date of birth in this world, but he is a fiction so at home in

the “Western” cultural landscape that his given name suffices, at least for the time being, to project a clear silhouette in the fog surrounding 221B Baker Street³³. Holmes is more than a mixture: he is a singularity, a block of affects that opens up in one go the interrelations of the politics of sight and aesthetics of prevalence along an artistic fold. In effect, the hawk-like virtuoso puts into question the fuzzy distribution of the capacity to sense, to detect, to see what matters, and his penchant for secrecy and controlled disappearance acts as a reminder of how circumstances can make actively remaining in the dark quite a thoughtful thing to do, if not a matter of life and death.

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The effects of art have the unpredictability of action. If the politics of artistic visibility are a matter of *ethos*, “of the proper attitude in ‘dark times’” (Arendt 1968, 17), this *ethos*, following Arendt’s Lessing, is neither a matter of seeing truth in solitary contemplation nor of self-expression. The poet interested Arendt precisely as “[he] rejoiced in the very

³³ The number of films and television series that took up Conan Doyle’s most famous character makes it inadequate to reduce Holmes’ endurance to that of a literary entity whose relevance would be limited to its own Victorian setting, or even to a “print” culture (which is not to say that his emergence is not informed by historical processes that marked the end of the 19th century; on the “social” nation-state as the context of detective novels, see Boltanski 2012). One outstanding trait of the “audiovisual Holmes” is the prevalent role that has been given to “consulting criminal” and mathematics professor James Moriarty, whose name has almost become a definitive example of what a nemesis is. The most recent television adaptation to date by the BBC, *Sherlock* (Gattis & Moffat 2012; 2010), complicates the Manichean interpretation of the Holmes/Moriarty enmity by insisting on the proximity of the two “geniuses” temperament—especially their intolerance to boredom and their passion for puzzles. *Sherlock* is particularly seductive in that it presents a contemporary, “updated” version that playfully highlights the similarities and differences with the original general setting, as well as with the details of Conan Doyle’s chronicles. In the first episode, for instance, set in 2010, Dr. Watson returns from serving in Afghanistan and is looking for a housemate in London; after accompanying Sherlock for the first time in “A Study in Pink” (an adventure named after the color of a victim’s smart-phone), the physician starts an internet blog where he publishes the duo’s stories; Sherlock rapidly becomes an “online celebrity” and is soon followed by the tabloid press; etc. Internet notwithstanding, the detective still remains “ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System”, a fact he justifies by the enduring belief that “a man’s brain originally is like a little empty attic [or a computer, in contemporary terms], and you have to stock it with such furniture [or data] as you choose. [...] It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones” (Conan Doyle 2009a [1887], 21). Of course, it turns out that *this* piece of knowledge (Copernican Theory) was *not* so useless: the presence of a certain star in a painted sky revealed, during an investigation, that an “early-modern painting” was a recent fake, given the star’s dated apparition in the night’s sky.

thing that has ever—or at least since Parmenides and Plato—distressed philosophers: that the truth, as soon as it is uttered, is immediately transformed into one opinion among many, is contested, reformulated, reduced to one subject of discourse among others” (27). Furthermore, the “astonishing lack of ‘objectivity’ in Lessing’s polemicism”, “his forever vigilant partiality [has] nothing whatsoever to do with subjectivity because it is always framed not in terms of the self but in terms of the relationship of men to their world, in terms of their positions and opinions”. Lessing was no political romantic in Carl Schmitt’s sense (see Schmitt 1986 [1919/24]); in fact, in her address Arendt seems to be responding to the jurist’s early condemnation of “aestheticism” as a depoliticizing stance. She asserts that it is precisely because the poet “was a completely political person [that] he insisted that truth can exist only where it is humanized by discourse, only where each man says not what just happens to occur to him at the moment, but what he ‘deems truth’” (Arendt 1968, 30). It is this “announcement of what each ‘deems truth’ [that] both links and separates men, establishing in fact those distances between men which together comprise the world” (30-1)³⁴. For Arendt, however, distances are *disappearing*, and the very ability to “deem true” anything seems to go along. She echoes Schmitt’s lament over “the age of neutralizations and depoliticizations” (Schmitt 2007 [1929], 80-96). In their footsteps, it is claimed that “retreats” *from* politics *into* aesthetics fuel “our” darkening.

2.2 Tactics of unaccountability

Two powerful stories are circulating about the fate of distances. On the one hand, it is claimed that distances are disappearing in contemporary conjunctures. This old story is

³⁴ These considerations suggest that the politics of sight are related to the politics of speech—and that aesthetics of prevalence relate to what I call aesthetics of emancipation. This is what I argue below, in the second chapter of this work, “Aesthetics of Emancipation: the Politics of Speech, and Taste”.

told today in the intertwined terms of an accelerating economic, technological, and social interconnectedness, or “globalization”. On the other hand, it is also recounted that what Arendt called “world alienation” (a form of distance) is increasing, that no public sphere persists (if there ever was one) under the over-stimulating proliferation of continuous information, and that “All that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (Debord 2006a [1967], 766; I translate). In the Hegelian manner of a “history of spirit”, these two stories can arguably be articulated to one another to be made to account for current styles of scholarship: while an overwhelming number of publications are produced and can circulate “all around the world” at an unprecedented speed,

[i]n the age of discourse analysis, as we know, any kind of directness has been abolished. A very wide range of authors have adopted the custom of not speaking or writing about a matter in their own voices, but rather via other authors who have spoken or written about the matter. This observing of observations and describing of descriptions characterizes a period that has turned the necessity of coming too late [like the owl of Minerva] into the virtue of second-order observation in all areas (Sloterdijk 2009b [2006], 51).

In this line of thought, even the “public sphere” of scholarship is not quite populated by claims to “deem truth” anymore. Asserting that to focus on aesthetics is “to retreat from the political” appears, in this light, as a reiteration of the metaphysics of directness expressed by the Arendtian notions of politics as acting in the visible (almost touchable) presence of others, and its overarching shadow, “the social”, thought as the fragmenting and remote administration of “the life process itself” through bubbles of intimacy. It makes a difference, however, whether “the political” is thought of as a space of *possible* manifestation, as “where freedom could appear”, or as a space of *compulsory* presence. In this respect, the in/visibilities of theatre differ from those of courtrooms, tabloids, and

vivisection tables. When the latter's imperatives prevail, the problem becomes: "how does one develop techniques and technologies to make oneself unaccounted for" (Galloway & Thacker 2007, 135)? Thinking politics aesthetically involves the search of weapons for and virtuosity in artful dis/appearances. Art is a site of experimentations.

Contemporary art, however, has been deemed "A completely self-referential world" (Baudrillard 2005, 56) that, at least since the *détournements* of the Internationale Situationniste, is caught up in a "living-dead" modality. This is to say that, from an "anthropological [...] perspective, art no longer seems to have a vital function; it is afflicted by the same fate that extinguishes value, by the same loss of transcendence" (65). It recycles its own history but it has "lost" all forms of vitality. Baudrillard insists:

Art has not escaped this tendency to effectuate everything, *this drive to make everything totally visible to which the West has arrived*. But *hypervisibility is a way to extinguish sight*. I consume this art visually, I can even take a certain pleasure in it, but it doesn't provide me either illusion or truth. Now that the object of painting has been called into question, then the subject of painting, it seems to me that this third term has not received as much attention: the viewer. He or she is increasingly solicited, but held hostage. *Is there a way of looking at contemporary art that wouldn't be the way the artistic milieu views itself?* [...] The conspiracy [of art] has no author and everyone is both victim and accomplice. The same thing happens in politics: we are all duped and complicit in this kind of showcasing. A sort of non-belief, of non-investment makes it so that everyone is playing a two-faced game in a sort of infinite circularity (65-6; I underline).

In this story, it should be remarked that art remains a truthful mirror, an exemplification, and even a magnifying glass of a state of culture. Moreover, even Baudrillard admits that "a few exceptions, a few singularities" (77) are interesting.

I argue that paying attention to acts that are taking place under the names of performance, intervention, or action art shows that Baudrillard's question finds at least one answer: there *is* a way of looking at art as security personnel does, namely as deeds to be monitored just like any other deed of potential interest to surveillance and control apparatuses "protecting freedom". In other words, there is a way of *not* looking at art.

I think of performance art as *eating a lightbulb*. Who would do this? Why? What kind of action is this? The setting, the timing and the audience all matter, as well as postures, materials, documentation, etc. A common claim has it that such a deed amounts to *n'importe quoi*, or that it is not art—or if it is, then this is a clear sign that "anything goes", that art has become nothing but a dubious alibi. Eating a lightbulb, however, can be beautiful, in the language of rationalist aesthetics; it can be a social commentary, in Marxist terms; an expression of subjectivity, in the psychological lingua; it can suspend the very categories through which actions are sensed and made sense of, in a Kantian/Rancièrian aesthetic... Eating a lightbulb is a plausible sight in art events and publications (although I have never actually seen it). While it may be encountered in non-artistic settings, it has the self-endangering quality of many public performances, and it retains a simplicity that brings attention to the processes triggered by strangeness: *what does it mean...?* And what if it was first of all what it is on the face of it—"simply" eating a lightbulb? Arguably, these thoughts have virtually no weight on people remunerated to make sure that "public peace" is not "breached" in any significant (incontrollable) way.

*

Serbian artist Tanja Ostojic once performed an action she describes thusly:

During the summer of 2000 I did three works embodying, with a bit of irony and (black) humor, the situation of

dealing with the World while being a Yugoslavian passport holder. Basically, this work shows possible approaches in reflecting such humiliating every day life situations./ The first was Illegal border crossing, which consisted of two simple actions on the Slovenian/Austrian border, which is the border of the European Union, where approximately 8-9 illegal migrants are captured each day./ For some administrative reason that is useless to describe now, my application for a EU visa in June 2000 was not taken into consideration. At that time I was living in Ljubljana. I actually wanted to join an informal international group of artists' meeting/workshop, which was happening in Austria. So, I decided to make a small art action and to join them. My both way illegal crossing became possible because of huge help from my friends who came from Austria, who picked me up in Slovenia and who guided me through tinny mountain roads to Austrian territory. One of them who drove me by car through small mountain roads risked a lot. We were equipped with detailed maps of the territories we were going through and with a small digital camera we used for minimal documentation of this event. It was exciting and still less stressful than legal procedures I went through when I got a proper visa few weeks before, when I had an exhibition and performance in Carinthia.

This text also describes two other actions: “Waiting for a Visa” (August 2000), and “Looking for a husband with EU passport” (2000-2005). These pieces are gathered under the title *Crossing Border Series*. The third piece, which lasted many years, involved a website, public advertisements, the writing of correspondence, and performances that included a legal wedding with a German artist. It ended officially with a “divorce party”, performed in the context of Ostojic’s broader *Integration Project*³⁵. In “Illegal Border Crossing”, border guards apparently failed to detect her presence. But had she been seen,

³⁵ For the source of the citation, see <http://www.van.at/see/tanja/not/mission.htm> (Accessed May 1, 2012). For an overview of Ostojic’s work, see <http://www.van.at/see/tanja/index.htm> (Accessed May 1, 2012). Recent projects by the Serbian performer include a series of “delegated performances” titled “Misplaced Women? Marking the City”, in which she invites anyone to perform and document the following action: carry a piece of luggage in a public space, unpack it, repack it, and go. See <http://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/> (Accessed May 1, 2012).

it seems there is little chance—*but a chance nonetheless?*—that Ostojic’s “proper” artistic alibi would have made the so-called competent authorities turn a blind eye.

Ostojic’s deed is exemplary, but in a way that contrasts with the exemplarity of self-declared avant-gardists. Guy Debord’s “action-models”, for instance, were of an *Ancien Régime* style: Machiavelli, the Cardinal de Retz, Clausewitz, Arthur Cravan or Nestor Makhno, stars appearing from hideouts for inspiring exploits of insight, foresight, wit, and timing—a boyish dreamscape. Debord’s own virtuosity was of this kind; with remarkable style, he wrote his own panegyric... The exemplarity of Ostojic’s actions differs: they put into play a widespread anonymity and make the mostly invisible deeds of “women without quality” (to paraphrase Robert Musil) slightly more visible through the modest staging of artful dis/appearances. Predominant positions in the art world itself are challenged by deeds like her *Curator Series* (2001-2003), which played on the perception of women’s “strategies of success” for “making a name for themselves”, as Ostojic acted publically for a few days as the young, very visible, well-dressed companion of an art Biennale’s curator, following the older married man in his socializing. Debord’s and Ostojic’s seem two incommensurable worlds. However, that artistic actions are not only analogous to political actions, but are also *instances* of acting-in-common and being-with, of performance and “exploit”, was a key claim of Debord’s Internationale Situationniste. Are illegal border crossings what a *dérive* now looks like?

3. Automated surveillance: security, selection & elegance

The noun *dérive* has pejorative connotations in French. One reads of condemned *dérives autoritaires*, but also of lamented *dérives démocratiques*—in these instance, “drift” signifies “abuse”. These common usages imply a threatening deviation from a normalized

course. In the Internationale Situationniste's mostly Parisian *dérives* that positively revalued drifts and infinite deferrals, the “normalcy” to be threatened was that of purposive urban circulation policed through the productive imperatives of Capital. In Ostojic's illegal border crossings, normalcy is that of “mobilities under surveillance”, as

[t]echnologies of the securitization of mobility conjugate themselves in better and better ways with the absence of blockages, walls, checkpoints and barbed wires. [These technologies] abandon waiting lines and individualized controls. They operate through the recognition of the characteristics of a person amid a flow, a mass of people in movement. They accomplish themselves thanks to the traceability of the movement of any group and by the anticipation of trajectories. Technologically, the speed of the transmission of information on suspect individuals must simply be higher than the speed of their physical displacement for surveillance to prevail. The desirability of mobility, and of a faster mobility, cannot be confounded with freedom of movement when surveillance is capable of projecting itself in space even more rapidly than the individuals who thought they could escape (*s'échapper*) (Scherrer, Guittet & Bigo 2010, 13; I translate).

This contemporary automation of surveillance is said to signal the demands placed on the management of in/visibilities by the recent “War or Terror”, but also by much broader movements of populations within “the world-economy”, especially between “peripheries” and “centers” of production, consumption, and exchange. In self-described critical security studies, it is often claimed that so-called security imperatives thereby tend to trump the possibilities of freedom³⁶. The very automation of surveillance would

³⁶ This field of politological research is highly productive, and here I cannot do justice to the diversity of works that are produced in this nebula. The qualification “critical” is nonetheless held to “unify” the field, to the extent that it signals a posture that explicitly seeks to consider claims about the necessity of security imperatives as polemical, *political* claims, rather than as givens, as “simple common sense”, etc. It is interesting to note that the development of critical security studies has accompanied the so-called “aesthetic turn in international political theory” (Bleiker 2001). Arguably, attention to aesthetic matters of concern enable more nuanced and textured accounts of the functioning of security and surveillance apparatuses. I believe, however, that this type of attention could also be mobilized to disentangle the stakes of the impressive number of “turns” that are claimed by critical security studies scholars, the last one to date being “the

force appearances (and disappearances) in dehumanizing, violent-*because*-automated ways. Codes are certainly at play in these processes, but humans remain central to the politics of surveillance. One simply has to consider who (still) stands behind CCTV cameras, who pays for, installs, breaks, and replaces them. Similarly, “blockages, walls, checkpoints and barbed wires”, “waiting lines and individualized controls” have not disappeared, as anyone who traveled by plane in recent years will have remarked.

3.1 “Trust your senses”—“If you see something, say something”

I encountered the two order-words that make up the above title at an academic convention. The first was presented by a geographer on the panel “New Mobilities: Methods, Nomads, Circulations and Borders” (Adey 2012). It comes from a poster that has been visible in London after “7/7”. The poster has been described thusly:

On the top right corner of the poster, we can see the logo 7MILLION LONDONERS/1LONDON. In vertical line, on black background, we can see a blue eye, a brown ear and red lips. Next to the eye, we can read ‘If you see’, next to the ear ‘or hear anything suspicious’, and next to the lips ‘tell our staff or the police immediately’. At the end, in bold, the slogan ‘Trust your senses’. Therefore the message is: ‘if you see or hear anything suspicious, tell our staff or the police immediately. Trust your senses’. The last layer, with a white background, contains a list of logos of institutions: Mayor of London, Metropolitan Police, City of London Police, British Transport Police and Transport for London (Salerno 2008, 2).

Another London Transport security notice reportedly reads: “Trust your senses not your neighbours” (cited in Parkins 2009, 1). Commentators have been quick to highlight the Orwellian atmosphere of this visual entity, its 1984’s “Big Brother is Watching You”

mobilities turn”. An aesthetic mode of thought should highlight the contingency of the effects of any claim to turning; a turn may not be wished into nor out of existence as easily as it seems.

quality. The “Trust your senses” poster also recalls the articulation of statist surveillance to sense organs in Alan Moore & David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta* (2005 [1981-88]), in which “the Head” (the Leader and his bureau) gathers all the information that comes to it from “the Eye” (video surveillance), “the Ear” (audio surveillance), and “the Nose” (forensics), while “the Finger” (police) executes and “the Mouth” (radio and television) does propaganda. Famously, “the Head” relies on “Fate”, a mega-computer, to analyze and synthesize the abundance of data and suggest courses of action. This dystopian graphic novel has become highly emblematic since V’s Guy Fawkes mask has been adopted by the hackers of Anonymous and by participants to the so-called “Occupy Movement”—after it became widely available as a by-product of the movie version of the comics. Meanwhile, governmental authorities have recently shown an increased interest in prohibiting masks from protests and demonstrations, not only to enable facial recognition, but also to maintain the efficacy of tear-gas as a tool for “crowd management”—but here, goggles are more directly targeted than Guy Fawkes masks.

The second order-word—“if you see something, say something”—I read on a poster, waiting in line to “go through security” at San Diego airport. In the context of this refolding of the politics of sight onto aesthetics of prevalence, what is striking is the delegation of surveillance that both posters call for, their attempt at mobilizing anyone who happens to come pass them. Beside an unabashed confidence in sense data a Francophone may be prone to attribute to an Anglo-American penchant for empiricism, the two invitations highlight a key problem of automated surveillance: the determination of importance. Designers and operators of surveillance technologies must constantly ask themselves: What information is worth considering and will not uselessly mobilize

limited resources? What data should actively be sought out, and which data participates of “the promotion of measurable data of negligible importance”, “[a]llowing to be measured now and again for false behaviors, thereby attracting incongruent and ineffective control responses” (Galloway & Thacker 2007, 136)? What data will seem void until it becomes obvious—but it may be too late—that it was crucial, and that what was deemed pertinent was not? It seems that there are no certainties, only probabilities.

It should be noted, here, that surveillance systems can—or seek to—grow stronger through their failures. Failures signal limitations that can thereafter be focused on; this is why those concerned with the security of computer systems actively rely on hackers. One can easily imagine stealthy individuals being hired by border services for similar ends, to test their systems of detection. When “an undercover police officer ‘chased himself round the street’ for 20 minutes after a CCTV operator mistook him for [a] suspect” (Hough 2012), no wonder British police took it “in good spirit”: “we all enjoy moments of light relief”, they said—but one has to add: as well as moments of learning.

It is difficult to measure the precise effects of the automation and the delegation of surveillance work—or so it seems. The vigilance commanded by order-words like the ones cited above—“trust your senses”, “if you see something, say something”—relies on and relays many layers of discourses on what matters, on what “truly” imports. It goes without saying that “If you see something, say something” is not to be read literally, that a (pre-)selection is in order, that what should be watched for is a “security threat”. In an airport for example, a “luggage left unattended” matters far more than a drunk. Similarly, certain “types” of people are to be watched more closely, we are told—and the very fact that this last formulation suffices to evoke *some* images shows the efficiency of security

discourses, whether one opposes their classificatory politics or not. It shows that recognizing importance is a matter of training, of schooling in valuation and evaluation.

3.2 The *longue durée* of automation

Rather than holding automation as a sufficient criterion of condemnable violence, I find it helpful to consider a powerful claim that refolds the selective and “selectionning” violences of automated sight on aesthetics of prevalence via the notion of elegance. This claim comes from what is arguably the very core of the so-called neoliberal nebula. In his famous article on “The Use of Knowledge in Society”, F.A. Hayek writes:

The problem is precisely how to extend the span of our utilization of resources beyond the span of the control of any one mind; and, therefore, how to dispense with the need of conscious control and how to provide inducements which will make the individuals do the desirable things without anyone having to tell them what to do. /The problem which we meet here is by no means peculiar to economics but arises in connection with nearly all truly social phenomena, with language and most of our cultural inheritance, and constitutes really the central theoretical problem of all social science. As Alfred Whitehead has said in another connection, “It is a profoundly erroneous truism, repeated by all copy-books and by eminent people when they are making speeches, that we should cultivate the habit of thinking what we are doing. The precise opposite is the case. Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them.” This is of profound significance in the social field. We make constant use of formulas, symbols and rules whose meaning we do not understand and through the use of which we avail ourselves of the assistance of knowledge which individually we do not possess (Hayek 1945, 527-8).

Fifteen years after the publication of this article, the Austrian economist-philosopher promoted the same passage by Whitehead to the rank of epigraph to the second chapter of *The Constitution of Liberty*, titled “The Creative Powers of a Free Civilization”:

“Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them. Operations of thought are like cavalry charges in a battle—they are strictly limited in number, they require fresh horses, and must only be made at decisive moments” (Whitehead, cited in Hayek 2011 [1960], 73). These lines are taken from the chapter on “The Symbolism of Mathematics”, in Whitehead’s *An Introduction to Mathematics* (Whitehead 1911, 61). Therein, they are preceded by the assertion that “by the aid of symbolism, we can make transitions in reasoning almost mechanically by the eye, which otherwise would call into play the higher faculties of the brain”. They are followed by this assertion: “One very important property for symbolism to possess is that it should be concise, so as to be visible at one glance of the eye and to be rapidly written”. In this passage, sight is portrayed as a more immediate experience than thought, although what is seen is necessarily being “interpreted”. As Kant had put it centuries before, sense-perception is the condition of sense-making.

Training one’s eyes to recognize symbols participates of a process of automation that makes it so that, for example, when seeing $1+1=2$, one can read it “immediately” as an equation (and even as a true one, since it is so common) without pondering the meaning and function of each symbol. Errors may occur as one “misrecognizes” or “goes too fast”, taking one symbol for another, forgetting some details of the operations performed by a particular symbol, or by a peculiar ordering of symbols, etc. In light of Whitehead’s concerns for pedagogy, however, one should primarily note that schools are where training in and habituation to the “glancing” recognition of symbols (mathematical, but also linguistic) takes place most strenuously. Misrecognition is explicitly tackled and perhaps even minimized as students are repeatedly told to “look

more closely”, to “take the time to read carefully”, so that the rules of the game will become a “second nature”, so to speak³⁷.

The politics of Hayek’s claim on “the use of knowledge” are seemingly well known. He sees “the price system [as] one of those formations which man has learned to use (though he is still very far from having learned to make the best use of it) after he had stumbled upon it without understanding it” (Hayek 1945, 528). Making “the best use of it” would require a better understanding of its workings, i.e. expliciting, unfolding this “spontaneous” formation. However, the above considerations also ground Hayek’s claim that while “planning” might be desirable, it is ultimately *impossible*, given the sheer amount of information and analytical resources a “plan” would require to unfold in truly predictable ways. Innumerable factors are involved in determining any one price, and the “inner workings” of the whole formation are never fully knowable to any “one mind”, if only since they involve the preferences of uncountable “minds”, including the ones who seek to study them. “Still, it works”, Hayek might say: the system distributes relative importance as any sign (price) communicates with all others. For the economist-philosopher, this system is the most elegant of decentralized, impersonal, and automatic coordinating formations that express “perceptual salience” (Strong 2005), that is what prevails and matters. This is why it should be “left alone”, according to neoliberals.

³⁷ It is interesting to note that Debord, of all people, lamented a certain “disappearance” of logical thinking by relating it to a current inability to detect importance: “We generally believe that those who showed the greatest incapacity in matters of logic are precisely those who proclaimed themselves revolutionaries. This unjustified reproach comes from an anterior epoch, where almost everyone thought with a minimum of logic, to the notable exception of cretins and militants; and for the latter, bad faith was often involved in this, willed because thought efficient. But it is not possible, today, to neglect the fact that the intensive usage of the spectacle has, like we could expect, made the majority of our contemporaries into ideologues, although only by fragments. The lack of logic, i.e. the loss of the possibility to instantaneously recognize what is important and what is minor or out of the question; what is incompatible or, inversely, what could well be complementary; all that this or that consequence implies and what, at the same time, it forbids; this sickness has been voluntarily injected in high dosage into the population by the *anesthesiologists-reanimators* of the spectacle” (Debord 2006b [1988], 1610-11; I translate).

*

Hayek's claims are grounded in an account of the modalities of lived-experience as the intertwinement of sense-perception and sense-making. This account is most explicitly presented in *The Sensory Order* (Hayek 1952). This book offers a "cybernetic" (my word) account of experience, in which "human organisms" (Hayek's word) are the black boxes, "physical events" are inputs, meaning and action are outputs, and a feedback loop of "learning" makes it so that future interpretations of sensations are informed by prior ones in a continuous process of adaptation that occurs at the "level" of "the individual", but also at that of "the species". The passage between the two levels is of such complexity, however, that only hypotheses can be advanced for its description. Still, according to Hayek something like a "social evolution" is probably at play.

Hayek's model formulates both sense-perception and sense-making as issues of information: "The operations of both the senses and the intellect are equally based on acts of classification (or reclassification) performed by the central nervous system, and [are] both part of the same continuous process by which the microcosm in the brain progressively approximates to [but never achieves] a reproduction of the macrocosm of the external world" (108). Since Einstein's works, it appears that even space and time (that is: "the external world", in principle independent of "the subject") are themselves "no longer regarded as representing absolutes, existing in themselves as permanent substances or entities. Rather, the whole of physics is conceived as dealing with the discovery of what is *relatively invariant* in the everchanging movements that are to be observed in the world, as well as in the changes of points of view, frames of reference, different perspectives, etc., that can be adopted in such observations" (Bohm 1996

[1965], 142). As the automation of surveillance is concerned, Hayek's view would imply that the monitoring of "external" actions can never be complete. For one, completeness would require a transcendent "center" monitoring the actions of those who monitor, those of those who monitor monitors, *ad infinitum*³⁸. Moreover, Hayek's account suggests that as the amount of data increases, not only do computing powers need to increase (the two processes fostering one another), but that *elegance* also becomes of crucial importance.

In this respect, it is remarkable that the technicians of the externalization of memory and the automation of surveillance acknowledge that the "beauty" of data and codes is key to swift analysis (e.g. Segaran & Hammerbacher 2009; Oram & Wilson 2007). Still, the limits to knowledge that Hayek affirms are, in his neo-Kantian mode of thought, deemed objective and unsurpassable. The impossibility of planning would thus not—or not only, *not primarily*—be a matter of beliefs, values or worldviews, nor of momentarily insufficient technological and aesthetic capacities, as it is often argued, but a matter of the asymptotic character of knowledge itself, and perhaps especially of "self-knowledge". In return, I hold that these considerations can evoke how "The eyes are the organic prototype of philosophy [as] their enigma is that they not only can see but are also able to see themselves seeing. [But] for this, reflecting media, mirrors, water surfaces, metals, and other eyes are necessary, through which the seeing of seeing becomes visible" (Sloterdijk 1987 [1983], 145). One could argue that Marxist or leftist attempts at deconstructing the Hayekian account of the automated, self-steering market constitute such "other eyes" that lift the veil off the not-so-hidden violences of elegant economics. Still, just how these "others eyes" see is bound to remain partly invisible.

³⁸ Hayek relies on the logical claim according to which an explanation (in mathematics, a description) must be of a higher order of complexity than what it explains, if it is to be complete in a strict sense.

4. Spectral geometries

In this chapter, I have been trying to formulate the problem of variations in distributions of political importance in a manner that acknowledges the perceived centrality of the sense of sight in contemporary aesthetics of politics. In that sense, I have engaged the politics of sight through the hypothesis that aesthetics of prevalence act as prerequisites to the determination of these variations in terms of in/visibilities. So far, I have dealt with three lines of refolding: a politological refolding, an aesthetic refolding, and a polemological refolding of aesthetics of prevalence. By explicating how, in politological thought, ocularcentrism names the requirement that a prevalent entity or pattern can be detected, I have shown that this formulation of the problem of importance already marks how political life tends to be seen and talked about. By putting into question the roles of the politico-artistic notion of virtuosity in its relations to spaces of dis/appearances, I have engaged how possibilities of “freedom” and “resistance” are matters of concern for this visual problematization of importance. By engaging accounts of the practices of automation and surveillance that are involved in the more or less elegant “management” of aspects of political life, I have shown that aesthetics of prevalence imply particular modulations of violences. At this point, by addressing the notion of “spectral geometries” through what I call a hauntological fold, I want to revisit this formulation of the problem of importance by trying to identify the “prior exclusions” that are deemed necessary to the construction of this very structure of inclusion-and-exclusion that is at stake in the entwined notions of visibility and invisibility. The problem of hauntology, a term coined by Derrida (1993a), is akin to the problem of the “blind spot” of any knowledge

that neo-Kantians such as Hayek or cyberneticists like Niklas Luhmann (2002, 190) have been engaging. It should be recalled that hauntological matters cannot but be elusive.

Spectral geometries exist. There are objects of mathematical inquiry. I cannot, however, do justice to the mathematicians who deal with them on a daily basis³⁹. I borrow the name as the title of this fourth fold because I think that the very multiplicity (or the existence of a spectrum) of geometries—a still recent occurrence or “discovery”, given the multi-millenary prevalence, or rather, the monopoly of Euclidian geometry in Occident—hints at what haunts visual formulations of distributions of importance. This multiplicity of geometries is significant not least because the discourses that surround it, often lamenting the loss of a certainty that may never have been, seem to prefigure a large number of contemporary claims on “dichotomies breaking down”, on ways of seeing that *must* be revised, etc. Moreover, as indicated above, the problematization of experience that I call aesthetics of prevalence does not only require notions of space (and time) to think through the unfolding of political life. It can also be asserted that the conceptualization of political spatiotemporalities requires that certain entities or patterns first “stand out”, as it were, as politically relevant, which is to say that prevalence and the very possibility to detect it act as prerequisites. To phrase aesthetics of prevalence as prerequisites, rather than as conditions, is to characterize singular series of formulations of what experience is, of how sense-perception and sense-making relate one another.

Interestingly, calls for “no more ghosts!” have recently been issued in light of the growing popularity of Derrida’s notion of hauntology. Rejections of “ghost-talk” did not

³⁹ I have come across the field of spectral geometry by a chance encounter with an article written by mathematician Mark Kac: “Can one hear the shape of a drum?” (Kac 1966), while researching the aesthetics of temperament and the politics of hearing I treat in Chapter III, below. This article is said to have been crucial for the emergence of spectral geometry as a field of research (see Gordon & Webb 1996).

come from mathematicians or scientists, however, in something like a repetition of the so-called Sokal affair (see Stengers 2006; Bouveresse 1999)—maybe this is because mathematicians are used to deal with immaterial beings. Rather, recent charges against the very idea of spectrality came from the very types of “theorists” Sokal opposed (e.g. Spångberg 2011). Their charges strangely repeat Thomas Hobbes’ seminal expulsion of phantoms from politics and politology by way of a geometrical mode of expression⁴⁰.

4.1 Only metaphors & metonymies?

Are the automation of sight, the virtuosity of dis/appearances, and the centrality of ocularcentrism “merely” figures of speech? Are they “simply” partial descriptions that take seeing to stand in for sense-perception and sense-making in general? Are these not “only” metaphors and metonymies? The qualifiers “merely”, “simply” and “only”, here, are problematic. For one, as Derrida puts it in a passage that I cited above when engaging ocularcentrism, “the metaphor is never innocent. It orients the research and fixes the results” (Derrida 1997 [1967], 30; I translate). The privileging of sight may be a matter of representations, but in critiquing its reductionism as inelegant and violent one may want to avoid contesting the relevance of abstractions as such, if one accepts Whitehead’s claim that “you cannot think without abstractions” and that, “accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your *modes* of abstraction” (Whitehead 1997 [1925], 59). To read the qualification of aesthetics of prevalence and the politics of sight as metaphorical and metonymic phrases as a sufficient objection to their possibility, their plausibility and/or their interest for the problem at stake in this

⁴⁰ In Chapter IV, below, “Aesthetics of Friction: the Politics of Touch”, I present a nuanced and detailed engagement with the problem of the relationship between “science” and “politics” in Hobbes’ thought.

dissertation would be to assume that *there are* primary, fixed meanings or senses to the words we use, and that others are derivative and secondary.

Contemporary accounts of the functioning of language rather suggest that linguistic expression functions through metaphors and metonymies *all the way down*, an idea already developed in the early 1800s by Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart, who influenced Sigmund Freud in particular (Burgoyne 2001a, 155; 2001b, 164). Hobbes himself, in *Leviathan*, already insisted on the practical necessity of actively fixing (or trying to fix) what cannot but be slippery meanings through sharp, clear *definitions* that result from a certain arbitrariness. This claim, however, should not be taken to imply that what Nietzscheans call a healthy suspicion towards the politics of language is redundant. It does not mean that “anything goes”; quite the opposite! In a Nietzschean sense, one should rather try to explore what it can mean to hold that the practices involved in the determination of what counts and what does not count politically are “literally” ocularcentric. This is, for instance, what Peter Sloterdijk seems to be doing when he writes: “With intellectuals, an astounding dullness in the eyes is often evident that comes not least of all from the continual violence done to the eyes by having to read things the eyes would not accept if they had their own way. They must serve merely as tools for reading; and it is no wonder when the perspective of such people, being used to black lines, glides right off from reality” (Sloterdijk (1987 [1983], 146). The words “perspectives” and “lines”, here, express occurrences that it is difficult not to call *real*.

At this point, it should be remarked that “our” most assured conceptions of what a line is are of geometrical descent. The most enduring and elegant (and, for this very reason, perhaps the most violent) definitions of such notions are to be found in Book I of

Euclid's *Elements*. This is the case for the notion of “center”. In effect, Definitions 15 and 16 read: “D15. A *circle* is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure equal one another; D16. And the point is called the *center* of the circle”⁴¹. A center, as a point, has *by definition* no dimension—this is the first of Euclid's definitions—and it is, therefore, nowhere to be seen. It is necessarily a “vanishing” point. Any point one may draw is only a representation of a “real” point. Similarly, any line that one draws is not a line in a strict, Euclidian sense, for it will at least have the breadth of a pencil's tip. This may seem a strictly theoretical problem, but as one considers how borders are conceptualized as Euclidian lines, the question becomes very practical indeed. In 1948, for example, at the limits of Jerusalem, the lines of the ceasefire between Israeli and Arab forces

were sketched on a Mandatory 1:20,000 scale map. Moshe Dayan drew the Israeli front line with a green grease pencil, while Abdullah al-Tal marked his front line with a red one. The grease made lines three to four millimeters wide. Sketched on a map whose scale 1:20,000, such lines in reality represented strips of land sixty to eighty meters in width. Who owned the ‘width of the line?’ Had it been a matter of an open desert area, the problem would have been insignificant. But this was a densely built-up city, whose streets were mostly nine meters wide—or thirty meters, including the houses on both side. In addition, when they drew the demarcation lines, no one had taken the trouble to have a flat surface beneath the map. As a result, the grease pencils skipped over some places. And the lines were also disjointed, zigzag, or sketchy due to uncertainty or error in their initial drawings. /This cartographic monstrosity

⁴¹ The preceding definitions address all the key terms in the two definitions cited: “D1. A *point* is that which has no part; D2. A *line* is breadthless length; [...] D4. A *straight line* is a line which lies evenly with the points on itself; D5. A *surface* is that which has length and breadth only; [...] D7. A *plane surface* is a surface which lies evenly with the straight lines on itself; [...] D13. A *boundary* is that which is an extremity of anything; D14. A *figure* is that which is contained by any boundary or boundaries”. I am using the online edition of Euclid's *Elements* prepared by David E. Joyce (1998). On the enduring importance of Euclid for Western thought, see Berlinski 2013.

haunted both sides throughout the years that the armistice was in force (Benvenisti 1998, 57)⁴².

Drawn in 1947, shortly before the Israeli Green Line, “Radcliffe’s pencil lines” (Khan 2007, 196) partitioned British India into the sovereign States of India and Pakistan and had perhaps even more momentous consequences, dividing communities and presiding to massive, deadly displacements of populations. The “immateriality” of the objects that Euclid defined thus radically puts into question the political implications of the modes of existence of mathematical entities in particular, and of conceptual entities in general.

The use of statistics, among other practices, is key to what has been called the Modern-Western biopolitical management of “populations” through “explicitation” (e.g. Hacking 1990). What statistics do is to render certain patterns and distributions of entities, certain “facts” visible, and to obscure others. Their widespread use, however, only makes the question of the mode(s) of existence of such entities more pressing: how *is* a Gross Domestic Product? How *is* a point, if it is irreducible to any empirically occurring hole made by a compass? How *is* a boundary, beyond its Euclidean definition that also implies what “beyond” can mean? If mathematics is about detecting and formalizing patterns, as those who popularize “the queen of the sciences” repeatedly claim, how are these singular patterns sensed and made sense of? An enduring line of thought has been formulating these questions via a singular site: the “pineal eye”.

4.2 The pineal eye hypothesis

The notion of a pineal eye is commonly traced back to René Descartes’ discussion of “a little gland in the brain in which the soul exercises its functions more particularly than in

⁴² On the width of the “Oslo lines” traced in 1993, see “The lawless line” project by the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, at <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/battir-3/> (Accessed May 1, 2013).

the other parts” (Descartes 2008 [1649], art. 31; I translate). This gland has been thought of as the small yet tangible point of articulation between body and soul, or the corporeal and the mental, the two “substances” that Descartes strongly insisted on separating. The mathematician-philosopher formulated the role of this “little gland” in terms of logical necessity, and in at least one passage, he relates its operations to the experience of seeing:

as we have only one and simple thought of a same thing at the same time, it must necessarily be the case that there is some place (*lieu*) where the two images that come through both eyes, where the two other impressions, that come from a single object by the double organs of the other senses, can assemble themselves into one before they get at the soul, so that they do not represent two objects to it instead of one (art. 32).

This *lieu* is, hypothetically, the pineal gland, “the only part of the bicameral brain that is not duplex but singular, and [whose] singularity, along with its contiguity with the two beds of optic nerves, suggest its function—which is, as Descartes believes, to serve as what we today call the *chiasm* of the optic nerves, that which integrates the two images our eyes receive into the one image we see” (Krell 1987, 216). Although the views of the contemporary sciences on the matter diverge from Descartes’, it should be noted that the discipline of neurology does include “pinealogy” as a subfield, “hav[ing] now firmly established the pineal as a legitimate part of the neuroendocrine and circadian system” (Reiter, Quay, & Karasek 1984, 2). The hypothesis of the pineal *eye*, for its part, evokes metaphysical notions such as “the mind’s eye”, “the eye of reason”, “the third eye” and the likes (e.g. Willingham-McLain 1997). Furthermore, it seems “there is no doubt that morphogenetically in all vertebrates [the pineal gland] is a vestigial unpaired eye. As fossil evidence indicates—and we still find it almost fully developed in some extant amphibians—ancestral vertebrates possessed in addition to the paired bilateral eyes a

solitary dorsal eye opening at the top of the skull to the sky” (Krell 1987, 215). I hold that this pineal eye, which David Farrell Krell describes as holding “a special fascination for philosophers”, haunts aesthetics of prevalence to the extent that it focalizes formulations of the articulation of sense-perception to sense-making through a problematization of the detection and apprehension of what matters in a risky conjuncture.

What I call the hypothesis of the pineal eye has been taken seriously by at least two 20th century scholars who seem as different as possible: Kurt Gödel and Georges Bataille. Gödel’s prudent take on the question is that of a mathematician-logician. It differs from Descartes’ conception in that what is at issue, for Gödel, are not primarily “sense impressions”, but “abstract impressions”:

I conjecture that some physical organ is necessary to make the handling of abstract impressions (as opposed to sense impressions) possible, because we have some weakness in the handling of abstract impressions which is remedied by viewing them in comparison with or on the occasion of sense impressions. Such a sensory organ must be closely related to the neural center for language. But we simply do not know enough now, and the primitive theory on such questions at the present stage is likely to be comparable to the atomic theory as formulated by Democritus (Gödel, reported in Wang 1996, 233).

Pierre Cassou-Noguès, a contemporary French commentator of Gödel’s work, names the “physical organ” at stake in this passage a “pineal eye”, although Gödel does not use the term (Cassou-Noguès 2007, 62). This conjecture of a physical organ of “abstraction” can be read as an expression of Gödel’s asserted Platonism, of his reasoned belief in the independent existence of immaterial objects, that is objects such as numbers, but also angels, demons, and created persona—say, Sherlock Holmes, as Cassou-Noguès argues—that produce impressions on “the mind”. The mathematician-logician is even

said to have enthusiastically cited Plato's statement from Book VI of *The Republic*: "The forms which they [the students of geometry, arithmetic, and the kindred sciences] draw or make, and which have shadows and reflections in water of their own, are converted by them into images, but they are really seeking to behold the things themselves, which can only be seen with the eye of the mind" (cited in Wang 1996, 301). This is a universalist claim: in principle, any *rational* being possesses such an "eye of the mind".

In practice, Gödel considered that "this organ of reason, this pineal eye, seems susceptible to two kinds of troubles" (Cassous-Noguès 2007, 62; I translate). First, "there is a risk of hyperactivity of the pineal eye, which becomes fascinated by the movements, the ballet if you will, of angels [and mathematical objects], and forgets its primary function (which is 'to direct our action in a reasonable fashion, like the eye directs the walk')". Second, "there is an inverse trouble, of which Gödel speaks to [his student Hao] Wang: the mathematical eye can close itself, like the sensible eye, or its acuity can diminish, like that of sight or hearing". In this light, it is interesting to remark that a widespread opinion holds that young mathematicians are the best, most creative ones—perhaps because, with age, the pineal eye closes? Moreover, it would appear that this "eye of the mind" is independent of the "real" eyes. Some historians of mathematics have argued that the work of famous and respected blind mathematicians demonstrates that the "impressions" at issue in mathematics are irreducible to sense impressions, and are even impeded by sense impressions—especially by visual ones. Blind geometers would have a greater capacity to deal with n -dimensional objects (especially when $n > 3$) than people who can see (Jackson 2002). Finally—and more to the point, in the context of a problematization of distributions of *political* importance—, it should be underlined that

the training of the mathematical “pineal eye” is of crucial importance, according to Gödel, for dealing adequately with the issue of detecting and selecting *what matters*.

In effect, distributing importance adequately enables mathematicians to proceed with their specialized practices of thought, but also with more philosophical thought. Hao Wang, Gödel’s most famous student, wrote: “Since thinking is ultimately an individual activity and its aim is to see things as clearly as one can, it is important to get rid of distractions and to disregard what is not essential. The main thing is to observe what is within yourself” (Wang 1996, 297). He then cites Gödel’s remark to the effect that

Philosophical thinking differs from thinking in general. It leaves out attention to objects but directs attention to inner experiences. (It is not so hard if one *also* directs attention to objects.) To develop the skill of introspection and correct thinking [is to learn] in the first place what you have to *disregard*. The ineffectiveness of natural thinking [in the study of philosophy] comes from being overwhelmed by an infinity of possibilities and facts. In order to go on, you have to know *what to leave out*; this is the essence of effective thinking (298; brackets in the text).

These remarks may explain Gödel’s own virtuosity, although he does not specify how this training in knowing what to disregard can take place in an effective manner.

Historians of mathematics and logic tend to claim that breakthroughs and advances, such as those achieved by Gödel, occur when someone brings a “totally new point of view” to bear on a particular set of problems, or when someone reformulates a series of concerns into *one* general problem that captures and reframes the imagination of others. These changes in outlook can be irreversible; after one has grasped a new distribution of importance, a new way to look at things, it may be impossible to go back to a previous one with conviction. It is also asserted, however, that there is no rule that presides over the determination of what is an important or interesting problem. As such, this issue is

often said to be a matter of “aesthetic judgment” more than anything else (A. Lichnerowicz, in Vernier 1990; see Feyerabend 1993, 210). This claim illustrates many mathematicians’ belief that mathematics and the arts are closely related.

It is difficult, at this point, not to think that Gödel’s own “madness”, his well-known paranoia which led to his death, may have had something to do with—to put it in his own terms—the risk of a “hyperactivity” of the pineal eye, whose singular outlook may have become too feverish⁴³. It seems inevitable that individuals develop ways of “sorting out what happens into significant and insignificant, [to] prevent the psychic implosion that occurs when everything is informative, or when nothing is” (Sloterdijk 2005 [2004], 459; I translate). Still, it also seems possible that one errs in developing such classifications, and that an “implosion” ensues as an unintended consequence.

*

These considerations on “Gödel’s madness” open a pathway to briefly unfold Georges Bataille’s work on the pineal eye. Bataille’s take on this “third eye” is that of an *écrivain* who was both a mythologist and a self-declared mythmaker, rather than a philosopher or a scientist. Speculating on the anthropological significance of vision and the specificity of the human animal, Bataille distinguished two fundamental axes of life: “the horizontal direction of normal binocular vision, and the vertical direction of pineal vision” (Bataille 1970 [ca. 1930], 39; I translate). The first axis, which Bataille associates most closely

⁴³ Gödel, in a nutshell, feared that people were trying to poison him. He thought, for instance, that some people were destroying unknown works by Leibniz in the present day, and that he himself had to be most careful in what he chose to publish for his work to remain intact. Famously—at least in Gödel “circles”—his formal proof of the existence of God and his alleged proof that the United States’ Constitution contained a gap that allowed the country to be turned into a dictatorship in a legal manner were not published during his lifetime. To counter the possibility of being poisoned, Gödel’s wife was asked to taste first everything that he ate. When she had to remain in a hospital for many weeks due to an illness, the story goes that Gödel simply stopped eating. He died shortly afterward, emaciated. On the relationship of “logic and madness” through a thorough engagement with Gödel’s work and archives, see Cassou-Nogues 2007.

with animals (including humans), is said to be governed by the imperatives of the reproduction of life itself, while the second axis, more closely associated with the vegetal world (and aspects of human life), opens up toward something “mythical”, something which goes from (and links together) the blinding sun in the sky to the deepest hole in the ground. This second, pineal vision is described as a “system of impulses” that is “as material as the first”, and that is experienced most directly in “moments of vertigo”.

Bataille writes, in what appears to be an oblique critique of Descartes’ and even of Plato’s take on the mind’s eye, that, if “each man possesses, at the summit of the cranium, a gland known under the name of pineal eye, which in effect presents the characteristics of an embryonic eye” (37), this eye is “not a product of the understanding, but an immediate existence” (25). Its evolution appears bizarrely unfinished, incomplete, compared to other organs: “alone [at] the extreme peak of the superior edifice, the pineal gland remained in the state of a virtual way out, and it can only realize its signification (without which a man spontaneously enslaves (*s’asservit*) and reduces himself to the state of an employee) in virtue of the mythical confusion: as if to better turn human nature into a value foreign to its own reality, and weave it to a spectral existence” (34). The pineal eye, as Bataille sees (through) it, is haunting by definition. Its consideration as a pivotal factor in practices of freedom opens up toward what I will call, in the following chapter, aesthetics of emancipation. Gödel and Bataille both express universalistic accounts of “the human condition” based on the sense of sight. Each implies that the phraseology of the other—logical versus mythical—prevails in contemporary conjunctures. These claims suggest a pathway toward what I call the politics of speech, and taste.

Refolding distributions of importance (I)

The four following chapters take each of the four remaining senses of the age-old fivefold as their respective point of departure: taste, hearing, touch, and smell, in that order. In doing so, however, each chapter also proposes a refolding of one of the four folds of this chapter: politological, artistic, polemological, and hauntological. In effect, I will argue that the politics of taste and speech have as prerequisites aesthetics of emancipation that tend to be thought through singular *dispositifs* of dis/appearances, of presence and absence. I will also argue that the politics of hearing have as prerequisites aesthetics of temperament at play in the Machiavellian notion of virtuosity, and in the Arendtian/Heideggerian notion of world. The politics of touch, for their part, have as prerequisites aesthetics of friction that speak to the violences of elegant automation and selection that mark surveillance apparatuses and practices of training oneself and others. Finally, the politics of smell have as prerequisites aesthetics of endurance that can be formulated through the variable geometries of sense-perception and sense-making that inform the stubborn salience and persistence of allegedly “rotten” modes of political thought.

Chapter II – Aesthetics of Emancipation: the Politics of Speech, and Taste

Creativity is like emancipation so totally over. Emancipation? Is that a guy with a ponytail? What is this talk about the spectator emancipating himself? Oh, I know it's old school and so 2005, but I still hear it out there, e-man-ci-pa-tion – what a nice word to use. Bah, most art has no desire to emancipate anything at all and perhaps they're best off with their curious yet surprised view on the world.

No emancipation. No way, it's business as usual. You know that choreographers have no idea. No idea what they are working on nor why. It's just some inner feeling that makes it happen, a sort of a mix between poetry, "I want to be an artist" and business-mindedness. The worst is interest. Bleuurgh! "-I'm interested in..." this is bad, very bad. What do you mean you are interested in...? I believe it means the cultivation of unconventional or even foreign capacities remaining within a given territory. It also means to postpone a possible statement and remain negotiable. People that are "interested in" won't stand up for their shit, totally not ready for the emancipation and that's where we misread Rancière. Eat this, if our spectators emancipate themselves they won't come back to the theatre.

Mårten Spångberg (2011, 77-8)

Voice(s)-over

I first encountered the preceding lines on a late November night of 2011, in a quiet hotel room by the Kemojiki River in Rovaniemi, Finland. They come from a small book others and I were given earlier that day, when the sun had already set on the *Popular Culture & World Politics IV* conference, at the University of Lapland. Titled *Spångbergianism*, in echo of Deleuze's *Le bergsonisme*, this book was written, published, and distributed by Swedish choreographer Mårten Spångberg, who gave the second of four keynote addresses that weekend. The pamphlet's preface asserts from the outset that

This book is a performance. It was put together over sixty-four days as a sort of rehearsal, during which every day resulted in a showing [forbid them] in the shape of a blog-post. It's material, form and content is the result of a daily practice, aiming at two minor issues – to change the world [permanently], and second to find a way out of our present predicament [FFW apocalypse] concerning dance and choreography but also capitalism in general [why be modest]. It's one hundred and something pages of hysterical accusations, oversized banalities, slamming of already open doors, over the top categorical statements, unmotivated mood-swings, cheese making and paranoid [in the good sense of the word] arrogance (Spångberg 2011, 8; brackets in the text).

“[I]n a lingua that don't identify with either magazine flattery nor to models provided by constipated academics”, the choreographer phrases the imperative to write in this way: “We are all aware that if we don't open our mouths we won't be kept responsible for nothing. So let's get loud, let's speak our word and stand tall. We are engaging in choreography remember and that's important shit” (9-10). Spångberg's intervention by the Arctic Circle was a response to and a reiteration of this call to resolute expression. Beginning with a “grounding” exercise that had us, the audience, close our eyes and concentrate on our breathing and posture to the sound of his voice, it was an attempt at performing something other than a linearly argumentative lecture—a rambling, playful experiment with the forms and forces of ingrained scholarly habits.

Naming Rancière enables Spångberg to substantiate his claim that phrasing what matters politically through emancipation is a popular scholarly habit. The strength of this habit is sensible in the appeal of writing, here, that Spångberg's own work matters precisely because it seeks something like “emancipation from emancipation”. What would be at stake in claiming that his practices participate in or of an emancipatory

dispositif, notwithstanding his rejection of the term? Is it adequate, and/or is it a sign of violent appropriation to claim he seeks emancipation by any other name, so to speak?

Many of the problems involved in advancing a qualification of a practice that goes against an explicit assertion of the concerned practitioners regarding its sense have to do with the politics of speech, and taste. For one, this gesture repeats maneuvers that have been thoroughly critiqued, not least from post-/de-colonial feminist quarters, as expressions of asymmetric relations that tend to reinforce asymmetry (Spivak 1988). Such voicing-over are said to silence many immanent voices from one or many allegedly transcendent speaking position(s) held in the name of knowledge production. It is claimed we should seek to free ourselves from such modes of thought and expression, if only to foster creative and responsive (re)descriptions that do not merely reiterate long-held opinions (Tully 2008, 15-38). On the other hand, the violences of such voicing-over are repeatedly legitimized via the claim that, since any (re)description constitutes one possible account but never “the whole story”, its value and adequacy are anything but given (Luhmann 2002). Is it not naïve to think people can tell just what it is they are doing? Is it not precisely from this questionable belief that the sciences and philosophy seek to emancipate, however partially? If it is so, how is one to take a choreographer’s claim that “choreographers have no idea. No idea what they are working on nor why”?

Isabelle Stengers, a philosopher working at the Université Libre in Brussels, has been thinking through related matters of concern by taking into account “what imports” as what makes a practice *unlike* any other. Her “ecology of practices” begins with

the demand that no practice be defined as 'like any other', just as no living species is like any other. Approaching a practice then means approaching it as it diverges, that is, feeling its borders, experimenting with the questions which

practitioners may accept as relevant, even if they are not their own questions, rather than posing insulting questions that would lead them to mobilise and transform the border into a defense against their outside (Stengers 2005, 184).

A possible effect of insisting on a qualification like the one I hesitated to risk above (naming emancipatory a practice that expressly tries to diverge from formulations of its sense and effects in terms of emancipation) is that it has the acrid taste of an insult. For Stengers, what asks to be thought in claims that refold a voiced difference into a silent identity is not an ethical or moral problem but a pragmatic, tactical one: potentially insulting phrases are polemogenous, and as such they limit the possibilities of alliances.

Stengers' insistence on the weaving of alliances can be unfolded by recounting how her claims on the significance of "insults" and on the correlative requirement to learn to "speak well" to and of other practices and practitioners imposed themselves during the so-called science wars of the end of the 20th century. Stengers has been researching possibilities of alliances between various practices since her first book, co-written with a winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry (Prigogine & Stengers 1979). She soon noticed that self-described critical claims to the effect that "the sciences [are] a practice like any other" because scientific truths are "mere social constructions" have either deeply offended scientists, prompting fierce attempts at delegitimizing in return any and all critical study of scientific practices, or provoked but shrugs (Stengers 2006, 9)⁴⁴. These

⁴⁴ Anticipating on the fourth chapter of this dissertation, which engages aesthetics of friction and the politics of touch, one may want to formulate the distinction between these two gestures (counter-attack and indifference) in terms of differentials of *irritability*, in the language of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (e.g. Luhmann 2006 [1991], 55). One could hypothesize, for instance, that the bitter and often aggressive characters of many *physicists'* responses to "constructivist" sociologies of science in the 1980s and 90s were linked to the rise of biological, and especially biotechnological research in the fields of genomics and genetic engineering. Those research programs were arguably funded at the expense of the once dominant but then somewhat deserted field of fundamental research in physics. In other words, the powers and the importance of physics were attacked on two fronts simultaneously. This may account for its irritability, for the stress it experienced as a field during the years that preceded the contemporary era of large particle accelerators. This hypothesis offers a way of reading "the Sokal hoax", for instance, in sociological terms. The reactions of

“constructivist” claims seem to have had no transformative effect on the continuation of scientific business as usual, while, precisely, scientists increasingly find themselves confronted to the logics and exigencies of capitalistic business (Stengers 2009, 118). Such polemical phrases may even have prevented the voicing of common concerns with these and other transformations of research undergone in both critical and scientific nebulas. In her essay on “resisting the barbarity to come”, Stengers writes that, in order “to avoid throwing the baby out with the bath water, [she] had to try to ‘speak well’ of scientific practices (at least of those that teach us something new of the world and of things, that is, not of all the sciences), to describe their specific power (*force propre*), which is irreducible to general social relations, and to delink this power from any acquaintance with a rationality that non-scientists would be lacking” (117; I translate). This prompted her to ask this difficult question: what *oblige*s practitioners? What makes them think, tick, hesitate and stutter? What makes physicists dance in a laboratory, as they rarely yet sometimes do? What makes a choreographer write a “theory” book?

The question of what *oblige*s or imports is quite general. For Stengers, however, the credible responses are always “concrete”. This is to say that they not only depend on singular practices: they are what singularize a practice as such. It seems, for instance, that physicists joyfully dance “when the facts have spoken”. It is the occurrence of this rare joy that the philosopher tries to recount, for facts do not speak randomly, without

philosophers to this event may also be read in terms of irritation. On the general proposition that “the happy ending of [a] stress phase [is] of even greater importance than the stress itself” for an entity to maintain itself, see Heiner Mühlmann’s Maximal Stress Cooperation (MSC) theory (Mühlmann 2005, 10ff.; for a reading of post-1945 Franco-German relations through this lens, see Sloterdijk 2009c). Indifference, which is figured above by a shrug or a polite smile on the part of critiqued scientists, can also be read in terms of systemic irritation by considering that “the sciences” and “the sociology of science” are two distinct (sub-)systems that cannot, strictly speaking, communicate with one another insofar as each one is a participant to the other’s “environment”. In this respect, one would have to acknowledge that the irritation provoked by so-called constructivist claims has been insufficient to make a difference in the daily practices of most researchers.

preparation and care⁴⁵. A question like “do neutrinos have a mass?” is only settled when an adequate dispositive has become or remains capable of forcing those who care into an agreement. Otherwise, they tend to suspend judgment. Whether facts have spoken is what makes physicists hesitate *as physicists*, and how to make facts speak in an acceptable way (whatever that means *for them*) obliges them to think, experiment, collaborate and create in common. What makes Stengers intervene, *as a philosopher*, is the sense that the new “enclosure movement” in “the economy of knowledge” expressed by the unprecedented valuation of patents—*who dances for a patent?*—is destroying such collective practices of attentive, careful creation. The ways she redescribes what imports for physicists differ from, but try to take into account how physics describes itself (see Visvanathan 1984).

⁴⁵ Stengers’ insistence on “joy” is not only pragmatic: it is pragmatist, if one considers how it echoes William James’ assertion, itself borrowed from Robert Louis Stevenson, that “to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action” (from Stevenson’s “The Lantern-bearers”, cited in James 1900, 240). I owe the discovery of James’ text to Luhmann’s late conference on the Frankfurt School, “I see something you don’t see”, which is concerned with the problem of adequate description in contemporary conjunctures. Luhmann writes, in a remarkably ocularcentric register: “Social class, therapist, free-floating intelligentsia—one continues to search for a position of observation that explains to oneself and to others their inability to see and that thereby places within reach knowledge of the world about which one can ultimately agree. And how else is one to get up the courage needed to revolutionize society or to therapeutically heal people? The practical interests inhibit the observation and description of the new way of observing; and William James alone drew attention to precisely this fact in a little-noticed lecture, ‘On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings’ [James 1900, 229-64]. /If the official academic epistemology takes no notice at all, up to this very day, of what is taking shape here, this is to be attributed not least to the insufficiencies of the formulation of this alternative project that is ‘critical of ideology’. In the meantime, however, neocybernetic systems theory is working on a theoretical design with a much more radical starting point. The overall problematic is transferred by authors such as Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana, and Ranulph Glanville onto the level of observing systems. Reality is only what is observed. But in contrast to the subjective deviation of idealism, the empirical observation of empirical observers is essential for what is ultimately accepted as reality” (Luhmann 2002, 189-90). James summarizes his stance in this paragraph: “‘To miss the joy is to miss all.’ Indeed, it is. Yet we are but finite, and each one of us has some single specialized vocation of his own. And it seems as if energy in the service of its particular duties might be got only by hardening the heart toward everything unlike them. Our deadness toward all but one particular kind of joy would thus be the price we inevitably have to pay for being practical creatures. Only in some pitiful dreamer, some philosopher, poet, or romancer, or when the common practical man becomes a lover, does the hard externality give way, and a gleam of insight into the ejective world, as [William Kingdon] Clifford called it, the vast world of inner life beyond us, so different from that of outer seeming, illuminate our mind. Then the whole scheme of our customary values gets confounded, then our self is riven and its narrow interests fly to pieces, then a new centre and a new perspective must be found” (James 1900, 240-1). James’ claims interestingly echo some of Plato’s considerations in *The Republic*, which are expressed not only in the crucial principle “one man, one art” that serves to build “the city in speech”, but also in passing remarks by Plato’s Socrates, such as: “But, further, we surely know that when someone’s desires incline strongly to some one thing, they are therefore weaker with respect to the rest, like a stream that has been channeled off in that other direction” (Plato 1991 [ca. 380 BCE], 485d).

Her rephrasings envisage a critical rethinking of what matters *now* by cultivating possibilities of emancipation from the *grand récit* of a necessary universal Emancipation via techno-scientific Progress. Stengers affirms and modulates these phrases' powers by expliciting the alliances they enable and prevent.

As for Spångberg, his written exclamations (“Bah”, “Bleuurgh!”) regarding certain phrases suggest that the politics of speech involve a sense of (dis)taste. He is repulsed by the word emancipation. Like imagination and creativity, he deems it an order-word of “the big corporation” (Spångberg 2011, 74-6). Still, two neighboring tropes, “to change the world” and “to find a way out of our present predicament”, bring him to write that

the way artistic production functions is precisely in that gap, the double desire for contemporaneity and at the same time for relevance. /“-I want to do work that concerns people. To catch the audience off guard, to make them feel something... something specific, you know something political.” /But you know, there is no way out of that paradox. Something political is never contemporary, it's just more of the same. Simple opinions, however complex, it just doesn't matter. *Politics never matters, mattering is not part of its job.* And if you want your audience to feel something, and even worse something specific you better think again. Feelings are not contemporary, emotions are definitely not, they are conventional, commissioned and coproduced. Feelings, emotions and lately even affects have already been in PACT for a residency. Choreography is trapped in it's own fresh conservatism (44; I underline).

In this conjuncture, the choreographer invites “more piracy” because “it's about theft, but not of ‘some thing’, but of something irreplaceable, i.e. *the ability to authorize voice.* [...]”

Piracy is never about lack, it is a desiring machine that instead of breaking out, is breaking apart, *opening for the emergence of an alternative politics: the capacity of a struggle that matters*” (167-8; I underline). To explain away the tensions between these claims as incoherencies would be to miss the joy that obliges one to speak out thusly.

1. Politics and/as emancipation: productively interruptive phrases

In this second chapter, I engage the following hypothesis: *aesthetics of emancipation act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of logomachies*. In other words—and this is precisely about other words, about divergent phrasings—, determining what counts and what does not count politically tends to be formulated as a matter of evaluating conflicting claims whose variably qualifying effects can be sensed as more or less effective modulations of interruption, suspension, displacement, or change. To claim, say, that maintaining possibilities of alliances with physicists is as crucial, politically, as learning the art of not insulting choreographers may well trouble the quiet belief in a self-evident distribution of what must be truly significant forces and what is but inconsequential, artsy chatter.

This second specific hypothesis neither contradicts nor repeats the one engaged in the first chapter. They are to be articulated in relation to one another if distributions of political importance imply aesthetics of politics and modulations of violences as interwoven concerns. That “politics bears on what we see and what we can say about it, on who has the competence to see and the quality to say” (Rancière 2000, 14), on “the very interpretation of what people do with their mouth” (Rancière 2009, 121), hints at the co-implication of ocularcentric and logomachic accounts of political life. Speech is a credible contender to the title of prevalent practice by which political importance distributes itself. Before engaging the claim that “the speech act, comprehended as the performed articulation of lived space-time, is to be taken as the paradigm of political action” (Giroux 2008, 551), a refolding of politological uses of emancipation is in order.

1.1 The prevalence of the notion of an emancipation from what prevails

Spångberg's and Stengers' interventions both suggest that emancipation is a loaded term, a polemical word that acts as a significant trope in contemporary political and politological claims. To speak of emancipation is to evoke (and perhaps to invoke) many histories of often-violent struggles. It is, notably, to evoke violences done in the very name, or in one of the many names of emancipation. The word development, for instance, has been termed "genocidal" (Visvanathan 2011; 1987, 38). Accounts of what emancipation entails abound. Explicit definitions are contentious sites of conflicting claims. This issue of the (in)definition of emancipation is telling: that many "critical" politologies insist on the possibility of a form of emancipation from definitions, on productive interruptions of the essentializing violences of seemingly prevalent identity-centered modes of phrasing politics as a matter of emancipatory practices, suggests that aesthetics of emancipation are key to the politics of speech, and taste.

The hypothesis advanced above performs a troubling operation by asserting that aesthetics of emancipation act as prerequisites. Emancipation is often phrased as an endpoint, as a goal, an objective or a horizon to be reached—even if it can only ever be asymptotically—, but apparently not as a condition or a prerequisite, that is as a starting point, or as what must or does somehow precede at least some starting points. This first formulation could be accounted for by an etymological genealogy of the term that would make explicit how emancipation comes from the Latin *emancipare*; how it names the letting-go of a handling ("ex- 'out, away' + *mancipare* 'deliver, transfer or sell,' from *mancipum* 'ownership,' from *manus* 'hand' + *capere* 'take'"); and how, in ancient Roman law, it named "the freeing of a son or wife from the legal authority (*patria*

potestas) of the *pater familias*, to make his or her own way in the world”⁴⁶. Achieving this plausibly desirable status required a felicitous performative utterance: in the right context, having a rightly authorized agent say or write in the right way that one was now free could effectively make one so. In this juristic sense, still at play in practices like the emancipation of minors from parental responsibility, one is either emancipated or not. Furthermore, once one is emancipated it is generally for good. Following this usage, emancipation is *granted*. Admittedly, this granting can only be performed by an instance that is itself already free in some way. Any emancipation thus appears to be conditional upon a prior one. If only in that sense, emancipation can be said to act as a prerequisite.

While the rather rare freeing of slaves was called manumission (*manumissio*) in Roman law, and enfranchisement (*affranchissement*) under the French *Code Noir* that was in effect from 1685 to 1848 (Sala-Molins 2005 [1987], 192-201), the documents known as the 1863 American *Emancipation Proclamation* and the 1861 Russian *Emancipation Manifesto*, which concerned slaves and serfs respectively, both signal an extension of the use of the term to this occurrence. The United Kingdom’s *Roman Catholic Relief Act* of 1829, commonly known as the Catholic Emancipation Act, signals an extension to “freedom of religion”, which etymologists trace to the 17th century.

In his 1843 review essay of Bruno Bauer’s *On the Jewish Question*, Karl Marx begins thusly: “The German Jews seek emancipation. What sort of emancipation do they want? Civil, political emancipation. Bruno Bauer answers them: No one in Germany is politically emancipated. We ourselves are not free. How then could we liberate you?” (Marx 2000, 40) In Marx’s works, which still inform self-described critical, emancipatory

⁴⁶ I am citing Douglas Harper’s *Online Etymology Dictionary*, which cross-references a variety of written sources. See <http://www.etymonline.com/> (Accessed July 1, 2012).

politologies, emancipation is not univocal. Marx even presents the differentiation of types of emancipation as the crux of his critique of Bauer, writing that “It is in no way sufficient to inquire: Who should emancipate? Who should be emancipated? A proper critique would have a third question—*what sort of emancipation* is under discussion? What preconditions are essential for the required emancipation?” (50) Marx claims that Bauer “does not investigate the relationship of political to human emancipation and thus poses conditions that are only explicable by supposing an uncritical confusion of political emancipation and universal human emancipation” (51). The former is partial: it relies on and even reinforces prevailing relations of production. The latter is radical: it involves transformations in “man’s species-being”⁴⁷. In the introduction to his 1844 “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*”, Marx further specifies how a “universal human emancipation” may occur by discussing the German conjuncture:

⁴⁷ Marxist geographer David Harvey recently underlined that this notion of “species-being” bears witness to the influence of Kant’s anthropology on Marx’s thought, especially in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, although it “does occasionally exercise a shadowy influence” in *Capital* (Harvey 2010, 112; 173). In his contribution to *Lire le Capital*, co-written and published in 1965 by Louis Althusser and four of his students, Étienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, Roger Establet and himself, Rancière points to this influence in these terms: “[I]f the problem of Marx’s relation to Hegel has been abundantly thematized, we have not thought a relation that is perhaps decisive for thinking the rupture between the critique of the young Marx and that of the mature Marx, the Kant/Marx relation. We can ask ourselves whether the terrain on which the young Marx stands is not drawn by the Kantian oppositions (autonomy/heteronomy, person/thing, mean/end). It would then be appropriate to study, in *Capital*, the displacement of these oppositions, for example the displacement of the person/thing opposition into the concepts of support and personification. We should also ask ourselves to what extent the concepts of means and ends of the capitalist mode of production operate this desubjectivation of the means/ends opposition” (Rancière 1973, 27; I translate). I am using Marx’s name for a first folding of aesthetics of emancipation onto the politics of speech, and taste, in reason of the persistent powers of evocation of this name in relation to political and politological claims around emancipation, and around a certain persistence of emancipation as a live notion in contemporary conjunctures. In doing so, I am leaving aside any detailed discussion of an “epistemological break” (*rupture épistémologique*) that would distinguish a young, ideological Marx from a mature, scientific one (on this “break”, see Althusser 1996 [1965], who borrows the concept from Gaston Bachelard). I mention this rupture, which Rancière is hinting at in the passage cited above, because it has been read as the sign of an “intellectual emancipation” of Marx himself from former habits of thought. In any case, I hold that the notion of emancipation remained a constant matter of concern in Marx’s work. According to Harvey’s reading of *Capital*, the anthropological notion of “species-being” remained operative in Marx’s latest works. According to Althusser, however, there is a “theoretical anti-humanism in Marx” that should be taken into account. This expression implies that in Marx’s “scientific” works, the category of “man” did *not* play “[a role such as] it could not be deleted from the whole without altering the functioning of the whole” (Althusser 1976 [1975], p. 163). I come back to Kant’s anthropology and to the notion of “man” throughout the following sub-sections.

So where is the real possibility of a German emancipation? /We answer: in the formation of a class with radical chains, a class in civil society that is not a class of civil society, of a social group that is the dissolution of all social groups, of a sphere that has a universal character because of its universal sufferings and lays claim to no particular right, because it is the object of no particular injustice but of injustice in general. This class can no longer lay claim to a historical status, but only to a human one. It is not in a one-sided opposition to the consequences of the German political regime, it is in total opposition to its presuppositions. *It is, finally, a sphere that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating these other spheres themselves. In a word, it is the complete loss of humanity and thus can only recover itself by a complete redemption of humanity.* This dissolution of society, as a particular class, is the proletariat. [...] The emancipation of Germany is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat (81-2; I underline).

Twenty years later, these considerations will receive a more cosmopolitan, or rather, an internationalist expression in the 1864 *General Rules* of the First International⁴⁸. The proletariat's emancipatory quality is said to depend upon the prior emancipation of the capitalist bourgeoisie from the feudal *Ancien Régime*. Emancipation is not granted: it is *conquered* in collective struggles that interrupt and reconfigure prevailing conditions.

An influential story now acknowledges the significance of Marx's account yet holds that he misconceived "the subject of emancipation" by identifying it with the sole proletariat. Beside exegetical debates on just who Marx himself counted in this class-that-is-not-one, this story tells that a multiplicity of "emancipatory subjects" have since manifested themselves on the world-stage of political life: after the bourgeoisie and

⁴⁸ The text can be found online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1864/rules.htm> (Accessed July 1, 2012). When reading this inaugural text, I find it difficult not to think of the "failure" of the *Second* International, that is of the very occurrence of the First World War as a massacre of the European working classes in the name of mythified nationalisms that prevailed over internationalist socialism. I return to the First World War in the third section of this chapter.

workers came women, artists, colonized peoples, students, migrants, sexual minorities (Pieterse 1992)—and stranger entities, like the multitude (Hardt & Negri 2004) or the city (Lees 2004). The naming of these entities, the determination of their number, status and how they (dis/re)appear are possibly explosive matters that may lead (and have led) to murderous violences⁴⁹. Formally, one trait seems invariant: in virtually all cases, an emancipatory entity presents itself

⁴⁹ To get a sense of the potentially very consequential character of how the question of the modes of existence of “emancipatory subjects” is formulated and dealt with, it should suffice to ponder the implications of Stalinist and Maoist reinterpretations of what counts as a social class, of what a class *is* and what it is entitled to do. Peter Sloterdijk writes: “If it is appropriate to describe the history of events in the Soviet Union as a drama of the lost innocence of the revolution, the application of hatred against larger farmers—and after 1934 also against so-called midsized farmers (those who owned up to two cows)—marked the transition of the Stalinist U.S.S.R. to an open psychopolitics of dirty energies. In its course, the ‘class’ of those semi-starved was sent into battle against the ‘class’ of those barely able to survive—with the pretense that this would be the most contemporary form of revolutionary struggle in the fatherland of the world proletariat. Stalin himself provided the justification by contributing a new ‘class analysis’ from the vantage point of somebody who was riding on the witch’s broom of solitary illumination: according to this justification, it was legitimate to call for a ‘liquidation of the kulaks as a class’ in the name of the Marxist classics. A kulak or ‘great farmer’ was identified as somebody who produced enough in order to provide for his own family and a few laborers—with an occasional surplus sold at markets or in the city. This injustice against the working masses was not in the future allowed to remain unpunished. To avenge it, a demonstration was needed to show what ‘terrorism in one country’ was capable of achieving. /The reason behind the events was concealed in the random broadening of the concept of ‘class struggle.’ Suddenly it was no longer mentioned that the bourgeois epoch had ‘simplified’ class oppositions in terms of a clear opposition of bourgeoisie and proletariat, as the *Communist Manifesto* stated. After Stalin had elevated the kulaks to the rank of a ‘class,’ and by calling them ‘counter-revolutionary,’ this class was ordered to be liquidated overnight in substitution for the barely existing and quickly extinguished bourgeoisie. From that point on, it was evident for everybody who wanted to know that every form of ‘class analysis’ entails the demarcation of fronts at which the executioners confront those to be executed. Mao Zedong also came up with a new ‘class analysis’ when inciting the Chinese youth against the ‘class’ of the old during the great Cultural Revolution. /It is important to realize that we are not merely talking about terminological finesse here. If one continues to speak about classes after Stalin and Mao, one makes an assertion concerning the perpetrators and the victims in a potential or actual (class) genocide. As smarter Marxists have always known, ‘class’ is a descriptive sociological term only at the surface level. In reality, it is primarily strategic in nature because its content materializes only through the formation of a combat collective (a confessional or ideologically formed maximum-stress-cooperation unit). If one uses it affirmatively and, *eo ipso*, performatively, one makes an assertion stating who is justified to extinguish whom under which kind of pretense. Class thinking ranks far above race thinking when it comes to the release of genocidal energies in the twentieth century” (Sloterdijk 2010a, 164-5). These lines recall Carl Schmitt’s discussion of “class war” as a possible configuration of the political “criterion” that is the friend/enemy distinction (Schmitt 2007 [1927/32], 37-8). In *Rage and Time*, from which I take the lines above, Sloterdijk proposes to think “the left” as an “international banking institution” that both accumulates and multiplies “rage”, or *thumos*, which is “Europe’s first word”, i.e. the word that comes at the beginning of the first sentence of Homer’s *Iliad* (Sloterdijk 2010a, 1). More precisely, Sloterdijk claims that “the left” was able to operate as this “bank of rage” for a time that now seems to have passed. These remarks bring me to make explicit that claims about the importance of emancipation and even about a relationship between emancipation and determinations of what matters politically are voiced from and circulate through virtually every corner of the so-called political spectrum. What differ, for instance in terms of “left” and “right”, are the entities that are deemed emancipatory. The “form” seems to endure.

as that fraction which is capable of presenting its own emancipation as the *criterion* of general emancipation (or as that fraction which, in continuing in slavery and alienation, inevitably entails the unfreedom of all). [...] And these examples go to show that, in reality, the whole history of emancipation is not so much the history of the demanding of unknown rights as of the real struggle to enjoy rights which *have already been declared* (Balibar 2002, 6).

This language of rights that need to be (re)conquered so they may be effectively exercised is broadly associated with “Modernity” and with “the Enlightenment”. There is a sense, however, in which enlightenment is less the name of an epoch than that of singular processes of self-determination and subjectivation, of emancipation. As for the uneasiness that now risks accompanying these terms, it echoes voices that try to interrupt—to break out from, or to break apart—prevailing aesthetics of emancipation.

1.2 Speech as the paradigm of political action

Emancipation, thought as a prerequisite, is an obvious instance of what is said to matter politically. What feminists, for instance, make explicit is not only a predominance of men and masculinity in relations of desire, gender and sex, but also the very possibilities of reconfiguring these relations, of productively interrupting this prevalence by modulating the violences it (de)legitimizes. Such interruptions of what appears to be given are said to occur through a politicization of some of the categories and logics at work in—of the very words put in our mouth by—a set of conjunctures. Emancipation is not only a matter of seeing things differently: it implies the assumption of a possibility of speaking differently of what is in/visible. Collective practices of “consciousness-raising” thus seek to foster the sharing of experiences of domination so that a prevalent configuration can be voiced as such. On such occasions, it may even start to change with those who speak.

According to influential accounts of how language works (e.g. Wittgenstein 2001a [1953]), the very obviousness of the importance of emancipation is a function of linguistic practices. In politological and political claims, however, emancipation is not only an instance of what imports. Aesthetics of emancipation, formulations of emancipation as a form of experience, act as prerequisites to this determination as it is phrased in terms of lived logomachies that involve possibilities of change in what counts politically. Phrases, spoken, written, or acted, are thus said to make and unmake worlds.

Nuanced formulations of this stance can be found in Immanuel Kant's late works, and perhaps especially in his much-discussed 1784 article "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" (Kant 1991a) I read this text as arguing that determining what counts politically requires the possibility of emancipation as a practice of the ability to deal critically with a proliferation of diverging claims concerning the very ways in which occasions are sensed and made sense of. Accordingly, even claims to the effect that the notion of a definitive, necessary and universal Emancipation should now be abandoned given its historical involvement in the legitimation of many murderous "experiments" carried in its name express a logomachic problematization of distributions of political importance. These claims posit that it is possible to sense and to make sense differently of the very difference it makes to use the word emancipation to speak of political life. In return, this practice of (re)evaluating the variously worlding effects of words and phrases, of how speech articulates different "human space-times" and how, as such, it should be deemed "the paradigm of political action" (Giroux 2008), has itself been termed emancipatory, or critical. The soundness of this quasi-automatic identification of emancipation and critique can be felt through the appeal of the order-word: *learn to think*

for yourself! A cliché of commencement speeches that gathers what is arguably sought in and achieved by a Liberal Education (Wallace 2009; Strauss 1989a), this order-word also strikes more ancient chords that seem to phrase “individuals” as the “subjects” of emancipation: it echoes, say, the Socratic (or Platonic) invitation to exit (or to let oneself be dragged out of) the cave of *doxa* for the sun of *gnosis*⁵⁰. Iterations of this order-word are dealt with in intricate ways in Kant’s “Answer”, which partakes to and of a *dispositif* placing self-determination, subjectivation, autonomy, and creativity at the limits—at the beginnings and ends—of “our” political imagination. It is worth patiently refolding it.

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Kant’s “Answer”, which is presented as *an* answer, as one among many, begins thusly: “*Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of the enlightenment is therefore: Sapere Aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding*” (Kant 1991a, 54). The notion of a moving-across from immaturity to enlightenment evokes that of a

⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that in Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates tells the story of a recently “freed” prisoner being “dragged out” of the famous allegorical cave (Plato 1991, 515e-516a). This allegory is arguably the most enduring story of a difficult yet not impossible emancipation-through-philosophy that keeps circulating throughout so-called Western culture. The agency at work in this “dragging out” is first left undefined. It soon appears to be human as it is identified with some *one* who has already been dragged out of, and then came back into, this cave of opinion that is said to be the habitual realm of political life proper. Philosophy is thus phrased as the art of “turning around” both oneself and others (518d). In these famous lines, Plato’s Socrates asks: “And if they [who are still prisoners] were somehow able to get their hands on and kill *the man who attempts to release and lead up*, wouldn’t they kill him?” (517a; I underline) This passage evidently evokes how Socrates was condemned by Athens and chose to die. The exemplarily violent welcome reserved to contemplators of “the form of the Good” who come back into the cave has served to justify a “retreat” from the opinionated conversations on the current affairs of the imperfect *polis*—from a political life that is only concerned with “mere shadows” (496c-e; 500c). This retreat is a privileging of the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*, of the theoretical life over the practical life, to speak a language that was revived by Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss in their American teachings. On Strauss and Arendt’s rather strange silence about one another, read through their respective positions on practical and theoretical life, see Beiner 1990.

guarded passageway between legal minority and majority. *Aufklärung* can thus be said to operate as a name of emancipation. Kant's claim is irreducible to a strictly juridical language for it is doubtful that legal minority can be truly self-incurred, and he can hardly maintain that one can consider being enlightened once and for all—unless he holds resolution can be unwavering, that one needs not to pluck up one's courage anew on each occasion; but enlightenment is precisely this practice of “courage”. Kant writes of “man's exit” (*der Ausgang des Menschen*) from “his self-incurred immaturity” (*seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit*)⁵¹. This claim is anthropological in a general, or indeed in a Kantian sense of the word. It raises the fourth, and for Kant perhaps the most important question of philosophy: not “what can I know?”, “what ought I do?”, nor “what may I hope?”, but “what is man?” (Kant 1992 [1800], 538; see Balibar 2011, 29n1; Foucault 2008 [1964]) Kant writes *Mensch* (human being, *anthropos*), not *Mann* (male, *aner, andros*), to name what is in principle a possibility for any and all humans anywhere, anytime. Still, the text raises “the question of our present” (Foucault (2001a [1984]), and conventions arguably affect who is said to be a “full” member of the category “man”⁵².

⁵¹ Mary C. Smith offers this translation: “Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed *nonage*” (<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html> (Accessed October 2, 2012); I underline). In his 1967 course on Kant's political philosophy, Leo Strauss translated the last part of this first sentence by “the *tutelage* for which he himself is responsible” (see, or rather listen to Strauss 2010a, Recording 9; I underline and transcribe). Immaturity seems to me the most adequate term because it is more likely to express a quality that can manifest itself unannounced at any “age”, at any moment, as an always possible “live” option.

⁵² In 1783, Kant described his own enlightenment, as it were, or what is often called his critical turn, his “awakening”, by “freely admit[ting] it was David Hume's remark [on causality as a habit of thought] that first, many years ago, interrupted [his] dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to [his] enquiries in the field of speculative philosophy” (Kant 2004, 10). In his 1764-1765 “Remarks in the *Observations on the feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*”, Kant acknowledged being indebted to Rousseau for a first transformation in his mode of thought. He wrote: “I myself am a researcher by inclination. I feel the entire thirst for cognition and the eager restlessness to proceed further in it, as well as the satisfaction at every acquisition. There was a time when I believed this alone could constitute the honor of humankind, and I despised the rabble who knows nothing. *Rousseau* has set me right. This blinding prejudice vanishes, I learn to honor human beings, and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impart a value to all others in order to establish the rights of humanity” (Kant 2011, 96). Arguably, Kant thereby distanced himself from the tradition that considered “theoretical life” as being infinitely more valuable than “practical life”. I cite these lines in which Kant includes—as if it was needed, as

For Kant, immaturity is prevalent at the time of writing—which philosopher ever claimed otherwise, if only as a starting point? The second paragraph begins thusly: “Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a proportion of men, even when nature has long emancipated them from alien guidance (*naturaliter maiorennnes*), nevertheless gladly remain immature for life. For the same reasons, it is all too easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so convenient to be immature!” (Kant 1991a, 54)⁵³ Kant phrases such guardianship as dehumanizing:

Having first infatuated their *domesticated animals*, and
carefully prevented the *docile creatures* from daring to take

if it was possible *not* to include—“the rabble” into “humankind” because with respect to the question of the classification of “empirical” living beings as more or less human, they echo some of Rousseau’s own anthropological ponderings.

I am thinking, in particular, of a note by Rousseau to his 1755 *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in which he discusses European travelers’ accounts of creatures whose in/humanity is disputed. He writes that while “it is well demonstrated that the monkey is not a variety of man: not only because he is deprived of the faculty of speech, but above all because it is certain that his species does not have the faculty of perfecting itself, which is the specific characteristic of the human species”, similar “experiments [do] not seem to have been made on the pongos and the orangutan with sufficient care to enable the same conclusion in their case. [...] Precipitous judgments, which are not the fruit of an enlightened reason (*raison éclairée*), are prone to be excessive. Without any fanfare, our travelers made into beasts, under the names *pongos*, *mandrills*, *orangutans*, the same beings that the ancients, under the names *satyr*, *fauns*, *sylvans*, made into divinities. Perhaps, after more precise investigations it will be found that they are neither beasts nor gods but men” (Rousseau 1987, 98n10). After claiming that a “feral child” who ended up learning how to speak would have been sent back to the woods by “our travelers”, “after which they would have spoken eruditely about him in their fine accounts as a very curious beast who looked rather like a man”, Rousseau writes: “For the three or four hundred years since the inhabitants of Europe inundated the other parts of the world and continually published new collections of travels and stories, I am convinced that we know no other men but the Europeans alone. Moreover, it would appear, from the ridiculous prejudices that have not been extinguished even among men of letters, that everybody does hardly anything under the pompous name of ‘the study of man’ except study the men of his country” (99; this last sentence indicates that the previous one does not quite claim that Europeans are the only humans, but that this is what Europeans tend to assume). Rousseau concludes by asserting that until “truly wise” observers stop projecting the known onto the unknown and become able to convince “us” in their saying “of an animal that it is a man and of another that it is a beast”, “it would be terribly simpleminded to defer in this to unsophisticated travelers, concerning whom we will sometimes be tempted to put the same question that they dabble at resolving concerning other animals” (100-1). One should therefore suspend judgment. Rousseau’s charge against prejudices and against deference to self-proclaimed authorities prefigures Kant’s “Answer” on *Aufklärung*.

⁵³ In a sentence that risks displeasing the contemporary ear (especially for its parenthesis), Kant adds, a few lines below: “The guardians who have kindly taken upon themselves the work of supervision will soon see to it that by far the largest part of mankind (including the entire fair sex) should consider the step forward to maturity not only as difficult but also highly dangerous” (Kant 1991a, 54). This sentence shows how focusing on *anthropos* does not mean that the gendered *andros* is not at stake. I explicitly engage the language of more or less regularly distributed “inclinations” at work in Kant’s claims in the next chapter, which is concerned with aesthetics of temperament and the politics of hearing.

a single step without *the leading-strings to which they are tied*, they next show them the danger which threatens them if they try to walk unaided. Now this danger is not in fact so very great, for they would certainly learn to walk eventually after a few falls. But an example of this kind is intimidating, and usually frightens them off from further attempts. /Thus it is difficult for each separate individual to work his way out of the immaturity which has become almost *second nature* to him. He has even grown fond of it and is really incapable for the time being of using his own understanding, because he was never allowed to make the attempt (54; I underline).

Variations on this last claim populate accounts of alienation, of people being “totally not ready for the emancipation” (Spångberg 2011, 78). They abound in stories on what, in 1548, a young Étienne de La Boétie decisively termed *la servitude volontaire*⁵⁴. These claims imply the prevalence of immaturity is a practical issue: it can recede. Emancipation is phrased as a historical problem. To put it boldly, what it puts into play is a humanization, a becoming-human of *homo sapiens*, through *and* beyond individuals.

⁵⁴ Kant’s use of the expression “second nature” in the passage cited effectively echoes La Boétie’s posthumously published treatise. The *périgordien* wrote: “[F]reedom (*la liberté*) is natural, and, in my opinion, not only are we born with our freedom, but also with the desire to defend it. [...] Beasts (God help me!), if only men would listen to them, are screaming: *Vive la liberté!* [...] And thus, since any being which has the sentience of its [own] existence feels the woe of subjection and seeks freedom; since beasts, those very ones which were created for the service of men, can only submit themselves after having manifested an opposite desire; what unfortunate vice has been able to so much denature man, alone truly born to live free, to the point of making him lose the remembrance of his first state and the very desire to take it back?” (La Boétie 2009 [1574], 20-1; I translate) La Boétie’s answer to his own question is habit, *l’habitude*: “It is true to say that in the beginning, it is despite oneself and by force that we serve; but then we get used to it and those who come after, having never known freedom, not even knowing what it is, serve without regret and do voluntarily what their fathers had only done under constraint. And so the men who are born under the yoke, fed and raised in serfdom without looking further afield, are content with living as they were born, and not thinking they have other rights, nor other goods than those they found when they entered life, they take for the state of nature the very state of their birth. [...] [H]abit, which in all things exercises its empire on all our actions, has most of all the power to teach us to serve; it is she (*elle*) who in the long run [...] succeeds in making us swallow without repugnance the bitter venom of serfdom. No doubt it is nature which first directs us according to the good or bad inclinations she gave us; but we must also acknowledge that she has even less power over us than habit; for, as good as is the natural, it disappears if it is not maintained (*entretenu*); while habit always shapes us (*nous façonne*) in its manner despite our natural inclinations” (23-4). According to this story, emancipation amounts to a *rediscovery* of a “natural” equal freedom through a process that is akin to that described in the myth of knowledge as recollection (*anamnesis*) in Plato’s *Meno* (Plato 1967, 81a-e). This “first nature” is buried under multiple layers of sedimented, servile habits that come to constitute a “second nature”, as Kant puts it. In principle the first one stays intact and can be recovered, albeit with some difficulty.

I read Kant as arguing that what “truly” matters politically can be determined as such via public discussions of politics. While “only a few, by cultivating their own minds, have succeeded in freeing themselves from immaturity and in continuing boldly on their way” (Kant 1991a, 54)—and Kant does seem to include himself in this lot, presupposing, as it were, his own “critical awakening”—, he holds “[t]here is more chance for an entire public enlightening itself. This is indeed almost inevitable, if only the public concerned is left in freedom” (55). Kant claims “[t]he freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all—freedom to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matters”. He specifies: “by the public use of one’s own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*. What I term the private use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular *civil* post or office with which he is entrusted”. In principle, anyone can practice, if in turn, both uses of reason (*Vernunft*)⁵⁵. The private use of reason needs to be limited for political reasons: “in some affairs which affect the interests of the commonwealth, we require a certain

⁵⁵ A conceptual difficulty arises with regard to the seemingly undifferentiated uses of the nouns *Verstand* and *Vernunft* in Kant’s “Answer”, which are respectively translated as understanding and reason in English, and as *entendement* and *raison* in French. Is Kant using the terms in the “technical” sense articulated in his first *Critique*, or is he using them in a so-called colloquial sense? Given that his “Answer” was published in a review and that Kant does not, in the text, present any explicit account of “the play of faculties”, of the relationship between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, or even of the articulation of sensibility to the “powers of the mind”, I think they can be read as interchangeable terms that name what I would call sense-making “in general”—a practice principally distinguished from sense-perception “proper”, although the two are inextricably linked to one another, not least in the Kantian account of the relationship between intuition and thought, or sense and sense. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Kant does not speak of a courage or resolution to use one’s *sensibility* without the guidance of another, or of private or public uses of *perception*.

Regarding the claim that anyone can in principle use his or her reason both publicly and privately, one may want to ponder how Kant associates the public use of reason with that which one makes “*as a man of learning*”, and consider who he deems qualified as such. I believe that Kant’s occasional insistence on the “respect” due to “the great multitude”, which I document in this sub-section, can support this “egalitarian” reading. In “matters of conscience”, as Kant puts it, the *knowledge* that is in question is precisely *not* reserved to those who practice scholarly investigations. One could—and many have—nonetheless advance that Kant’s intention is elitist insofar as his discussion of enlightenment relies on an exclusion of those whose “immaturity” is caused by “lack of understanding”, which can be read as the lack of a specific body of knowledge and/or a lack of the very “faculty” of *Verstand*. In that sense, Kant’s claims—as exemplary of “Western Enlightenment”—have rightly been said to participate to and of justifications of colonial endeavors through which entire peoples are confined to the status of “minors” (see Pinkoski 2008, 174)

mechanism whereby some members of the commonwealth must behave purely passively, so that they may, by an artificial common agreement, be employed by the government for public ends (or at least deterred from vitiating them)” (56). The public use of reason involves practices of expression such as the production and circulation of written texts. Kant presents his own work as trying to secure the conditions of this publicity⁵⁶.

The Königsberg philosopher comes closest to being counselor to the Prince when he insists that “outward obstacles imposed by governments” (59) ought to concern only the private use of reason, lest “the progress of enlightenment” risks being hindered. This is to say that this “civilizational” process is not guaranteed: “Men will of their own accord gradually work their way out of barbarism so long as artificial measures are not deliberately adopted to keep them in it”. On the state of this process, Kant writes:

⁵⁶ Kant repeatedly equates publicity and writing. He writes that the individual who uses “his” own understanding does so “as a man of learning who may through his writings address a public in the truest sense of the word” (Kant 1991a, 56); “as a scholar addressing the real public (i.e. the world at large) through his writings” (57); and that ideally, “each citizen, particularly the clergyman, would be given a free hand as a scholar to comment publicly, i.e. in his writings, on the inadequacies of current institutions” (57). This last claim indicates that the public use of reason does concern discussions of political life, of “current institutions”. In his 1967 lecture on Kant’s “Answer”, Strauss asserts that Kant implied, although he did not explicitly mention, that the texts at stake are in German—which first means: *not in Latin* (Strauss 2010a, Recording 9). A contemporary *récit* tells that by the end of the 18th century, what Kant names “the entire reading public” was growing fast along with the dissemination of printing presses. This “public” was no longer restricted to a few men who mastered the old *lingua franca* of the European intelligentsia. Kant himself is writing in German. In contradistinction, less than a century before, Leibniz only wrote a few of his texts in German, preferring Latin and French. Frederick the Great himself is said to have preferred French to German (Richeson 2008, 19). It is also noteworthy that Kant explicitly mentions the increasing number of *women* who can read. He does so in a parenthesis in the strange Postscript to the also quite strange third and last part of his late *The Conflict of the Faculties*, as he gives recommendations on the materiality of texts: “I might also suggest that the author of the art of prolonging human life (and in particular, literary life) kindly consider the protection of readers’ eyes (especially the now large number of women readers, who may feel more strongly about the nuisance of glasses). At present our eyes are harassed from all sides by the wretched affectations of book printers (for letters, considered as pictures, have no intrinsic beauty at all). In Moroccan cities, a large percentage of the inhabitants are blind because all the houses are whitewashed; and to prevent this evil from spreading among us from a similar cause, printers should be subjected to police regulations in this respect” (Kant 1979 [1799], 209, 211). Kant then goes on to recommend the use of a specific font, among other technicalities. I think one can assume that his dubious claim on a widespread blindness in Moroccan cities comes from his engagement with travelers’ accounts (critiqued by Rousseau, as noted above) in the context of his anthropological investigations. I think one could also explore how Kant’s strange observation signals that the *Aufklärung* makes its “home”, how it sets camp, as it were, in *writings* (see Sloterdijk 2000).

If it is now asked whether we at present live in an *enlightened* age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*. As things are at present, we still have a long way to go before men as a whole can be in a position (or can even be put into a position) of using their own understanding confidently and well in religious matters, without outside guidance. But we do have distinct indications that the way is now being cleared for them to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to universal enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer. In this respect our age is the age of enlightenment, the century of *Frederick* (58).

The Prussian monarch is presented as a “shining example” (59), as “the man who first liberated mankind from immaturity (as far as government is concerned), and who left all men free to use their own reason in all matters of conscience” (58-9). For Kant, “only a ruler who is himself enlightened and has no fear of phantoms, yet who likewise has at hand a well-disciplined and numerous army to guarantee public security, may say what no republic would dare to say: *Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!*” (59) This claim concentrates how Kant's politics of speech, and taste, imply aesthetics of emancipation. It effectively acknowledges the variously worlding *and* polemogenous effects of the circulation of claims, as well as the sheer contingency of finding oneself bound to an “enlightened” authority. Kant himself was soon to experience this issue of timing. Frederick II, known as the Great, died in 1786, and his successor, Frederick William II, was to rule until 1797. “Together, the [new] King, his favorite minister, and the coterie of likeminded officials they gathered around them launched a campaign to ‘stamp out the Enlightenment’ [and] limit ‘the impetuosity of today's so-called enlighteners’ by censoring all writings dealing in any way with religious matters” (Gregor 1979, ix-x). In *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1979 [1799]), Kant later discusses

publicly the insistent letter he received in 1794 ordering him to stop arguing in a way that “displeases” his King. He also tells how he obeyed—as long as *that* king lived.

*

Emancipation matters for thinking distributions of political importance as it is phrased as a prerequisite for assessing what “truly” imports. The worlds of which Kant gives a taste are made of and by opinionated logomachies. Kant may thus have accepted what Peter Sloterdijk names “Plato’s discovery [that] people are in no shortage of words, but of the right words”, that “people speak too much, they lie too much, they say too many stupid things. They thus express themselves, as we say so cutely today, and they tell too many stories, and they insult one another, surrendering to polemogenous and aberrant communications. How can we reduce this production of speech to a necessary kernel?” (in Sloterdijk & Baudrillard 1999; I translate) Kant’s critical project is concerned with a rarefaction of speech, with a deflation of sense to be operated through and under the “eternal and unchangeable laws” of reason (Kant 1998 [1781], A xii). What are the three Critiques, if not attempts at tracing the line(s) between what can be said by who, when, where, and how, with any authority, legitimacy and value, concerning “man” and “the world”? Kant seems to encourage a proliferation of claims, an inflation of sense through his call to foster a free public use of reason “in all matters of conscience”. However, this freedom is strictly bounded: “reason” is always already its judge. Kant thus phrased both critique and politics as preliminary activities that are required to enable other worlding practices. Politics is arguably more primary since singular forms of political life can foster critique itself contra the dogmas of “the schools”. This is a field of struggles among

scholars and rulers, for “the great multitude” remains deaf to scholarly claims⁵⁷. The idea of a *critique* of political reason seems to put “the ends of man” into question.

What of these ends? Are they not of the utmost *political* importance, almost by definition? Kant makes many claims on the subject. In his “Answer”, he writes: “One age cannot enter into an alliance on oath to put the next age in a position where it would be

⁵⁷ This last assertion informs how Kant formulated something like a “policy recommendation” three years after having published his short article on enlightenment, and one year after the death of Frederick the Great. In the 1787 Preface to the Second Edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant further textures the distinction between public and private uses of reason. His recommendation comes at the end of a long paragraph in which he defends the theoretically decisive yet “socially” inoffensive effects of the critique of reason itself. In this account, criticism is public—as such, it should not be hindered—while “the schools” are said to defend private dogmas that can—and should—be controlled.

This passage is worth quoting at length: “I ask the most inflexible dogmatist whether the proof of the continuation of our soul after death drawn from the simplicity of substance, or the proof of freedom of the will against universal mechanism drawn from the subtle though powerless distinctions between subjective and objective practical necessity, or the proof of the existence of God drawn from the concept of a most real being (or from the contingency of what is alterable and the necessity of a first mover), have ever, after originating in the schools, been able to reach the public or have the least influence over its convictions? If that has never happened, and if it can never be expected to happen, owing to the unsuitability of the common human understanding for such subtle speculation; if rather the conviction that reaches the public, insofar as it rests on rational grounds, had to be effected by something else [...] then this possession [of knowledge by the schools] not only remains undisturbed, but it even gains in respect through the fact that *now the schools are instructed to pretend to no higher or more comprehensive insight on any point touching the universal human concerns than the insight that is accessible to the great multitude (who are always most worthy of our respect), and to limit themselves to the cultivation of those grounds of proof alone that can be grasped universally and are sufficient from a moral standpoint.* The alteration thus concerns only the arrogant claims of the schools, which would gladly let themselves be taken for the sole experts and guardians of such truths (as they can rightly be taken in many other parts of knowledge), sharing with the public only the use of such truths, while keeping the key to them for themselves (*quod mecum nescit, salus vult scire videri*). Yet care is taken for a more equitable claim on the part of the speculative philosopher. He remains the exclusive trustee of a *science that is useful to the public even without their knowledge, namely the critique of reason; for the latter can never become popular, but also has no need of being so*; for just as little as the people want to fill their heads with fine-spun arguments for useful truths, so just as little do the equally subtle objections against these truths ever enter their minds; on the contrary, because the school inevitably falls into both, as does everyone who raises himself to speculation, *the critique of reason is bound once and for all to prevent, by a fundamental investigation of the rights of speculative reason, the scandal that sooner or later has to be noticed even among the people in the disputes in which, in the absence of criticism, metaphysicians (and among these in the end even clerics) inevitably involve themselves, and in which they afterwards even falsify their own doctrines.* Through criticism alone can we sever the very root of **materialism**, **fatalism**, **atheism**, of freethinking **unbelief**, of **enthusiasm** and **superstition**, which can become generally injurious, and finally also of **idealism** and **skepticism**, which are more dangerous to the schools and can hardly be transmitted to the public. *If governments find it good to concern themselves with the affairs of scholars, then it would accord better with their wise solicitude both for the sciences and for humanity if they favored the freedom of such a critique, by which alone the treatments of reason can be put on a firm footing, instead of supporting the ridiculous despotism of the schools, which raise a loud cry of public danger whenever someone tears apart their cobwebs, of which the public has never taken any notice, and hence the loss of which it can also never feel*” (Kant 1998 [1787], 117-9 [B xxxii-xxxv]; I underline; bold in the text). Arguably, *The Conflict of the Faculties* offers a continuation of the problematization of these matters of concern by explicitly considering the organization of the university that may enable the effective implementation of Kant’s “pacifying” recommendations (see Derrida 2004 [1980]; Lyotard 1985).

impossible for it to extend and correct its knowledge, particularly on such important matters [as religion], or to make any progress whatsoever in enlightenment. This would be a crime against human nature, whose original destiny lies precisely in such progress” (Kant 1991a, 57). In another famous 1784 article, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”, he writes: “The greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally” (Kant 1991b, 45)⁵⁸. Kant is also known to have written “Man [...] *exists* as end in itself, and *not merely as means*” (cited in Derrida 1969, 31). These claims reiterate the Aristotelian determination of “man” as a political animal and as the only rational/speaking animal, woven into Rousseau’s account of the species as the only one which has “the faculty of perfecting itself” (Rousseau 1987 [1755], 98). These claims are teleological: the end rests within the beginning and consists in its fullest deployment. Kant’s starting point is the *as if* of sense—for practical reasons⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ If one were to playfully experiment with Strauss’ indication that sometimes (i.e. not always), rhetorical and political considerations can lead a speaker or a writer—say, an attorney facing a tribunal—to place his or her most important claim(s), which may also be the most fragile or the least amenable to be put into words (and for these very reasons, the most crucial one(s)), at the *center* rather than at the beginning or end of his or her speech, i.e. at that middle point where and when the addressees’ attention risks being least acute and where attackers will have the most difficulty to arrive (Strauss 2010b [1960], Recording 7 [near the middle]), one would hold a sufficient reason for specifically pondering how this is Kant’s *fifth* proposition out of nine. Interestingly, it is this proposition which addresses most explicitly what is most important—what is termed “the greatest problem for the human species” (Kant 1991b, 45), “both the most difficult and the last to be solved by the human race” (46), which is only subordinate to “the problem of a law-governed external relationship with other states” as its condition. On Kant’s art of writing, see Strauss 1988 [1952], 33n12.

⁵⁹ To posit an end, a sense, a direction or an orientation to “nature” and to human history as a *part* of nature is repeatedly presented by Kant as a necessity *if* morality is to be possible, *if* history is to be something else than sheer contingency or senselessness. These claims prefigure Luhmann’s question: “how else is one to get up the courage needed to revolutionize society or to therapeutically heal people?” (Luhmann 2002, 189) Insisting on a faculty of perfecting oneself is not necessarily—although it often is—equivalent to presuming that *homo sapiens* is a superior species; it may “simply” be its *specific* quality. In a teleological mode of thought, one may consider that species that “cannot perfect themselves” are precisely in *no need* of doing so because they are, as it were, already perfect. This claim is expressed by French legal scholar and psychoanalyst Pierre Legendre: “We are confronted by the fact that the world is given to the human being by language, that it is language that both separates the human being from things outside, and divides it within itself. As to the fact of being separated from outside things, this is what puts the human being, whether unbeknownst or beknownst, under the yoke of a universe of representation, bestowing it with a surrounding much more difficult to master and richer in obstacles than that encountered by the other, more perfect, species” (Legendre 2006, 148).

Kant's "Answer" is concerned with the importance of the free public rational discussion of "*matters of religion*" (Kant 1991a, 59). He gives two reasons for this "focal point". First, "our rulers have no interest in assuming the role of guardians over their subjects so far as the arts and sciences are concerned"—a strange claim, given Plato's Socrates' "inaugural" expulsion of (some) poets in *The Republic*, and Rousseau's lament over the corrupting effect of "the arts and the sciences". Second, "religious immaturity is the most pernicious and dishonourable variety of all"—a less contentious claim, given the place held by religious civil war in the Modern-Western political imagination, at least since Hobbes (1998a [1651]; 1969 [1668]). Religion, if it can be in the singular, deals with salvation—as universal a concern as death⁶⁰? "So long as [the sovereign] sees to it that all true or imagined improvements are compatible with the civil order, he can otherwise leave his subjects to do whatever they find necessary for their salvation, which is none of his business. But it is of his business to stop anyone forcibly hindering others from working as best as they can to define and promote their salvation" (Kant 1991a, 58). Phrasing "the civil order" as that which must be preserved from the proliferation of claims on salvation is to say: *one must save one's city before one can save one's soul*⁶¹. It is seemingly in this spirit that Kant rephrases *Aufklärung* in *The Conflict of the Faculties*:

⁶⁰ For Kant, what is questionable is the reverse possibility, namely that of putting religion in the plural. In a footnote to his 1795-96 "Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch", he writes: "*Religious differences*—an odd expression! As if we were to speak of different *moralities*. There may certainly be different historical *confessions*, although these have nothing to do with religion itself but only with changes in the means used to further religion, and are thus the province of historical research. And there may be just as many different religious *books* (the Zend-Avesta, the Vedas, the Koran, etc.). But there can only be *one religion* which is valid for all men and at all times. Thus the different confessions can scarcely be more than the vehicles of religion; these are fortuitous, and may vary with differences in time or place" (Kant 1991c, 114).

⁶¹ This sentence has been linked to Machiavelli's political thought, for instance by Strauss: "It is misleading to describe the thinker Machiavelli as a patriot. He is a patriot of a particular kind: *he is more concerned with the salvation of his fatherland than with the salvation of his soul*. His patriotism therefore presupposes a comprehensive reflection regarding the status of the fatherland on the one hand and of the soul on the other. This comprehensive reflection, and not patriotism, is the core of Machiavelli's thought. This comprehensive reflection, and not his patriotism, established his fame and made him the teacher of many men in all countries.

Enlightenment of the masses is the public instruction of the people in its duties and rights vis-à-vis the state to which they belong. Since only natural rights and rights arising out of the common human understanding are concerned here, then the natural heralds and expositors of these among the people are not officially appointed by the state but are free professors of law, that is philosophers who, precisely because this freedom is allowed to them, are objectionable to the state, which always desire to rule alone; and they are decried, under the name of enlighteners, as persons dangerous to the state, although their voice is not addressed confidentially to the people (as the people take scarcely any or no notice at all of it and of their writings) but is

The substance of his thought is not Florentine, or even Italian, but universal. It concerns, and it is meant to concern, all thinking men regardless of time and place” (Strauss 1969 [1958], 10-1; I underline). A more recent remark reads: “[N]ot everyone was as convinced as Machiavelli that the freedom of one’s secular home is more important than the salvation of one’s soul” (R. Walker 2009, 82; see also 289n34: “the recovery of Machiavelli from Straussian accounts of modernity is one of the most important sites of contemporary political critique”). In Chapter III, below, I turn to Max Weber’s engagement with Machiavelli’s sentence.

One of the key documents supporting the attribution of this sentence to Machiavelli is a late letter: “[Machiavelli] wrote, a few months before dying, in a letter from Forlì, dated 16 April 1527: ‘I love my *patria* (fatherland) more than my own soul.’ Or perhaps we should say, he may have written those words, since in the text copied by Giuliano de’ Ricci, after the phrase, ‘I love my native city more,’ there is an emphatic erasure. It is a reasonable conjecture that the words that were blotted out were ‘than my own soul.’ All of the editors of Machiavelli’s letters have accepted that conjecture. ‘To love one’s native city, or fatherland, more than one’s soul’—*Amare la patria più dell’anima*—was a very common manner of speech in Florence. Machiavelli himself had quoted the expression in the *Florentine Histories*, when he described the war between Florence and Pope Gregory XI” (Viroli 2010, 35). Note that Allan Bloom’s translation of Plato’s *Republic* explicitly uses the language of salvation in relation to the problem of the relationship between “the city” and “man”. In effect, Plato’s text presents a “solution” to the aporia—to the fact that saving one’s soul may require abandoning one’s city and that saving one’s city may require abandoning one’s soul, as it were—by requiring “the Guardians” to avoid all contacts with money and wealth. This solution follows the much-commented “noble lie” passage. It continues “the myth of metals”: “We’ll tell [the Guardians] that gold and silver of a divine sort from the gods they have in their soul always and have no further need of the human sort; nor is it holy to pollute the possession of the former by mixing it with the possession of the mortal sort, because many unholy things have been done for the sake of the currency of the many, while theirs is untainted. But for them alone of those in the city it is not lawful to handle and to touch gold and silver, nor to go under the same roof with it, nor to hang it from their persons, nor to drink from silver and gold. And thus they would save themselves as well as save the city” (Plato 1991, 416e-417a). See also Bloom’s mentor’s “Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History”, where Strauss links the city-or-soul aporia to the determination of the importance of political life as such: “One may say that the theme of political history is human power, but power viewed sympathetically. Power is a very imprecise term. Let us therefore speak of freedom and empire. Political history presupposes that freedom and empire are, not unreasonably, mankind’s great objectives—that freedom and empire are legitimate objects of admiration. Freedom and empire elicit the greatest efforts of large bodies of men. That greatness is impressive. That greatness can be seen or felt by everyone, and it is a greatness which affects the fate of everyone. The theme of political history is massive and popular. Political history requires that this massive and popular theme call forth a massive and popular response. Political history belongs to a political life in which many participate. It belongs to a republican political life, to the polis. Political history will be important only if politics is important. Political history will reach its full stature, it will be of decisive importance, only if politics is of decisive importance. But *politics will be of decisive importance only to men who prefer (as some Florentines did) the salvation of their city to the salvation of their souls: to men who are dominated by the spirit of republican virtue, by the spirit of the polis*” (Strauss 1989b [1946], 73-4; I underline).

addressed respectfully to the state; and they implore the state to take to heart that need which is felt to be legitimate. This can happen by no other means than that of publicity in the event that an entire people cares to bring forward its grievances (gravamen). Thus the prohibition of publicity impedes the progress of a people toward improvement, even in that which applies to the least of its claims, namely its simple, natural right (Kant 1979 [1799], 161).

At the time of writing, these lines make sensible how Kant's claims on what I call aesthetics of emancipation feel both very familiar and very distant. This is precisely why they are useful "guides" for thinking logomachic determinations of political importance.

2. Suspensions: tasting limits & elevating hooks

A guide does two things: preceding one or many along what, for any number of reasons, the guide deems the right path; and giving reasons, explaining, telling why and how it is the right one, how far the objective remains, what are the alternative routes better left untraveled, etc. The latter may not occur, but having a silent guide is reputedly unsettling: it fosters doubts, jeopardizes confidence, and may even put a halt to the journey. One then risks being unable both to continue and to go back⁶². The pedagogical art of a guide is a matter of sharing a certain grasp of what imports. This grasp is arguably what the guided should seek to secure as well, "for oneself", to become able to travel

⁶² For a theatrical engagement with a configuration of the guide/guided relationship that features a porter in a crucial mediating role, see Bertolt Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* (Brecht 1977). In this short "didactic play" (*Lehrstücke*), a Western capitalist merchant traveling across an unknown Eastern desert to find oil ends up firing his guide and, later on, killing his porter, when he thought the latter was attacking him—he was in fact offering the merchant the last drops of water he had in his gourd. Once in the courtroom, the merchant and the judge agree that the merchant had good reasons to fear his porter: being of an "inferior class", the latter could only hate a richer man—*who wouldn't?* The merchant could not reasonably be asked to expect a poorer man to be so exceptional that he would not want to kill a richer man when the opportunity arose, and was thus justified in killing him as he approached silently. The merchant is declared not guilty. Written in the early 1930s, this play shows the intertwining of colonial and class relationships in a way that may trouble the easiness with which general propositions like the one I just formulated ("A guide does two things...") can be accepted as valid "in general", as "the rule". Note that Brecht's title knowingly echoes the language of Carl Schmitt, as does another *Lehrstücke*, *The Measures Taken*, that evokes the notion of state of emergency. On Brecht's relationship to Schmitt's political theory, which he knew and seems to have taken quite seriously, see Simons 2009 and Müller-Schöll 2004.

independently or at least to judge if a trip is in order. This supposes that this grasp of what imports is unequally distributed. There is also an art of choosing one's guide.

In his "Answer", Kant lists three guiding entities: a book, a spiritual adviser, and a doctor (Kant 1991a, 54). Since his own writings have been deemed repositories of political, spiritual, and even therapeutic advice, the question one faces is not only if Kant "sets himself up as a guardian", but whether, when reading Kant, one is using one's own understanding without the guidance of... Kant! As I ventriloquize Kant's claims to fold stories of logomachic determinations of variations in distributions of political importance onto aesthetics of emancipation, am I quietly relying on his (or on another's) authority, or am I thinking for myself? How can one *know* whether one is emancipated or not, and whether one's immaturity is self-incurred, or due to lack of understanding? One thing seems certain: a judgment to this effect cannot come from "outside" as this would seem to be a sign of immaturity. What can it mean for it to come from "inside"?

Kant makes these potentially muting worries import. His claims saturate a field of problematizations of emancipation since searching to suspend any of their questionable assumptions may be a Kantian move. This complication is less dependent on Kant himself—for one, there are many Kants—than on the impression that many claims on aesthetics of emancipation and on the politics of speech, and taste, circulating in contemporary conjunctures often contra Kant find remarkable echoes in his writings. The so-called Kantian subject, say, which is often critiqued as the icon of prevalent, Modern-Western views of an autonomous and liberal individual subject is rarely if ever phrased by Kant as being as sovereignly isolated as many contemporaries would have it. Rather, it tends to be presented as always already inextricably entangled in a multiplicity of

relationships constituted through proliferating logomachies that stand on the verge of disorder and nonsense—hence the difficulty of “autonomy”—and that make it a “relational subject” from the outset. Kant is useful for he phrases this as a problem. This is not to say that he said it all, nor well. Some of his claims do legitimize violences in worryingly efficient ways, especially when these violences are said to foster or to even be required for establishing a “perpetual peace” that is not that of graveyards⁶³. In that sense, the question that imposes itself is that of the lines of fracture or creation that articulate themselves onto “Kantian” phrasings that have become lines of sedimentation or history. What seems un/translatable or in/acceptable in contemporary conjunctures? What feels adequate? What feels inadequate, and even repugnant in these formulations of the relations between sense and the senses, between aesthetics, violences and political importance? I hold these questions refold themselves along stories of taste.

2.1 A sense of one’s place

Many contemporary claims that can be articulated to, if not subsumed under the claim that what matters more or less, politically, is determined as such through logomachies,

⁶³ Here I am thinking of a famous (or infamous) early footnote to “Perpetual Peace” that arguably legitimizes colonial, genocidal violences. Kant writes: “It is usually assumed that one cannot take hostile action against anyone unless one has already been actively *injured* by them. This is perfectly correct if both parties are living in a *legal civil state*. For the fact that the one has entered such a state gives the required guarantee to the other, since both are subject to the same authority. But man (or an individual people) in a mere state of nature robs me of any such security and injures me by virtue of this very state in which he coexists with me. He may not have injured me actively (*facto*), but he does injure me by the very lawlessness of his state (*statu iniusto*), for he is a permanent threat to me, and I can require him either to enter into a common lawful state along with me or to move away from my vicinity. Thus the postulate on which all the following articles are based is that all men who can at all influence one another must adhere to some kind of civil constitution. But any legal constitution, as far as the persons who live under it are concerned, will conform to one of the three following types: /(1) a constitution based on the *civil right* of individuals within a nation (*ius civitatis*). /(2) a constitution based on the *international right* of states in their relationships with one another (*ius gentium*). /(3) a constitution based on *cosmopolitan right*, in so far as individuals and states, coexisting in an external relationship of mutual influences, may be regarded as citizens of a universal state of mankind (*ius cosmopoliticum*). This classification with respect to the idea of a perpetual peace, is not arbitrary, but necessary. For if even one of the parties were able to influence the others physically and yet itself remained in a state of nature, there would be a risk of war, which it is precisely the aim of the above articles to prevent” (Kant 1991c, 98-9).

through decisive encounters between claims, insist on saying that major changes occurred since Kant's days. One of them is said to be a delocalization or a liquefaction of power or a dilution of authority. It is said there is no center anymore, no self-evident agency of alienation, domination, and exploitation one may assuredly try to resist—or to secure. This claim assumes that what imports politically relates to power and authority.

Derrida phrased this story of dilution in a remarkable way in his reading of how Kant, in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, deals with the letter he received from his king:

Among us, perhaps, in 1980, there may be some who dream of receiving such a letter, a letter from a prince or sovereign at least letting us locate the law in a body and assign censorship to a simple mechanism within a determined, unique, punctual, monarchical place. [...] Whatever one thinks of [Kant's] system of justification [in his preface], the nostalgia that some of us may feel in the face of this situation perhaps derives from this value of responsibility [put forth by the King in his 1794 missive]: at least one could believe, at that time, that responsibility was to be taken—for something, and before some determinable someone. One could at least pretend to know whom one was addressing, and where to situate power; a debate on the topics of teaching, knowledge, and philosophy could at least be posed in terms of responsibility. The instances invoked—the State, the sovereign, the people, knowledge, action, truth, the university—held a place in discourse that was guaranteed, decidable, and, in every sense of this word, “representable”; and a common code could guarantee, at least on faith, a minimum of translatability for any possible discourse in such a context (Derrida 2004 [1980], 86-7).

Derrida knows any discourse deconstructs itself. To what extent is the difficulty to situate power a function of his own “situation”, or in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, of intellectuals misrecognizing their dominant position? Many people(s) seem very much aware of just who and what alienates, dominates, exploits and censors today. What of this awareness?

This is a question of taste, if one accepts Bourdieu's claim, in *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, that taste functions as a "*sense of one's place*" (Bourdieu 1979, 544; English in the text). Qualifications like treacly, sweet, mushy, or *à l'eau de rose*, for instance, tend to be used in contemptuous ways. This contempt relies on a hierarchical articulation of "the taste of the senses" to "the taste of reflection", of the allegedly immediate sensations of dis/satisfaction that depend on taste buds and other "low organs" to the supposedly distanced and disinterested thoughts of reason, the latter being more distinguished and discriminating than the former (567-9)⁶⁴. For Bourdieu, there is a concrete, practical ground to these idealized hierarchies that are working to erase or to negate "*the indivisibility of taste, the unity of the 'purest' and the 'impurest', or 'coarsest' of tastes*" (565; I translate): the fact of inequality. It is said any society or field is divided into dominant and dominated individuals and groups. Within this (societal) distribution of parts and places, this division of (social) labor, anyone will most probably have the tastes of one's class, a claim the sociologist seeks to document by statistical research. If one has the tastes of another class than one's "own", it is most plausibly a sign that one is engaged in an (always risky) ascending or descending trajectory within the general distribution of material and symbolic possessions. This very distribution is internalized, it is embodied in and through quotidian practices: "Objective limits turn into [a] *sense of limits*, [a] practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by the experience of objective limits, [a] *sense of one's place* that leads to excluding oneself

⁶⁴ In Bourdieu's account, a "simple" reversal or inversion that would privilege the taste of the senses over the taste of reflection, the "popular" and "bodily" over the "noble" and "intellectual" would not suspend the reproduction of the very form involved in the hierarchical distinction between two types of taste, and between two types of tasters in function of which type of taste is said to predominate in the life of these "agents".

(goods, persons, places, etc.) from what one is excluded from” (549). For the sociologist, there is no real outside to this self-reproducing most general distribution⁶⁵.

This most general distribution of positions matters for distributions of political importance because it is said to “found” what Bourdieu calls a “principle of pertinence”:

The foundation of the principle of pertinence that is put to work (*mis en oeuvre*) by the perception of the social world and that defines the set (*l'ensemble*) of characteristics of the things or the people susceptible to be perceived, and perceived as interesting, positively or negatively, by all (*l'ensemble*) those who put these schemes into work (another definition of common sense), is nothing but the interest that the individuals or groups considered have in recognizing this trait and the belonging of the individual considered to the set defined by this trait: *the interest for the perceived aspect is never completely independent of the interest to perceive it* (554).

In this story, the very distinction that Kant exposes between the two types of taste he articulates to one another in his third *Critique* is not universal, but a function of his own particular objective interests as a member of “the dominated fraction of the dominant class”, which is typically the position of “intellectuals” (568). Kant could arguably not voice this since one is always partly blind to one’s position, which defines and delimits from where one can and does see and speak. Bourdieu seems to claim for himself the ability to see and *speak* this general field of positions. This is not to say he can step out of the most general distribution, however. Rather, he claims to operate in a different field

⁶⁵ One could argue that Bourdieu’s perspective is fundamentally statist insofar as it seems to consider there is only one “society”, one “world” at stake—one most general distribution. His analyses are nonetheless amenable to account for how those who are excluded from the “fields” under study—which can be “international”—are included *as* outsiders, and are even required as such in order for a field to exist at all as a bounded “cultural” territory. Bourdieu also acknowledges something like a “global” division of social labor that involves practices of “othering”. He underlines the “anthropological” aspect of his concerns as he asserts that “the stake (*l'enjeu*) of the aesthetic discourse, and of the imposition of *a definition of the properly human* that it aims to realize, is nothing but, in the end, the *monopoly of humanity*” (Bourdieu 1979, 573; I translate). Bourdieu appends this footnote to the last sentence: “We see what is hidden by the *Sollen* [the ought] enclosed in the apparently constative statements in which Kant encapsulates the definition of pure taste”.

than the one under study—say in academia rather than in the art world, however porous their borders may be. He can thus be said to voice the modesty that scientists often assert (perhaps since Kant) to be an inevitable corollary of the limited certainty that can be attributed to any claim whatsoever. Still, there remains a sense in which the sociologist pretends to be more capable of suspension, displacement or elevation than both “the masses” and “purist intellectuals”, whom he both portrays as forgetting, silencing, or misrecognizing the “objective limits” that determine their possible experiences⁶⁶.

Bourdieu’s account helps to make sense of Spångberg’s remarks on (and distaste for) the claim “I’m interested in”, cited at the inception of this chapter. The objective limits that weave a sense of one’s place distribute what can and cannot be said and done, “postpon[ing] a possible statement” (Spångberg 2011, 78) relatively to one’s more or less “negotiable” position. An impossible statement is such as one would say: you cannot say that! These limits are said to be objective because they effectively structure what individuals and groups can bear to deem important, interesting, relevant, pertinent, significant, etc. To express being interested in even implicates “the most absolute form of recognition of the social order” (Bourdieu 1979, 549; I translate) for it “reveals” and reproduces “embodied social structures” (545). For Bourdieu, there is a

⁶⁶ In the last part of his post-scriptum to *La distinction*, after a discussion of Kant’s “classical” aesthetic theory and of its intentional absence from his book, Bourdieu singles out Derrida among those he calls “purists”. He comments on Derrida’s “pure reading” of Kant’s third *Critique* and claims that this practice of “pure reading”—Derrida taking the third *Critique* as an aesthetic object, against what the text itself allows or says of itself—is at home in the disciplinary field of professional philosophy, with its rituals and customs, its passwords and hierarchies. For Bourdieu, Derrida’s “transgressive” reading is enabled by and thus included in the repetitive “mainstream” as a “marginal” and creative reading, while being involved in “struggles of classifications” at the *internal* borders of philosophy. It is anecdotal yet interesting to note that Derrida and Bourdieu were friends. On the subject, see Derrida’s short posthumous homage to Bourdieu, seven days after his death, in the Fifth session (January 30, 2002) of the first volume of Derrida’s posthumously published seminar *La bête et le souverain (2001-2002)*, where he says they were friends “for fifty years”, and where he singles out the moment when, in the same room as that in which he is then speaking, they both took part in founding the “CISIA, Comité international de soutien aux intellectuels algériens”, in 1993 (Derrida 2009, 136; on the politics of friendship, see Derrida 1994).

relative autonomy of the logic of symbolic representations from the material determinants of the condition: the struggles of classifications (*classements*), individual or collective, that aim at transforming the categories of the apperception and appreciation of the social world and, thereby, the social world [itself], are a forgotten dimension of class struggle. But it suffices to have in mind that the classificatory schemes that are at the principle of the practical relation that agents have with their condition and of the representation they can have of it are themselves the product of this condition to see the limits of this autonomy: the position in struggles of classifications depends upon the position in the structure of classes[,] and social subjects—starting with intellectuals[,] who are not in the best position to think what defines the limits of their thought on the social world, namely the illusion of the absence of limits—possibly never have less chances to overcome (*dépasser*) “the limits of their brain” than in the representation they offer and give [to] themselves of their position, which defines these limits (564).

Accepting Bourdieu’s account means that one can hold that aesthetics of emancipation act as “abstract” prerequisites to the determination of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of logomachies, but that one needs to acknowledge that the social-material configurations of class struggle act as the “concrete” conditions of this very formulation. In Marxian terms, the language of prerequisites belongs to “the superstructure”. It is the language of conditions that can account for the determinant character of the “base” *in the last instance* (Althusser 1976, 138-51). For Spångberg, the ways in which theatre and dance depend upon statist and capitalist institutions explain their “incapacity” to enable transformative experiences: these arts are too bourgeois, emancipation requires rejecting them. But here, Spångberg seems to misread Rancière

Spångberg shares with Rancière a certain disdain for sociology. He writes: “Sociology. Taste it. What do you experience? So-ci-o-lo-gy. Admit it, it’s embarrassing. There is a taste of enthusiasm, of desire to engage, however always at decent distance. I

shiver when I think about it” (Spångberg 2011, 80). His distaste is informed by the emergence of so-called sociological art: “Something has gone terribly wrong with dance, it’s flooded with sociology all over the place. [...] With a generous gesture they, the sociologists, offer their dancers create the choreography by themselves, obviously under the supervision of the author who through this gesture swears himself free from any responsibility and at the same time produces himself as invincible” (81-2). Rancière’s critical redescription of sociology in general, and of Bourdieu’s work in particular, finds an echo in this notion of producing oneself, *as a sociologist*, as “invincible”.

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Rancière’s stance can be gathered in a few words: starting from the fact of inequality can only reproduce inequality. His counter-proposition is to start with what he calls the opinion of equality, by which he implies that inequality is a *doxa* too. In *Le maître ignorant. Cinq leçons sur l’émancipation intellectuelle* (Rancière 2004c [1987]), in which he ventriloquizes the claims of early-19th century French “emancipator” Joseph Jacotot which he encountered while working in the archives of the French workers’ movement (Rancière 2005 [1981]), Rancière contrasts these two axiomatic propositions by naming the former “the stultifying logic of pedagogy”, and the latter, “the emancipatory logic of equality”. The former is stultifying since in order to claim to be capable of reducing inequality, or “ignorance”, to bridge the gap and bring “ignoramus” to a position of knowledge, the very existence of this gap has to be voiced in a manner that instates it, performatively. This is the logic of vanguards. It is homologous to logics of development and progress, which can only support claims to advancement by “naturalizing” a lagging-behind. In contradistinction, beginning with the opinion of equality may be emancipatory

for it involves testing in deeds whether the postulated equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being is effective⁶⁷. One difference that it makes to start with equality has to do with becoming able to account for and even to effect *suspensions* of the “natural” logic of inequality, of hierarchy and oligarchy⁶⁸. Rancière often returns to a series of exemplary scenes of such suspensions: a worker who wrote of his poetic experience while painting a bourgeois apartment; the French students of May 68 claiming “we all are German Jews” in solidarity with Daniel Cohn-Bendit; revolutionary Frenchwomen asking if they are included in “the rights of man and the citizen”. Considering the logics at work in gestures that claim to be politically important brings Rancière to formulate the very notion of aesthetics of politics for dealing with the problem of both interpreting and transforming life in common, every interpretation involving *some* transformations, and every transformation involving *re*interpretations.

This notion may itself be capable of displacing the prevalence of the “consensual logic” of identification put into play in accounts that insist on a representable series of correspondences between what is seen and what can be said about it by whom. It may do so by explicating the “dissensual logic” at work in those “other” scenes, those momentary stagings whose instigation is the fact of what Rancière calls politics proper, of dis-

⁶⁷ Presenting “the opinion of equality” as an opinion, or as what Rancière calls an axiom means it is not *founded* in any strict sense of the word—contrary to Bourdieu’s “principle of pertinence”, which is said to be founded in and by the *fact* of class struggle. In mathematics, an axiom is a proposition that is not proven or demonstrated, but this does not mean it is arbitrary and that “anything goes”. Similarly, the opinion of equality that Rancière proposes is unproven yet it is plausible, credible. It is informed, for instance, by how those who “start” with inequality can themselves be said to first posit a form of intellectual equality: to give orders with the expectation that they will be obeyed adequately by a subaltern is to suppose they will be understood by this other speaking being as they were meant to be understood, and therefore, that both the “orderer” and the “orderee” *share* in “reason” in a fundamental way (Rancière 1995, 37).

⁶⁸ Rancière repeatedly—but does not always—puts “nature” and “natural” within scare quotes or quotation marks. On his use of these suspensive devices in relation to the notion of nature in particular, and in relation to the suspensive character of both politics and art according to Rancière, see Jean-Luc Nancy’s short text titled “Rancière and Metaphysics” (Nancy 2009, 85-8).

identifying deeds that may reconfigure what can be seen and said by whom, troubling the order of consensus, the fixating logic of policing that works to assign unambiguous identities without remainder—be it that of an art form or media as being irredeemably bourgeois and *passé* (see Rancière 2004d [1998]). If Bourdieu may argue that symbolic representations in struggles for classifications only ever play a secondary role in determining what “truly” matters, Rancière claims there is practically nothing under aesthetics of politics: what is at stake in political life are *aesthetics all the way down*, stories about many forms of experiencing stories concerning political life. But surely, housepainters of the 1830s were not able to end bourgeois domination; the students of May now care most of all for saving their pension; it took more than a century for Frenchwomen to be deemed bearers of all the rights of man and the citizen, and still...

For Rancière “intellectual” emancipation is the only one. It posits the equality of intelligences. It is never achieved. It is unpredictable, and it concerns *individuals*:

Only chance (*le hasard*) is strong enough to topple the instituted, incarnated belief in inequality. /Still, the *tinniest thing (un rien)* would suffice. It would suffice that, for an instant, the friends of the people arrest their attention on this starting point, on this first principle that is summarized in a very simple and very old metaphysical axiom: the nature of the whole cannot be the same as that of the parts. What rationality we (*on*) give to society, we take away from the individuals who compose it. And what it refuses to individuals, society may well take it for itself, but it can never give it back to them. What goes for reason goes for equality which is its synonym. We must choose to attribute it to real individuals or to their fictitious reunion. We must choose to make an unequal society with equal men or an equal society with unequal men. He who has any taste for equality should not hesitate: individuals are real beings and society is a fiction. It is for real beings that equality has value, not for a fiction. /It would suffice to learn to be equal men in an unequal society. This is what it means to emancipate ourselves. But so simple a thing is the most

difficult to understand especially since the new explanation, progress, has inextricably mixed equality and its contrary to one another (Rancière 2004c [1987], 220-1; I translate).

Rancière's worlds are populated by "individuals who are tracing their own path in the forest of things, deeds, and signs, that face and surround them" (Rancière 2008, 23; I translate). In the archives of the workers' movement, he says he found traces of workers who "*hic et nunc* made for themselves another body and another 'soul' for this body", together yet not as a unified group. For the young Marx and similar thinkers, such self-fashioning was, is, and will always remain delusional: "the forms of emancipation of these artisans who made themselves a new body to live here and now in a new sensible world could only be illusions, produced by the process of separation and by the ignorance of this process. Emancipation could only come as the end of the global process that had separated society from its truth" (49). In turn, contemporaries risk asking insistently whether Rancière is not forgetting that individuals too are fictionned.

2.2 Curious verticalities

Among the alleged shortcomings of Rancière's insistence on moments of emancipation are two phenomena that seem to inform determinations of importance: technology and violence. The last sentence of the above subsection hints at another transformation that is said to have occurred since Kant's days, one that involves a double displacement in what is gathered in the phrase "the ends of man". The first is often read through Michel Foucault's concluding claims, in *Les mots et les choses*, on the eventual and eventful disappearance of "man" as an entity proper to the Modern-Western episteme (Foucault 1990 [1966], 398). These lines tend to be linked to Nietzsche's claim that "the *sovereign individual*" is fabricated (Nietzsche 1998 [1887], II:2) to claim other fictions are possible,

if not necessarily desirable. In other words, technologies of the self and aesthetics of existence are many. The second displacement is tied to the appearance of the concrete possibility of a momentous self-eradication of *homo sapiens* as a species through nuclear technologies, in the guise of the enduring yet now rarely discussed eventuality of atomic warfare (Arendt 1970, 9-10; 30). In any event, evolutionary biology makes “natural” extinction an ultimately unsurpassable horizon. In recent years, both displacements have met, or have at least been thought together through notions of “the posthuman”, so as to make some sense of “the other nuclear technology”: genetic engineering, or more broadly, the promises of novel biotechnologies that “also produce a situation which, insofar as it would derail, could degenerate in making societies hostages of their own advanced technologies” (Sloterdijk 2000, 17; I translate). Some artists are said to act as advanced reconnaissance troops onto this field of problems.

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Born in Cyprus in 1945, Australia-based artist Stelarc is one of the icons of so-called posthuman thought. He is best known for his performances, which always involve some technologies: cables and hooks for his suspensions, an electro-mechanical arm, a robotic set of legs, a wired stomach sculpture, a biopolymer ear implanted in an arm, etc. His most famous claim is “the body is obsolete”. In an interview, Stelarc voiced it thusly:

I don't have a utopian perfect body I'm designing a blueprint for, rather I'm speculating on ways that individuals are not forced to, but may want to, redesign their bodies—*given that the body has become profoundly obsolete in the intense information environment it has created*. It's had this mad, Aristotelian urge to accumulate more and more information. An individual now cannot hope to absorb and creatively process all this information. Humans have created technologies and machines which are much more precise and powerful than the body. /[...]

Perhaps it's now time to design the body to match its machines [rather than the opposite]. We somehow have to turbo-drive the body-implant and augment the brain. We have to provide ways of connecting it to the cyber-network. At the moment, this is not easily done, and it's done indirectly via keyboards and other devices. There's no way of directly jacking in. Mind you, I'm not talking here in terms of sci-fi speculation. *For me, the possibilities are already apparent. What do we do when confronted with the situation where we discover the body is obsolete? We have to start thinking of strategies for redesigning the body* (in Atzori & Woolford 1995; I underline).

One may ponder if things have ever been otherwise, if “the body” has ever been capable to “absorb and creatively process” information in a way that was not deemed incomplete, unsatisfactory, or perfectible. Stelarc himself asserts the constitutive character of prostheses: “Technology has always been coupled with the evolutionary development of the body. Technology is what defines being human. It's not an antagonistic alien sort of object, it's part of our human nature. It constructs human nature. [...] My attitude is that technology is, and has always been, an appendage of the body”⁶⁹. Transformations in modes of thought are the province of techno-physiology, for the artist:

Having spent two thousand years prodding and poking the human psyche without any real discernible changes in our historical and human outlook, we perhaps need to take a more fundamental physiological and structural approach, and consider the fact that it's only through radically redesigning the body that we will end up having significantly different thoughts and philosophies. I think our philosophies are fundamentally bounded by our physiology; our peculiar kind of aesthetic orientation in the world; our peculiar five sensory modes of processing the world; and our particular kind of technology that enhance

⁶⁹ It should be noted that there is at least one political risk in Stelarc's position, namely: deducing from the claim that technology defines human nature that “more advanced” technologies equal “more advanced” human beings, or that “more technological” means “more human”. Stelarc does not seem to draw this conclusion, but it should be recalled that anthropologists acting as expert-witnesses for governments in cases of land-claims involving indigenous peoples have often made use of an articulation of “stages of technological development” to stages of socio-political development in order to refuse said land-claims (see Pinkoski 2008).

these perceptions. [...] The desire for unity may well be the result of our rather fragmentary sensory system where we observe the world sensually in discrete and different sensory modes. So our urge to merge, our urge to unify, that religious, spiritual, coming together might very well be due to an inadequacy or an incompleteness in our physiology.

Stelarc's remarkable series of suspensions are useful sites for thinking how aesthetics of emancipation have to do with such possibilities of rearticulating sense and the senses⁷⁰.

Stelarc suspended "the body" with many wires and hooks piercing the skin more than 20 times between 1976 and 1988. He did so in a number of settings, including a street of New York City, the Australian seashore, and various galleries (Smith 2005, 243). The suspensions were mostly performed in silence, although many of them involved sonorous amplifications of the sounds of the body. There often was no audience safe for the artist's aides (Stelarc & Smith 2005, 237). Stelarc phrases what obliges him:

I guess I was always envious of dancers and gymnasts—the body as both a medium of experience and expression. The 2D arts deal in metaphors and symbols of the body. In performance art, you have to take the physical consequences for your ideas. To make three films of the inside of my body, to suspend the body with steel hooks, to extend the body with a third hand: it was not enough to imagine and speculate. Rather, the approach was to actualize the idea, to experience it directly, and then try to

⁷⁰ Attending a presentation by Stelarc left me speechless for some time. The artist did a conference at the Pacific Centre for Technology & Culture (PACTAC) at the University of Victoria, on October 9, 2009, titled *The Comatose, The Cadaver & The Chimera: Avatars Have No Organs* (see Stelarc 2009). It was mainly a review of his work. I left, at the end, with a sense that if Stelarc is a figure of the Nietzschean repertoire, he is closer to "the last man" than to the *übermensch*—a thought that echoes Paul Virilio's stance on his art, which I discovered soon after (Virilio 2004 [2000], 43; on Stelarc and Virilio's relationship with one another's work, see Zurbrugg 1999). It took me a while—years perhaps—to formulate that what disturbed me in this event was Stelarc's own enthusiasm for his recent avatar-based projects, especially his "interactive" *Prosthetic Head*, which I could not help but find rather banal. In effect, I find that "avatars", as such, operate through largely unchallenging representational aesthetics. Their *mimesis* is (at least for the time being) unpersuasive, unconvincing. This *mimesis* remains incapable of eliciting (I speak for myself) the *unheimlichkeit*, the uncanny affects it allegedly musters (Clarke 2005; Stelarc 2005). How, I wondered, could Stelarc not be aware of this? It was troubling to me precisely because it sharply contrasted with the fascination that Stelarc's suspensions exercise (again, on me).

articulate what happened. The resulting ideas are authenticated only by the actions (215-6).

In other words, “Art doesn’t simply illustrate an idea. An idea is not a blueprint for an art installation. Intuitive and aesthetic explorations are the result of a complex interplay of bodies with artifacts enmeshed in social structures and cultural conditionings” (230). Commentators tend to reiterate and expand on the artist’s claims. Brian Massumi, for instance, writes that “The suspended body is a sensible concept: the implications of the event are *felt* first before being thought out. They are felt in the form of a ‘compulsion’: an abstractness with all the immediacy of a physical force. The apparatus of suspension sets the body’s unfolding relation to itself as a problem, a compulsion, and construed that problem in terms of force” (Massumi 2005, 141). This is what happens to “the body” capable of suspension. Massumi, however, insists: “The suspension variations should not be confused with answers to the problem posed. The problem posed by a force cannot be ‘solved,’ only *exhausted*”. The proximity of Stelarc’s language with the words of his commentators elicits attempts at piercing this echoing chamber.

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Stelarc’s suspensions mime—and push to a certain extreme—an image that is far more ancient than Kantian portrayals of aesthetic judgments as judgments “without criteria” that may suspend normalized experiences (Shaviro 2009, 13). Stelarc effectively mimes the already-literalizing *mimesis* that is the first apparition of Socrates in “the Tradition”. This “inaugural” miming occurs in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, first performed “at the Great Dionysia in 423 BC”, in Athens (Bailey, in Aristophanes 1921, 5). The scene is this one:

(SOCRATES is seen suspended in a basket from a crane.)
 [Strepsiades.] Hallo! who’s that man up there on the crane?
 [Pupil.] The Master.

and inventing new gods (Plato 1966a, 18b-d; 19a-c). In *The Clouds*, Socrates is presented as a rhetorician and a natural philosopher holding the clouds are gods. His suspension literalizes what one could name, in Nietzschean terms, the will to knowledge as elevation, which participates in this will to power that Nietzsche deemed the motor of the logic of universal-progress-through-science. For Nietzsche, Socrates was therefore “the first theoretical man” (Strauss 1980 [1966], 7). In the *Apology*, however, Plato’s Socrates claims to know nothing of “the things beneath the earth and in the heavens”⁷¹. This claim would explain why the “traditional view” of the history of political philosophy, as expressed in Cicero’s remarks, held Socrates to be the first political philosopher, “the first to call philosophy down from heaven, to establish it in the cities, to introduce it also into the households, and to compel it to inquire about men’s life and manners as well as about the good and bad things” (Strauss 1978 [1964], 13). It seems to be the case that political thought effects, and even *is* something like a descending gesture that directs the

⁷¹ In contradistinction, a line voiced by Aristophanes’ Socrates can be counted among the prefigurations of Nietzsche’s (and Hegel’s) famous word, “God is dead” (Nietzsche 2001 [1882/86], §§ 108, 125, 343; Hegel 1977 [1807], §752). Aristophanes’ Socrates says: “Zeus, d’you say? now don’t talk drivel; Zeus does not exist at all” (Aristophanes 1921, line 367). As Aristophanes’ title suggests, new gods called the Clouds replace Zeus in the world of the “Thinkery”. Arguably, Nietzsche’s assassinated God is not replaced, and this is precisely the problem that confronts “the age” that is said to be ours (see Heidegger 1977a [1943]). Note that the “basket” in which Aristophanes suspends Socrates was a technical apparatus used in Greek theater, especially in tragedy, to present gods or demigods as entities that could fly. The very use of this apparatus has been read as a satirical claim by Aristophanes to the effect that Socrates, through his investigations, is presenting himself as occupying a quasi-divine position. A contemporary commentator notes: “‘Basket’ is the common but wrong interpretation of the mode of suspension implied by the use of [*kremathra*] (slings) and [*tarroz*]. The latter is a rack, especially one used for drying out fresh cheese, and this makes perfect sense here. The clinching point is that unlike the basket the moving rack makes it possible to convey the notion of an *airwalk*. To this effect a standing Socrates is certainly much more appropriate than [...] a sitting one[.] /The [*kremathra*] present no problem: some sort of sling seems to be meant. No scientific instruments are indicated in the hands of the master, who conducts purest, that is unaided, science ‘mixing his fine thought into the air which is of the same nature’ [...]. This stands in a deliberate and effective contrast to the preceding scene, where much effort was spent on a detailed presentation of the Socratic Thinkery both in terms of its personnel and accessories. The master’s ease and detachment contrast with the busyness of his disciples who were presented as restless researchers pursuing absurd projects with ridiculous props” (Revermann 2006, 188-9). For a detailed discussion of Aristophanes’ Socrates in relation to political philosophy, and especially to a possible “turning” in Socrates’ life through which he would have gone from being similar to Aristophanes’ depiction to the depiction offered by Plato and Xenophon, see Strauss 1980 [1966]. For a recent discussion of Strauss’ *Socrates and Aristophanes* and its account of Socrates’ “turning”, see Mhire 2013.

will to knowledge along a horizontal, human plane. Claiming that there are no “good and bad things” as such partakes to and of this “horizontalization”.

Contemporary accounts of what matters politically are concerned with possibilities of elevation, if only to a position from which to sense and make sense, to evaluate endless conflicts among competing claims on the value of “ultimate values”. Nietzsche’s taste for the rare air of quiet mountain heights bears witness to a strange affinity with Aristophanes’ Socrates, while Kant’s attempt to fix a roof to rational ascent suggests one with Plato’s. Stelarc and Spångberg are both thinkers of elevation: they ventriloquize the figuration of “the artist” as a scout, leading the way *up* and *forward*, taking on the task Plato reserved to educators in (true) philosophy, this “art of turning” discussed in the allegory of the cave (Plato 1991, 518d) and explicitly refused to poets in Book X. The links between Stelarc, Rancière, Spångberg and Bourdieu, on the one hand, ancient figurations of Socrates, on the other, and the question of political importance phrased via Kantian claims on emancipation, on a third hand, may be weak—*hanging by a thread*. Still, they hint at what those who profess to practice an art of (self-)turning hold as prerequisites to this very movement. Stelarc’s literalization of the will to elevation states that some grounded apparatus is always necessary for a suspension to occur. It also signals that enduring a momentary suspension—a *stretch*—is a challenge. As for Spångberg’s challenging call to let go of emancipation, creativity and imagination as live political notions, it seems untenable since the vertical imperative “you must change your life” (Sloterdijk 2013a) keeps making itself heard as the very sense of emancipation, creativity, and imagination. Along with this imperative, however, the claim that “We live in a suspension of signification” (Nancy 2013 [2010], 7) is voiced as well.

3. Mute muses & muddled cries, or entrenched silencings

The two preceding folds, a political and an artistico-political refoldings of determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of logomachies, may not quite succeed in showing—not to say in proving or demonstrating—the soundness of the hypothesis that aesthetics of emancipation act as prerequisites to said determination. This is so, I believe, not least because this last term, determination, is far from being unproblematic. I hold it can be productively engaged through or along a polemological refolding of the question of political importance onto phrases that concern modulations of violences in and of speech.

Many of the violences involved in *logos*—in speech and reason, in the conflicting voices of multiple rationales—concern determinations of what matters *politically* as they put into play “the ability to authorize voice” (Spångberg 2011, 167). There is a violence in and of the distribution of this “ability”. There is a hierarchical self-positioning effected in voicing that, in truth, this is an ability, and that as such it can only be asymmetrically distributed, especially since it concerns authority, which foregrounds the issue of (its) prevalence, of which authority is in fact the most authoritative or sovereign, if quietly so. All these words—reason, ability, truth, inequality, hierarchy, asymmetry, authority, prevalence, sovereignty, and violence—can themselves provoke violent reactions of distaste or distrust, given their histories. These reactions take the form of multiple calls to abandon, replace, or at least unpack these charged terms. Finally, there is also a violence of the suspicion toward anything but the allegedly epochal suspension of the significance of these determining words—a crisis, perhaps, of the authorization of the voices that claim a crisis demands to be voiced.

3.1 “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”

Jean-Luc Nancy indicates and engages such “crises” as he writes, in *Adoration. The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, that “Our time displaces or disassembles entire chains of signification. We have only to think of ‘man,’ ‘history,’ ‘nature,’ ‘law,’ ‘science,’ ‘love,’ ‘art,’ and there are many more. We live in a suspension of signification” (Nancy 2013 [2010], 7)⁷². Most significant are the lines that immediately follow:

Incidentally, this [suspension] is what will always happen to signification: as both the diversity and the mutability of languages demonstrate. But in our time it is sensed more precisely as a sort of breakdown, doubtless because for a long while we had believed in a stabilization, in a permanence of sense that we thought underpinned the displacement of history and the expansion of Western reason. However, in the moment when this expansion is completed with the saturation of the world, the permanence of sense becomes syncopated, and the entire order is put back into play by what one could call “sense.” /Indeed, the very sense of this word, the import of this notion, and even—perhaps—its possibility are called into question. But this is how it has always been with sense: it appears only by being called into question, put in play or in crisis. No one and no human culture is unaware of this, nor have they ever been: it is not a given, it is always about to be lost, or else it submerges us. It is always an excess or a lack—but nowhere is there anything against which we might measure sense in order to say whether there is “too much” or “too little” of it. Thus we can say that it is always *just* what returns to us (*nous revient*). What comes down to “us,” speaking living beings, but at the same time to all beings (*étants*), to the whole world in its being launched into the

⁷² “Crisis” is perhaps not the right word if one holds, with Nancy, that “A crisis occurs (*survient*) to a *continuum* which it affects, and which it perhaps deforms or reforms, but all the while keeping it as its reference. On the contrary, the metamorphosis (the rupture) of figures of existence takes place in a discontinuity of histories and in an incommensurability of their worlds, for which there is no reference. But the gap (*l'écart*) is then at the same time so slow (*lent*) and so proliferating that it is only ever perceptible from a very great distance, once it has stopped to gape: as if I now pass, in thought, from the Empire of Augustus to that of Charlemagne” (Nancy 2001, 139; I translate). Epochal claims on “a suspension of signification” seek to name a metamorphosis. Is not the distance too small to authenticate such a diagnosis? In “the present”, are there not only crises, strictly speaking? Nancy adds these lines: “De facto, today, since ‘the sixties’, we are engaged in a passage analogous to that which then occurred from an ‘age’ to another”, that is from the “age” of Augustus to that of Charlemagne, without any certainty regarding which one is “better”.

fortuitous swirling of the cosmos amidst nothing. /Mankind has always known and adored the severe grace, the difficult, exasperating, but shocking joy of this senseless, painful, unjust justness.

What is indicated by how “We live in a suspension of signification” is the condition of thinking in contemporary conjunctures, even of thinking “in general”: a world without “any backworld” (*sans arrière-monde*), with “no other world”, no beyond or ground, no overarching principle (*archè*), reason or sense (12). Emancipation from stories about multiple backworlds seems required for *thinking*—but as opposed to what? Sloganeering? Nancy’s ponderings bring him to enlist an unexpected ally: Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein is an unlikely “positive” figure under Nancy’s pen (or keyboard) for they appear to stand on either shore of the “continental divide” between so-called analytic and continental philosophy⁷³. Wittgenstein—at least “the first Wittgenstein”, the one of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 2001b [1921])—remains thought of as a founding figure of logical positivism. The Vienna Circle offers all the appearances of a violent (or *counter-violent*) project aimed at silencing a great many claims on the assumption of their absurdity or nonsense, of their being “metaphysical”. It was—and *remains?*—a sustained endeavor to deflate sense in the face of what was sensed as a proliferation of “inflationist” metaphysics at the turn of the 20th century. Wittgenstein’s seventh and last proposition in the *Tractatus* acts as an order-word: “7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”. This claim is announced in the preface: “The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why

⁷³ I borrow the expression “continental divide” from Peter E. Gordon (2010), who argues that this divide can be read as emerging from a common trunk, namely neo-Kantian philosophy, elaborated at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, especially in Germany. This “parting of the ways” (Friedman 2000) has been read in relation to the mythified discussion—or confrontation—that took place between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer in Davos, in 1929. Interestingly, Rudolph Carnap, one of the key figures of the so-called Vienna circle, attended the event.

these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (3). For Jacques Bouveresse, one of the few French philosophers trained at the turn of the 1960s who worked extensively on Wittgenstein, writers like Nancy—or Derrida, or at least Régis Debray—most often exemplify what it means to speak but say nothing, to favor style and affects over rigor and clarity (see Bouveresse 1999). It is notable, however, that the sense of Wittgenstein’s last proposition does not go without saying. Wittgenstein claims that “the aim of the [*Tractatus*] is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). /It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense” (Wittgenstein 2001b [1921], 3-4). While this last qualifier, “simply”, seems to imply that “nonsense” is negligible, easily dealt with, Wittgenstein repeatedly terms “what we cannot speak about” as “mystical”, and hints at the importance of “what is mystical”⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ He writes: “6.522 There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical” (Wittgenstein 2001b [1921]). On the previous page, one reads: “6.44 It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists”; and “6.45 To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. /Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical”. Wittgenstein’s remarks on “what is mystical” and on the limits of language and thought parallel a short text by Franz Kafka, “On Suspended Animation”. Kafka writes: “Anyone who has once been in a state of suspended animation can tell terrible stories about it, but he cannot say what it is like after death, he has been actually no nearer to death than anyone else, fundamentally he has only ‘lived’ through an extraordinary experience, and not-extraordinary, everyday life has become more valuable to him as a result. It is similar with everyone who has experienced something extraordinary. For instance Moses certainly experienced something extraordinary on Mount Sinai, but instead of submitting to this extraordinary experience, like someone in a state of suspended animation, not answering and remaining quiet in his coffin, he fled down the mountain and, of course, had valuable things to tell, and loved, even more than before, the people to whom he had fled and then sacrificed his life for them, one might say: in gratitude. From both, however, from those who have returned from a state of suspended animation and from Moses, who returned, one can learn a great deal, but the decisive thing cannot be discovered from them, for they themselves have not discovered (it). If they had discovered it, they would not have come back at all. But we do not even want to discover it. This can be

Wittgenstein writes that “If [the *Tractatus*] has any value, it consists in two things: the first is that thoughts are expressed in it [...]” (4). He considers he has “found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems [of philosophy]”—a book to end all books, as it were, or at least to end all books of a certain type, as one hears of a war to end all wars... Although others may improve on their expression, he believes “the *truth* of the thoughts” exposed therein is “unassailable and definitive”. He concludes: “And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows *how little is achieved when these problems are solved*” (I underline). Wittgenstein exposes this thought near the end of his treatise:

6.52 We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer.

6.521 The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. / (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constitutes that sense?)⁷⁵

shown by the fact that we may occasionally, for instance, have the wish to experience the experience of the man in a state of suspended animation, or Moses’ experience, so long as the return is guaranteed, to undergo it as it were with a ‘safe-conduct,’ indeed, we may even wish death for ourselves, but not even in our thoughts should we wish to be alive and in the coffin without any chance of return, or to remain on Mount Sinai” (cited in Cixous 1993, 61; interestingly, the title of Cixous’ book is *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*).

⁷⁵ These propositions qualify proposition 6.5: “When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. / The *riddle* does not exist. / If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it”. The first qualification of this proposition is: “6.51 Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked. / For doubt can only exist where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*.” Wittgenstein acknowledges the “method” he proposes is unsatisfactory in practical terms, if only because it does violence to the expectations of many interlocutors: “6.53 The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. *something that has nothing to do with philosophy* [I underline]—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—*this* method would be the only strictly correct one”. In a footnote to *The Sense of the World*, Nancy cites propositions 6.41 (which I engage below), 6.44 and 6.521 (cited above), and writes: “One will not fail to notice that these propositions are contemporaneous with those of Heidegger and Freud: the twenties were the years when the end of philosophy and the question of sense came to light. We are still, or anew, in the twenties, and this is indeed why it is a matter of preventing the thirties from being in front

These propositions are phrased as elevating, not only in relation to existing philosophy, or “metaphysics”, but also in relation to Wittgenstein’s own claims: “6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) /He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright”. This claim assumes the possibility of emancipation as a change of view about what matters.

The “late” Wittgenstein, the writer of the fragmented *Philosophical Investigations*, arguably transcended his own propositions—*threw away the ladder*—on a strictly logical determination of sense and nonsense. In effect, he came to phrase speech as irreducibly practical, as a set of immanent language games constituting forms of life. In remark 96, he writes: “Thought, language, now appear to us as the unique correlate, picture, of the world. These concepts: propositions, language, thought, world, stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each. (But what are these words to be used for now? The language-game in which they are to be applied is missing.)” (Wittgenstein 2001a [1953], 44e) The two “now” first refer to the investigations exposed, but it is difficult, *now*, not to read them as historical markers, as situated acknowledgments that attempts at controlling sense fail (*today?*). They are never definitive. Thus goes sense, thus goes nonsense.

of us, as Gérard Granel announces (‘Les années 30 sont devant nous,’ in *Les Temps modernes*, February 1993), as the years of the ‘ontological blastoff beyond the attraction of finitude [which] is the very soul of the modern world . . . [and which] does not appear simply by virtue of the fact that the modern idealities are those of infinitude, but presupposes in addition the lure of their totalization’ (74). I am not as convinced as Granel of the persistence of this lure, or at least I think that we are despite everything less lacking than a little while ago in means for dissipating it. But this presupposes precisely that we take up again propositions such as Wittgenstein’s, but without the ‘mystical,’ that is, without the horizon (even if it were *absconditum*) of a revelation (even if it were the revelation of the void), and in consecrating all necessary forces to make without respite *that which is designated as the ‘beyond’ of the world pass back into the world*. Not in immanentizing transcendence, but in inscribing the latter—or sense—*along the edge of immanence* (which signifies, ultimately, the insufficiency of those concepts themselves)” (Nancy 1997a [1993], 183n48).

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Nancy often makes use of a late proposition from the *Tractatus* as he phrases the “world without a backworld” that he claims is what marks and demands to be thought in contemporary conjunctures. He ventriloquizes Wittgenstein’s “*le sens du monde est hors du monde*” (Nancy 2004), “the sense of the world is out of the world”. Wittgenstein’s phrasing differs from Nancy’s iteration in that it includes markers of logical necessity:

6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value. /If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case [i.e. the world; cf. prop. 1]. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. /What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. /It must lie outside the world (Wittgenstein 2001b [1921]).

This claim immediately qualifies “6.4 All propositions are of equal value”. In Nancy’s story, this proposition can be read as a forceful expression of what has been called, in somewhat metaphysical terms, nihilism, that is the de(con)struction of all backworlds, of any standard that could be thought to enable an evaluation of value in a definitive way.

In a recent talk, Nancy ventriloquized Wittgenstein’s claim as he discussed contemporary treatments of the notions of principle and cause in relation to theism and atheism, which he phrases as the two sides of that “Western” coin forged in Athens and Jerusalem that stamped God as *the* principle, characterized by its being not-a-presence. Nancy speaks of attempts at “thinking otherwise” that claim notions of principle and cause only apply to strictly determined technical or technological dispositives. He voices the difficulty of thinking such “thinking otherwise” otherwise than in negative or subtractive terms, as something other than a loss or a decline. The problem is that

The horizon of a subtraction continues to act as a horizon, that is: as limit, impasse, and end of the world. It encapsulates (*cerne*) our thought all the more now that the world, in effect, touches to its confines from all sides, on the physical mode as well as on the metaphysical one. It is now out of the question, of course, to exit (*sortir*) the world. But this is not a reason to consider it as a horizon. In other words, finitude does not confine (*borne*) infinity, it must on the contrary give it its span (*expansion*) and its truth. It is in that sense that I want to understand this word (*ce mot*) of Wittgenstein: “The sense of the world is out of the world”, that is to say, that the outside (*dehors*) of the world is inside (*dedans*). Here is the issue, there is no other one today. In the end, what is in question is nothing other than nihilism, such as Nietzsche understood it. [...] And if nihilism indicates simultaneously, as Nietzsche wants it, that it is through it, from it, and almost, as it were, in it that it can be envisaged to escape it (*qu’il peut être question d’en sortir*)—if this term is appropriate—, it does not, however, up until now, overcome its own indication toward anything else than toward a repetition of its own *nihil* (Nancy 2004; I translate and transcribe)⁷⁶.

What is at stake is “to introduce a new sense while knowing that this introduction is itself senseless (*privée de sens*), to loosely paraphrase Nietzsche”. Nancy asks: “How are we to lift the aporia, if the forcing of a sense beyond sense—a senseless, absent, hyperbolic or hypertrophied sense—has given us nothing less than the exterminating horror in so many forms, conjoined with or pitted against the humanist impotence, in so many forms as well?” To grasp this question requires grasping how Nancy thinks “the exterminating

⁷⁶ Nancy also cites Wittgenstein’s “word” in *Adoration*, after which he writes: “Of course, Wittgenstein is not calling on any representation or conception of ‘another world’: he is asking that the outside be thought and grasped in the midst of the world. /What is thus shown by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein could be shown by a thousand other references. The ‘spirit of Christianity’ (to quote Hegel) is none other than the spirit of the West. The West (which—need it be said?—no longer has any distinct circumscription) is a mode of being in the world in such a way that the sense of the world opens up as a spacing (*écartement*) within the world itself and in relation to it. This mode can be distinguished both from the mode in which sense circulates in the world without discontinuity—death as another life—and from the mode whereby sense is circumscribed in the narrow space of a life that death dispatches to insignificance (a dispatch that can shine with the brief splendor of tragedy). Of course, the Western mode brings with it the great danger of an entire dissipation of sense when the world opens onto nothing but its own chasm. But this is precisely what concerns us” (Nancy 2013 [2010], 24). Nancy, here, relays the *récit* of a “Westernization” of “the world”.

horror” and “the humanist impotence”. What Walter Benjamin called the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics can get at these phrases.

3.2 “Experience has fallen in value”

Benjamin’s twofold expression comes at the end of “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, where he writes: “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art” (Benjamin 2007a [1936], 242). I argue this diagnosis of self-alienation is equivalent to that made in “The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov”, that “experience has fallen in value”: “*Die Erfahrung is im Kurse gefallen*” (Benjamin 2007b [1936], 83-4). This epochal diagnosis modulates violences in at least two ways: it claims to describe a configuration that is said to result from violent historical processes, and it qualifies “the present” in a way that is very similar to the ways in which a number of contemporary claims now assert a generalized powerlessness in the face of a prevailing neoliberal (*Hayekian?*) capitalism.

Benjamin’s claim that “experience has fallen in value” is presented as the reason, as the *ratio* for another occurrence: “the art of storytelling is coming to an end” (83). For Benjamin, “It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken away from us: the ability to exchange experience”. He writes:

One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper demonstrates that it has reached a new low, that our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight

has undergone changes which were never thought possible. With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body (83-4; brackets in the text).

This process arguably affects the sharing of experiences of political importance.

In German, *Kurs* means value in the sense of an exchange rate. The inscription of Benjamin's claim about the deflating value of experience in the language game of the stock exchange is evidenced by his use of the French "*cours*" in his own translation of "The Storyteller", published posthumously in 1952: "*le cours de l'expérience a chuté*" (Benjamin 1977, 1290). When Wittgenstein writes: "All propositions are of equal value", "*Alle Sätze sind gleichwertig*" (Wittgenstein 2012), he uses *Wert*, which is closest to worth. *Wert* puts into play the double register of price and virtue, value and valor. Benjamin's "*Die Erfahrung ist im Kurse gefallen*", for its part, hints through its economic phrasing at the world-historical processes of the reconfiguration of "productive forces" Benjamin considers key for the fate of storytelling. In effect, this fate, "coming to an end", is said to result from transformations in the social-material conditions of storytelling: the disappearance of craftsmanship and of the boredom it enabled (Benjamin

2007b, 91-3). Benjamin's phrasing hints at what Marxists call the "generalized equivalence" caused by Capital's ability to convert any value into currency.

A very short story that Benjamin told in one of his last letters to Theodor W. Adorno, dated May 7, 1940, makes explicit what he called "the root" of his "theory of experience", and what I would qualify as what obliged him to write. This "root" resides in a childhood memory: "In the many places where we stayed over the summer, our parents, as it should, took us on walks. [...] The one I am thinking of here is my brother. When, in Freudenstadt, Wengen, or Schreiberhau, we had visited one or the other mandatory excursion sites, my brother used to say 'there again, something done'. The sentence inscribed itself in me indelibly" (in Adorno & Benjamin 2006, 373; I translate). Benjamin's "theory of experience" posits that it falls in value and that this process is historical. In an early text, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy", he already qualified the experience of "the Enlightenment", which he explicitly understood as that which "informed" Kant's philosophy, as "not at all different from the experience of the other centuries of the modern era" in that it was—*and it remains?*—"of the lowest order", "virtually reduced to a nadir, to a minimum of significance", having "almost no intrinsic value" (Benjamin 1996a [1918], 101). These considerations make it tempting to read Benjamin's story as laying bare how his brother lived every walk as equivalent to all others, how he experienced all sites indifferently and was thereby exposed as being exemplarily "modern"⁷⁷. Against what "standard" is Benjamin's measuring or assessing

⁷⁷ In political terms, it is tempting to speculate that Benjamin's brother would have become what Carl Schmitt, in an early text, called a political romantic, i.e. someone who is incapable of taking a clear stance on political issues because one is always treating the world "as an occasion and an opportunity for his [or her] romantic subjectivity" (Schmitt 1986 [1919/25]). Others, however, may argue that it is Benjamin who is the romantic, as he holds the "occasion" of his brother's comment as an opportunity for his own "poetic productivity". I return at length to Schmitt's *Political Romanticism* in the next chapter because I argue that it offers a forceful problematization of what I call aesthetics of temperament.

the decrease in value of “experience”, that is of experience “in general”? And what is at stake in using Benjamin’s own storytelling in the illustrative manner I just indicated?

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In his remark on the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics, Benjamin refers to “Homer’s time” as a historical point of comparison—or as an incommensurable world in which “mankind” was not (or was incomparably less) “self-alienated”. “Homer’s time” is said to be mythical (Butler 2011 [1935], 80). This qualification repeats the opposition of *muthos* and *logos*, the idea that each “speech” characterizes an “age”, and that Plato’s “invention of philosophy” is the key moment demarcating an oral, mythical “culture” from a written, rational one (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy 1990, 297). But this story has itself been termed mythical: there is a myth of reason as being incommensurable with myth (Horkheimer & Adorno 2007 [1947]). Believing the use of myths is a *fatum* of political life—if not everywhere and at all times, then at least in contemporary, or in recent conjunctures—because of the efficacy of myths, of stories that make a whole world thinkable, that phrase an inhabitable *cosmos* in a way that is not (quite) subject to “reason” as a unitary set of principles—say, non-contradiction—is seemingly what is at stake in “rendering politics aesthetic”, in acting on the assumption that it is (quite) rational (and even necessary) to modulate “the irrational”⁷⁸. It is not clear, however, what politicizing art means for Benjamin, and why

⁷⁸ The discussion of the political importance of myths was lively at the turn of the 20th century. Part of this conversation was articulated around the work of French engineer and syndicalist Georges Sorel, who theorized revolutionary class struggle in terms of what he called “the myth of the general strike” (Sorel 2003 [1908]), building on late 19th century anthropology and historiography, and on the philosophy of Henri Bergson. At the end of *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, in the section titled “Irrationalist Theories of the Direct Use of Force”, Schmitt commented on the importance of Sorel’s “theory of myth”, mentioning how anarcho-syndicalists, on the one hand, and Mussolini, on the other, explicitly seek to spread the belief in a grand story, a momentous fiction. Schmitt writes: “The theory of myth is the most powerful symptom of the decline of the relative rationalism of parliamentary thought. If anarchist authors have discovered the

it seems an apt response of communism in the face of Fascism. It seemingly means engaging in a battle on this very terrain of competing myths—something art may do. If that is so, the forms and contents of these competing stories become crucial issues as they inform what is to be taken seriously, what is to be considered to matter politically.

In “The Storyteller”, Benjamin effectively distinguishes a variety of “epic forms” in terms of their “nature”. A tale, a legend, a novel and a newspaper article may all be said to tell a story, to deal in *muthos*—or in “narratives”, a term that is supposed to hold *muthos* and *logos* together—, but they do so differently. The forms and contents of each “epic form” are closely articulated to one another. What Benjamin calls a story proper is akin to a tale or a legend. It has to do with “the sharing of experience”. It is “practical”:

An orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers. [...] All this points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today “having counsel” is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would

importance of the mythical from an opposition to authority and unity, then they have also cooperated in establishing the foundation of another authority, however unwillingly, an authority based on the new feeling for order, discipline, and hierarchy. Of course the abstract danger this kind of irrationalism poses is great. The last remnants of solidarity and a feeling of belonging together will be destroyed in the pluralism of an unforeseeable number of myths. For political theology that is polytheism, just as every myth is polytheistic. But as the strongest political tendency today, one cannot simply ignore it” (Schmitt 2000 [1923/6], 76). In his “Critique of Violence”, Benjamin also cites Sorel on the myth of the general strike as what could lead to a proletarian revolution in Marx’s sense, as a violence that could be “creative of law” rather than “preserving law” (Benjamin 1996b [1921]). The story according to which “wherever it comes to an open confrontation of the two myths [national and socialist], such as in Italy, the national myth has until today always been victorious” (Schmitt 2000, 75) was in circulation as Benjamin wrote “The Storyteller”. It is still used to relate that the Great War could only occur as it did because the “national loyalty” of the working classes of European nation-states proved stronger than their “class loyalty” across borders. Nazism, for its part, has been termed mythical because it held, through “national-aestheticism”, that the *Volk* could be identified “without remainder” as a work of art to be fabricated (see Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy 1990; Lacoue-Labarthe 1987).

first have to be able to tell the story. (Quite apart from the fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows his situation to speak.) Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out. This, however, is a process that has been going on for a long time. And nothing would be more fatuous than to want to see in it merely a “symptom of decay,” let alone a “modern” symptom. It is, rather, only a concomitant of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing (Benjamin 2007b, 86-7).

In that sense, “One must imagine the transformation of epic forms occurring in rhythms comparable to those of the change that has come over the earth’s surface in the course of thousands of centuries” (88). The beginnings of the novel, which Benjamin traces to “antiquity”, participated in slowly displacing storytelling: “The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life” (87). One gathers that the storyteller *is* “able to express himself [or herself] by *giving examples of his [or her] most important concerns*”.

The “present”, for its part, is marked by the leveling, equalizing power of “information”, which is “more menacing” than the novel. Information makes it so that “Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of

storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it” (89). What truly matters becomes a question: it imposes itself as a problem to be dealt with daily.

Stories have to do with elevation and opening. A story “does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (90). In practice, “All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier” (102). Stories have a pedagogical quality as they *hint* at cosmological considerations with a sense of counsel: “The wisest thing—so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits”. This claim brings Benjamin to consider the figure of “the righteous man”, who is the wise “advocate for created things and at the same time [their] highest embodiment” (104). The “world itself” *speaks* through stories: “The hierarchy of the world of created things, which has its apex in the righteous man, reaches down into the abyss of the inanimate by many gradations. [...] This whole created world speaks not so much with the human voice as with what could be called ‘the voice of Nature’ in the title of one of Leskov’s most significant stories”. Benjamin adds that: “The lower Leskov descends on the scale of created things the more obviously does his way of viewing things approach the mystical. [...] The mineral is the lowest stratum of created things. For the storyteller, however, it is directly joined to the highest” (106-7). Given its mediating role between highest and lowest, “The

storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself” (109). But in a world without backworld, does righteousness make any sense?

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Near the end of *Adoration*, Nancy engages a term that seems as distant and suspect as the term righteousness in contemporary conjunctures:

Evil, this evil that we now know belongs to our own capacity to turn against one another because we will not turn away toward the infinite, always and in all its forms consists in a closed identification, an idolatry, a figuration without remainder: *as soon as I put forward this or that, put forward that this or that “are” the good or the truth of mankind or of the world, I enter into evil.* But “relativizing” does not get us out of this situation, for the “relative” can be thought only against the backdrop of the “absolute.” The absolute must be affirmed without its relative counterpart, the absolute of each “one,” of each “here and now,” of each instant of eternity. This is how a different evaluation could be opened up: in the fact that there is no value besides what has absolute value (Nancy 2013, 74; I underline).

“The exterminating horror” and “the humanist impotence” both close rather than keep-open. Nancy ends “The insufficiency of ‘values’ and the necessity of ‘sense’” thusly:

I will be told that this is no answer, and that no reply to what I have said is possible because it sets out no values onto which one can hold, or to which one could respond. But, *it is precisely this which is important, whatever the signs to which we must refer. We must have in sight that which escapes any sign.* Of necessity we have to invent the direction to take, and to invent it knowing that this invention can never claim to ‘know’ for everybody in that together-with-one-another which has no price because it is existence itself. /To bring into view that which we cannot ‘see’ – that which conceals itself as the origin of the other, in the other – and to bring ‘into view’ the fact that we cannot ‘see’ it: that is what today makes an ‘ethical’ demand, without which any moral standpoint, any normative or prescriptive assurance is only the application of a recipe, with eyes closed, sleepwalking... (Nancy 1997b, 131; I underline)

The question arises as to whether this has anything to do with *politics*. One may argue that emancipation for Marx, enlightenment for Kant, or existence for Nancy are of a different—*higher?*—order. What they seem to counsel is: recall that politics is not all that matters, that it matters that something else matters. Politics, however, can make it impossible to think or speak of anything else but politics when what matters is at stake.

4. All ventriloquists

The form of this chapter seeks to express its content. The hypothesis that aesthetics of emancipation act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of logomachies, and that it does so *through stories*, can be taken as the basis for a voluntarist account of how “intersubjective reason” or “deliberation” can “pacify” the ceaseless conflicts of various *logoi* and *muthoi* on what matters politically through practices of educating taste, or judgment, in the quest for establishing what matters for some individual(s) or group(s). But it can also—and I favor this reading—be read as indicating that logomachies are ultimately, in principle and in practice, ineradicable and proliferating. For one, there are logomachies on potentially any distinction, such as that between principles and practices. Moreover, logomachies abound with regard to who and what is to educate the educators in taste or judgment. These “descriptive” claims are also “prescriptive” as they silently suggest that attempts at reducing or at “pacifying” logomachies are also logomachic, and that these attempts are perhaps most violent when “pacification” is phrased as a future-yet-always-deferred outcome of the “free play” of claims on political importance, as Kant would have it.

The form of this chapter is logomachic. It stages tentative encounters between conflicting claims in a singular manner: it *ventriloquizes*. Automatons and puppeteers,

marionettes and ventriloquists are spectral yet central figures in Western political thought (Nancy 1975; see also Benjamin 2007c). Thinking the practice of the dissester, of *this* writer as an exercise in ventriloquy first means that I claim the problem I am trying to engage in a thoughtful manner is not “mine”, or not “merely” so. In effect, I claim the question of political importance imposes itself and that it speaks *through* me, as it were. I also think the question of political importance imposes itself on others, that it speaks *through* them, if you will. Engaging this question is therefore not a “simple” matter of taking a stance on what any other has written or said, but of experimenting with what is at stake in voicing claims that, once “out there”, belong to strictly no one.

I may be said to “speak” of a voice that may well be “my own” through the proliferation of voices that I report, that I play with through my extensive (and assuredly excessive) use of citations. But it could also be said that *something*—if “it” is a “thing”—is made to speak through this gesture, or is making this gesture speak. I am inclined to attribute this agency to the question of political importance “itself”. The problem of its origin, of an initial or a first claim on distributions of political importance recedes infinitely. Now ventriloquy, which can be defined as *a speech through the belly* of the kind that, precisely, actively makes its own origin, the specific source of itself, uncertain, *haunts* the politics of speech, and taste. The very fact of using language inscribes any attempt at “speaking freely” or at “speaking for oneself” in a complex fabric of claims that surround this attempt. Aesthetics of emancipation have to do with this proliferation of ventriloquies for in spite, or rather, because of this proliferation of anonymous voices and noises, the notion that there is both a need and a possibility to “find one’s voice” in *political* matters still marks political thought. This situation is faced, today, in a

conjuncture that can be reasonably characterized as being populated by an unheard of proliferation of voices that try to distinguish themselves, to mark and become remarkable.

4.1 The exception and the rule

The problem, the question of truth haunts the problematization of how to account for variations in distributions of political importance. I argue that it does so “in general”, in the sense that engaging the very multiplicity of those accounts, and thus the variety of distributions of political importance, raises the question of whether, *in truth*, something or other matters more than something else, politically. This question of truth, however, of truth as a question, as something that may be grasped—if it can be grasped at all—through practices of questioning, through questioning practices, has a privileged relationship with the politics of speech, and taste, and with what I call aesthetics of emancipation. This is the case insofar as coming to terms with the question of the truth of political importance (or of *a* truth—this alternative being perhaps precisely what is in question) posits the possibility of emancipation from a prevailing *doxa*, be it that of *the* truth or that of there being *no* truth(s).

This claim, that *doxa* truly prevails and that there is a *doxa* of truth, implies that truth and *doxa* are distinct. It most often assumes that *doxa* is more widespread than truth, that truth is rare. In other words: opinion is the rule, truth is exceptional. According to Bourdieu, who posits that the truth of what matters resides in class struggle,

The logocentrism and the intellectualism of intellectuals, joined to the prejudice (*préjugé*) inherent to the science that gives itself *psuchè*, the soul, psychology, conscience, representations as its object, without speaking of the bourgeois pretention to the status of “person”, have prevented [us] from perceiving (*apercevoir*) that “we are automatons in three fourth of our actions,” as Leibniz puts

it, and that ultimate values, as we say, are never anything but the primary and primitive dispositions of the body, the tastes and distastes that we say are visceral, and where the most vital interests of a group are deposed, that for which we are ready to put into play (*mettre en jeu*) our body and that of others (Bourdieu 1979, 553; I translate).

However, even if this was *the* truth of the matter regarding what ultimately determines what matters, Bourdieu's claim, as a claim, is inscribed in a nebula of "truth-claims", as analytic philosophers like to say. As Hannah Arendt puts it in a passage that I cited in the preceding chapter, what "has ever—or at least since Parmenides and Plato—distressed philosophers [is] that the truth, as soon as it is uttered, is immediately transformed into one opinion among many, is contested, reformulated, reduced to one subject of discourse among others" (Arendt 1968, 27). Beside the questions of whether there is the or a truth at all about political importance, or indeed about political life, of the difficulty of phrasing any truth, of putting "it" into words, and of what happens once it is "uttered", assuming there is one, there arises the possibility that truth *cannot* be put into words (be it the truth that there is no Truth), that it cannot be captured. There also arises the question, from Plato to Nietzsche and beyond, of a distribution of "types" of people who would be distinguished from one another by their relative capacity, their ability or their "fitness" to bear the truth, to be told and to tell the truth, whatever it is. In that sense, refolding aesthetics of emancipation opens up aesthetics of temperament.

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In this chapter, I have often evoked Leo Strauss—or his voice—, especially in the footnotes. Strauss has a bad reputation, to say the least, among people with whom I think I share a fair deal of politological and political commitments. This is due to his elitism. Strauss is helpful, here, precisely because he is recognized as a very effective

ventriloquist, as making texts speak through close readings in a manner that inevitably raises the question of what and who speaks through these ventriloquisms—what or who, if not Strauss himself, would “hide” among these voices, and seek to “entrap” his listeners or readers in an intricate web of fine-spun tales. His readers and listeners, even if they are not Straussians, often do find themselves speaking and writing like him...

My own acquaintance with Strauss is informed by the recent accessibility of his “teacher voice”, that is, by the online publication, in 2010, of a large number of recordings of his courses dating from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, by the Leo Strauss Center at the University of Chicago. Listening to Strauss makes one aware of what any student can otherwise remark in a program of study, namely that teachers—as orators—weave, with time and effort, an arsenal of routines, lines of speech and turns of phrase that are repeated with variations an innumerable number of times during their career as a professor, as public speakers. The experience of listening to Strauss is all the more thought-provoking because he is known to have insisted on, and even “revived”, the distinction between exoteric and esoteric speech and writing, between open and “public” and hermetic and “private” professions. By listening to his voice, one can have the impression of encountering the possibility of getting closer to what he may have written “between the lines”—if he wrote anything there; but how could he have failed to do so? I was quickly reminded, however, that speaking in front of a class is to speak publicly, and speaking publicly while accepting one’s speech to be recorded is in practice equivalent to publishing a written text (otherwise than under the cloak), for it is to accept that this speech may be encountered by anyone. For Strauss, a reader of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, it thus imports to take into account that one will be saying the same thing to different people.

Strauss is useful for addressing what haunts the politics of speech, and taste, because he voices the claim that speaking politically means *saying different things to different people*. Political prudence requires modulating one's claims on what matters. One way in which Strauss makes this claim is through his routine on the first issue encountered when one starts studying Plato. Typically, after going through his routine on why one should study ancient political philosophy at all in the present—that is, after voicing what he calls “the crisis of the West”; the fact that political thought and action is, as such, always and everywhere concerned with change *for the better*; that it therefore implies that people hold *some* conception of better and worse, if only implicitly; that ancient political philosophy made this question of better and worse its main concern; and that this tradition (*the Tradition*) of political philosophy starts with Plato (see Gunnell 1978)—, Strauss then insists on the fact that Plato never spoke in his own name in any of the books published under his name (e.g. Strauss 2010b). Socrates is seemingly Plato's spokesman, but he is reputedly ironic. It is therefore not clear what he teaches. Still, it should be remarked that Socrates only speaks to a few people at a time, in private, as it were—safe for his *Apology*, which led to his death. Socrates is also absent from a few dialogues. A “stranger” tends to replace him. Facing a dialogue, one must attentively analyze both what is said and what is not said by who to unfold the meaning of the “action” (whether it is “voluntary” or “forced”, etc.), and evaluate the apparent contradictions and lacunas in “the argument” that could not reasonably have escaped Plato—a *great thinker*, says Strauss—in order to grasp what it is teaching. The very form of the dialogue is said to be the best form to say different things to different people.

Each time Strauss makes a claim, one wonders whether he is speaking of himself. It becomes abysmal. Epigones and critics alike underline that “Strauss spoke to different people differently, telling each what he believed they needed to hear”—not “expressing the same truths to all in different ways or using different language or metaphors depending on the ability and inclination of the one being taught”, but “*literally* teaching different people different things” (Drury 2005, 188). This story echoes how Strauss himself reads Socrates’ interventions at the end of *The Republic*:

No one who has understood the dual meaning of justice can fail to see the necessity of Socrates’ “Philistine” utterance on the earthly rewards which the just, generally speaking, receive (613d, c4). Socrates, who knew Glaucon, is a better judge of what is good for Glaucon than any reader of the *Republic*, and surely than the modern “idealists” who shudder in a thoroughly unmanly way [i.e. in a way opposite to Glaucon’s character, which is marked by *thumos*] at the thought that men who are pillars of a stable society through their uprightness, which indeed must not be entirely divorced from ability or artfulness, are likely to be rewarded by their society. This thought is an indispensable corrective to Glaucon’s exaggerated statement in his long speech about the extreme suffering of a genuinely just man [at the beginning of Book II]: Glaucon could not have known what a genuinely just man is. It cannot be the duty of a genuinely just man like Socrates to drive weaker men to despair of the possibility of some order and decency in human affairs, and least of all those who, by virtue of their inclinations, their descent, and their abilities, may have some public responsibility. For Glaucon it is more than enough that he will remember for the rest of his days and perhaps transmit to others the many grand and perplexing sights which Socrates has conjured for his benefit in that memorable night at the Piraeus (Strauss 1978 [1964], 137).

It is from such passages that stories of Strauss as a Machiavellian Socrates, as a hermetic “teacher of evil”, as Strauss himself qualified Machiavelli following “the most common view” (Strauss 1969 [1958], 9-14), that the picture emerges of a “mastermind” whose

plans are executed by a nebula of “followers” long after his death. The somewhat gloomy, troubling aura of importance around Strauss is woven through those stories⁷⁹.

4.2 “Here, I will not be hustled”

I believe the fascination exercised by Strauss-the-ventriloquist on political thinkers of diverse allegiances stems from how believing in an effective political influence of Strauss’ even most “obscure” exegetical work, including the work done in a classroom, reinforces the idea that scholars can have significant political effects, and that they can do so not “only” by participating in “party politics” or “social movements”, or by participating in “the policy process” as experts—read: not “merely” as citizens among millions, nor as experts among thousands—, but through their most patiently scholarly works—through the careful, attentive commentary of a centuries-old footnote, say, for of course, one tends to consider oneself an attentive reader rather than a superficial one... This idea gives significance to one’s daily practices, which cannot always be enjoyable and evidently important. Arguments on whether Strauss “himself” would have agreed with this or that policy which commentators trace to his “influence” (e.g. Labelle 2007; and in reply, Giroux 2011), he who, according to his daughter, only wanted “to spend his life raising rabbits (Flemish Giants) and reading Plato” (Strauss Clay 2003), hint, for their part, at how one’s actions have unforeseen consequences, no matter how careful one is. It seems to be the case, for instance, that “constructivist” sociologies of science have had the unforeseen effect of giving weapons to those who “do not believe” in a human influence on the climate (see Stengers 2009). Seeing one’s “conceptual tool-box” being

⁷⁹ For a polemological analysis of the “Strauss goes to Washington” story, written by two of his students, see Zuckert & Zuckert 2006.

used against its intended uses seems to make the counsel that it is often wise to say different things to different people import in a way that could readily be qualified as politically urgent. This claim does function within what I call aesthetics of emancipation.

Aesthetics of emancipation act as prerequisites to the determination of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of logomachies because logomachic formulations posit that those who encounter conflicting claims can be changed by such encounters, for better or worse. Aesthetics are at stake not only because accounts of forms of experience are implied, but also because opposites, in such formulations, may appear identical. The most liberating can be the most enslaving. More contentiously: the most enslaving can be the most liberating. Encountering the silent voices of nonhumans, and even of the planet as a whole through the speeches of those who are in principle authorized to speak in its name in virtue of their vocation, of their lifework, namely scientists, may emancipate from an arguably reductive formulation of political life as a *jeu à deux*, as a two-player-game involving only humans and other humans (Serres 2009, 51-80). It may also strengthen the non-democratic tendencies of the rule of experts and technocrats. Emancipation is always a wager.

Perhaps vocation, here, should be read as Deleuze understands the resistance of “artists, filmmakers, musicians, mathematicians [and] philosophers” in his *Abécédaire* (in Boutang 2004, R; I translate). To the question “To what do they resist?”, he replies: “They first of all resist the pushes and wishes of current opinion, that is to say to all this realm of imbecilic interrogations. They truly have the strength to require (*la force d’exiger*) their own rhythm. We will not be able to force them to put out anything in premature conditions, just as we will not hustle an artist. Nobody has the right to hustle

an artist”. Stengers (2009) takes on this answer and claims the many “here, I will not be hustled” distinguish practitioners from one another. But of course, hustles abound in political matters, where and when “the pushes and wishes of current opinion” often seem to be all there is to consider, all there is to listen to, and to re-voice.

Refolding distributions of importance (II)

This second chapter opens up toward the three following ones. The first two chapters of this dissertation act as a first mapping of how variations in distributions of political importance are thought in contemporary conjunctures. Arguably, they form a twine from which many loose threads now hang out, waiting to be picked up. What lay beside, beyond, or even under formulations of political life as a matter of prevalence and of emancipation, of sight and speech, and taste? Throughout this second chapter, it should have become evident that something like aesthetics of temperament, something like a multiplicity of inclinations are at stake in accounts of what matters politically. In the third chapter, I relate this formulation of political importance to the politics of hearing. Quietly, I think the soundness of thinking political life in terms of aesthetics of friction has also become sensible. I think through this formulation of political importance in the fourth chapter, in relation to the politics of touch. Finally, a few remarks in the present chapter have suggested, at key moments, that something like aesthetics of endurance are at stake—perhaps in all the aesthetics of politics mentioned thus far. I engage this formulation through the politics of smell in the fifth and last chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter III – Aesthetics of Temperament: the Politics of Hearing

It is true that the noise of destruction adds to its satisfaction; the banging of windows and the crashing of glass are the robust sounds of fresh life, the cries of something new-born. It is easy to evoke them and that increases their popularity. Everything shouts together; the din is the applause of objects. There seems to be a special need for this kind of noise at the beginning of events, when the crowd is still small and little or nothing has happened. The noise is a promise of the reinforcements the crowd hopes for, and a happy omen for deeds to come.

Elias Canetti (1981 [1960], 19)

In the moment however, let us allow the philosopher to lend an ear to the signal, rather than rush to the police station.

Alain Badiou (2011, 37; I translate)

All the same, one would have to be very deaf indeed not to hear the enormous cracking sounds of this system—enormous cracking sounds...

Éric Hazan (in Sigel 2012; I translate)

Concordia discordantium canonum

The scene took place in daylight, in May 2012, in Montréal, outside the main entrance of the glass-walled building of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, by the Berri-UQÀM metro station. I was going out of the library for a break. Inside, by the revolving doors, ten policemen were standing by, in light anti-riot gear. These garments had become a common sight in downtown Montréal, given the daily protests linked to the students' unlimited general strike that began in mid-February to oppose the raise in tuition fees announced by the Liberal government; it was to last until late August. On

March 22, thousands of people had taken to the streets in the metropolis—some say up to 250 000 people, but crowd estimation is a risky business⁸⁰. Still, it remained unusual to encounter anti-riot police within a public building, especially as no protest was to be seen or heard. I made my way outside hesitantly, but without being prevented from doing so. Other “civilians” were going in and out the library, if at a slower pace than usual.

Once outside, I immediately heard two series of sounds coming from my left: glass being shattered, and a few people chanting. At the same time, I saw on my right two other groups of about ten police officers each, standing at opposite positions. They formed a triangle whose third vertex was a group of about six people with their backs to the building, separated from the recently installed glass walls by plants and concrete. They supported the strike, if the small red felt square each of them had pinned on could be trusted. They seemed in their early twenties. They were the ones making noise.

The police officers were silent. They remained at a distance from the small group but seemed very attentive. The action was indeed fascinating. The protesters gathered by a large plastic container, some two feet high, four feet long and two feet wide, placed on an old carpet. By the sound of it, it held the resounding pieces of glass. A man with a bandana covering the lower half of his face was on one knee, hammering and stirring the glass. Mobilizing a familiar rhythm, they were all chanting “*la vitre brisée attire les policiers*”—in an apt rendition of their tone: “broken glass attracts the cops”. This was an original slogan. I had never heard it in previous protests, nor did I hear it afterward.

⁸⁰ From May 2012 onward, an amateur collective named *Translating the printemps érable*, sympathetic to the striking students, offered an archive in English of the main texts and conversations that took place during what was quickly nicknamed “the maple spring”. See <http://translatingtheprintempserable.tumblr.com/101> (Accessed June 1, 2013). Strategic considerations linked to crowd over-estimation formed only one, rather minor conversation among the many that emerged throughout the strike. Tactical questions raised on this topic included that of the risks of being told that “the movement is losing steam” when the number of people in the street visibly drops, even though thousands still march weekly.

After what seemed like ten minutes or so, the protesters went quiet, lifted up the container, rolled the carpet and walked away. They made their way through the park nearby, Place Émilie-Gamelin (the rallying point of most protests), and disappeared into the distance. A few police officers followed them, at a slow pace. While I do not know how it ended, no interpellation seems to have occurred. Had it happened, *in that singular conjuncture*, I trust the word would have spread rapidly across “social media”.

I found it quite remarkable that the contrast between the slight smile of most bystanders and the steady, serious gaze of most police officers seemed to make the chanted statement all the more true. Those who can be presumed to have sympathized with the “red squares”—a loosely defined group in which I include myself—seemed to consider the claim an apt characterization of the temperament of “the police”, which is often criticized for its propensity to protect windows (property) and to charge protesters more or less discriminately when smashing does occur. The protection of windows and the repression of smashers (*casseurs*), as well as calls to increase both, have been heard by many activists as symbols of the so-called objective alliance of the repressive state apparatus, Capital, mainstream media, and “consumerist masses”. In return, many of those who would rather speak of “the silent majority” of “ordinary tax-payers” repeat that broken windows are the prime signs of anarchistic violence, of disorder and chaos⁸¹.

As the small crowd grew, it became quite evident that the sound of broken glass attracts a fair number of people, and not only “the cops”. I, for one, stayed until the end

⁸¹ These lines wilfully echo what policy circles have come to call “the broken-window theory” (following Kelling & Wilson 1982). This theory, however, concerns “low-intensity vandalism”, not window-breaking that may occur in a protest or a riot. Regarding the latter, it is interesting to note that rumors about the role of *agents provocateurs* that would somehow be paid by the police forces to encourage, and even to perform the breaking of windows in mass protests tend to appear quite soon after a window is indeed broken. As rumors, however, these allegations are hardly ever verified or falsified.

of the action to see what was going to happen. The sound of shattering glass, which usually makes me flee, surely played a role in my “decision”, but I would add this caveat: this sonic event became attractive—I was drawn closer to it—when it had become reasonably clear that the glass was contained and was going to remain so. And were the opposite to occur... well, the police was close by? The sound first caught attention as that of a danger. The irregular hammering and curiosity for what was to be done with the shattered glass then modulated the ambient level of stress. Police officers seemed to slowly get used to the situation as they started to adopt more relaxed postures. It was never entirely certain, however, that the breaking was the end of the deed, and not a means to another end. In any case, the protesters were largely outnumbered—but this may have signaled another danger for “sympathizers”: I for one never feared protesters during the so-called maple spring; as for fearing the police, it is a very different story.

As I encountered this scene and felt the “smashers” might get arrested, I started wondering what difference it could make, if any, were a sign ARTISTIC PERFORMANCE IN PROGRESS put up beside them. “Probably none”, I thought, “not now...” This was a pressing question on the limits of what counts as a political action, or at least as “free speech”⁸². The quick evaluation of this eventuality—what could happen with an ART sign—was readily informed by the singular conjuncture “in” or through which it arose. This conjuncture was marked by what I now call a high level of psycho-political stress. There was (and there remains) an aural, sonorous aspect to this stress, to this sustained

⁸² I clearly recall deciding, or *desiring*, at that very moment, to use this event in the way I am using it here, namely as the introductory “vignette” to my chapter on the politics of hearing. In the fourth section below, I return to the association of “personal feelings” with the witnessing and reporting of “political acts”, through an engagement with Carl Schmitt’s concerns with what he termed “political romanticism”.

tension. The sound of a helicopter flying at a low altitude long remained sufficient, for some, to bring back the atmosphere of the times—call it posttraumatic stress, perhaps...

The fact that those glass-breaking protesters were not “simply” arrested or fined was conjunctural as well. The Montréal police could well have charged them with infringing municipal by-law B-3 on noise production, which forbids “noise resulting from cries, clamors, singing, altercations or cursing and any other form of uproar” (City of Montréal 1994, § 9.4). Doing so *there-and-then*, however, may have had consequences of an unpredictable magnitude, first given the glass ready at hand, but also given the assiduity with which people were reporting police gestures. Similarly, from May onward, by-law P-6 made it so that any protest that did not transmit its route beforehand and was not authorized (that is, virtually every protest: literally hundreds of them) was illegal—and yet “tolerated as long as no criminal offence [was] committed”, as the police repeatedly declared through its noisy megaphone truck. The section of P-6 forbidding masks covering the face was also very loosely enforced, if at all. Nonetheless, both sections (route and masks) were readily invoked as soon as an intervention became “necessary”—or was underway. The importance of context is made even more manifest by how, one year later, as protests against “police brutality” were gaining some momentum, it had become quite thinkable to enforce P-6 very strictly indeed⁸³.

If there is something like a typical, fundamental, or even essential temperament of “the police”, and also a typical, fundamental, or even essential temperament of

⁸³ The most powerful symbol of this intensification is probably the fact that Anarchopanda, a big panda mascot impersonated by a CEGEP philosophy professor in support of the students since May 2012, was “beheaded” on April 7, 2013. During most of 2012, Anarchopanda was “tolerated” by the police, to whom he even gave some hugs. Interestingly, the man under the costume is the one who is contesting the constitutionality of by-law P-6 in court (Lalonde 2012). Note that the news of the “beheading” and of the return of Anarchopanda’s head to its owner were covered by both Francophone and Anglophone media throughout Canada (see Moore 2013; National Post Staff 2013; Presse Canadienne 2013; for by-law P-6, see City of Montréal 2012, §§ 2.1; 3.2).

“protesters” in contemporary conjunctures—this is a big *if* that asks, I believe, to be refolded onto the problem of political importance—, if there exist characteristic stances, attitudes and postures on “both sides”, that is: habitual manners of holding that this or that matters more or less, politically, then it appears that any expression of these temperaments is itself tempered, as it were, by the drone of circumstances. Political life, in that sense, has much to do with how discordant canons can be made to concord⁸⁴.

1. Politics and/as temperament: modulating modulated ardors

In this third chapter, I engage the following hypothesis: *aesthetics of temperament act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of resonances*. This hypothesis seeks to make audible how more or less prevalent and conflicting claims on what matters politically tend to be thought of as forming a multiplicity of interrelated modulations—chords and melodies, if you will. To hear the Montréal police and the protesters that were, for a moment, all ears for one another by the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec as clashing forces demands an appreciation of concord and discord. It requires a certain ear for the sense of the deeds, the voices and the noises that made this occasion into an oscillating site of a singularly disharmonious distribution of political importance. Variations in such a distribution

⁸⁴ The title of this opening section and this last clause both seek to echo the title of a somewhat forgotten sum of texts on Canon law that once were very important in the politics of Christianity, for which the terms concord and discord—if only between “the city of man” and “the city of God”—have been quite important. Compiled by Gratian around 1140, the *Concordance of Discordant Canons*, also known as *Decretum Gratiani*, kept being used by the Roman Catholic Church until the early 20th century, and had a significant influence on the construction of Western law (for a survey of recent scholarship on the relationships between Medieval Canon Law and central aspects of contemporary Western law, see Reid & Witte 1999). Moreover, I believe the term “canon” readily resonates with its Greek etymology, *kanon* meaning “rule” or “measure”. It is generally admitted that what is at stake in political life are different rules, different measures, different rationalities, that is: *sums* of what is deemed important, orderings of what has been *canonized*, as it were.

appear to occur through processes of harmonization and disharmonization, consonance and dissonance, that is to say: through series of qualifiable resonances.

I argue that formulations of the problem of political importance in terms of resonances put into play the politics of hearing in ways that *require* aesthetics of temperament, if only because the very ability to hear significant modulations in distributions of what matters seems distributed as a character trait. Before engaging the claims that “Society is the sum of its spoken songs” (Sloterdijk 2005, 337; I translate) and that “politics [is] the art of what is possible in noise (*dans le bruit*)” (341), a first folding of the political uses of the notion of temperament can help to articulate this third specific hypothesis to the two previous refoldings of the politics of sight onto aesthetics of prevalence, and of the politics of speech, and taste, onto aesthetics of emancipation.

1.1 The discordant prevalence of emancipatory temperaments

This chapter on the politics of hearing and the two following ones, on the politics of touch and the politics of smell, engage the three senses of the age-old fivefold that are apparently far less important than sight and taste (as “the sense of speech”) in attempts at thinking political importance. Again, Rancière’s claim that “politics bears on what we see and what we can say about it, on who has the competence to see and the quality to say” (Rancière 2000, 14; I translate) exemplarily phrases the import of these two senses for prevalent problematizations of how aesthetics of politics relate to the ways in which what matters politically is determined as such. The first two chapters of this work thus form a first, more descriptive part that mapped a highly populated neighborhood of claims. This third chapter opens a second, more exploratory part that must be more daring in its refolding gestures precisely since the apt, useful folds are not as evident.

It is rather obvious, however, that hearing—seemingly more so than touch and smell—is always already enfolded within considerations of the politics of speech, and taste. What are logomachies, if not more or less sonorous occurrences? To be judged or assessed as such, conflicting claims have to be heard in some way(s)⁸⁵. Hearing is also enfolded within the politics of sight. In effect, the ability to “read between the lines”, as Strauss would put it, is also an ability to listen carefully to what is said to import, and to detect what is silenced and yet—or even as such—imports⁸⁶. This central chapter is

⁸⁵ On the relation between various modes of hearing and possible judgments about what imports, consider this remark by James Tully in “Public Philosophy as a Critical Activity”: “To employ Stanley Cavell’s striking analysis [in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*], we can see our predicament as somewhat analogous to Nora and Thorvold in Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*. Nora is trying to say something that is important to her but the dominant language in which Thorvold listens and responds misrepresents the way she says it, what she is saying and her understanding of the intersubjective practice in which she speaks. Thorvold takes it as a matter of course that a marriage is a doll’s house and he recognizes, interacts with and responds to the problems Nora raises always already as if she were a doll, with the limited range of possible conduct this form of subjectivity entails. As a result, Thorvold fails to secure uptake of her speech-act as a ‘claim of reason’, and so a democratic dialogue over the justice of the oppressive relations between them (which compose their practice of marriage) is disqualified from the outset. She is deprived of a voice in her political world. The first question for political philosophy today is, therefore, ‘How do we attend to the strange multiplicity of political voices and activities without distorting or disqualifying them in the very way we approach them?’” (Tully 2008, 20) Throughout this chapter, I argue that many answers to this last question, and even the question itself tend to be formulated in the language of what I call aesthetics of temperament. The possibility *and* the necessity of a “working-on-oneself” presuppose there is a “self” to be worked upon or modulated, even though it can also be added that this “self” does not strictly pre-exist such “working-through”. It seems that the variable “ability” for self-fashioning asks to be described in terms of various temperaments.

In his general introduction to *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, “Public philosophy and civic freedom: a guide to the two volumes”, Tully unfolds the musical resonance of his title: “I would like to say a few words about the phrase ‘in a new key’. Just as a jazz musician plays a composition in a new key relative to the classic performances of it, so too a specific public philosopher plays the role in his or her own new style in relation to the classic public philosophers in his or her field. The style of these studies is a new key in that it combines historical studies and a reciprocal civic relationship in what I hope is a distinctive way. Jazz musicians play in a new key in the course of improvising with other musicians and in dialogue with classic performances and present audiences. Analogously, public philosophers improvise in dialogues with contemporary theorists, the classics, engaged citizens and in response to the political problems that confront and move them. This is the situated freedom of a public philosopher. I see the studies in these volumes as improvisations in this sense” (9-10; I underline).

⁸⁶ This is to say that there is a more or less extended gap between what is seen and what is said and heard. For Rancière, acknowledging the unbridgeable character of this gap is to acknowledge *dissensus*. Beside Strauss’ insistence on the distinction between exoteric and esoteric teaching, discussed at the end of the preceding chapter as an attempt to modulate (but not necessarily to reduce) this very gap, one can also ponder Foucault’s remarks on the inevitably “audio-visual” character of “the archive”, which are highlighted by Deleuze in his *Foucault*. Deleuze cites two series of statements: “[O]n the one hand, ‘we may well say what we see, [but] what we see never resides (*ne se loge jamais*) within what we say, and we may well make see (*faire voir*), by images, metaphors, [or] comparisons, what we are saying, [but] the place (*lieu*) where they shine is not that which the eyes deploy, but that which the successions of syntax define’; on the other hand, ‘we must admit between the figure and the text a whole series of interweavings (*entrecroisements*), or rather, from one to the

therefore crucial for weaving together the different threads of this research. These first remarks on different *modes* of hearing or listening to various claims and visions already suggest that determinations of political importance have to do with temperaments.

A recent etymological genealogy of the uses of this last word, temperament, both in its nominal and its verbal forms, indicates that

It derives from the Latin *temperare*, “to tamper with,” and the French *tempérer*, “to mix ingredients proportionately,” to produce a favorable blending of contraries. It also comes from Old English *temprian*, “to regulate”: God turns the spheres and tempers all on high. To temper can mean to adjust to the needs of a situation, to ease difficulty by finding a middle course or forging a compromise. /To temper is to make morally suitable, as in *temperance*, and to instill peace, as in *temperamentum*: the due measure that leads to balance. A healthy temperament, it was once believed, results from the equilibrium of various physical humors. Tempering is an act that persuades and pacifies. “Now will I do to that old Andronicus, and temper him with all the art I have,” wrote Shakespeare. Men temper themselves through restraint to avoid the explosive outbursts of *distemper*. /Other related words suggest broader connections. There is *tempus*: to do things at the right time, in the right season. And there is *templus*: a space cut off and consecrated to the gods—the origin of *temple*. Each term connotes a world partitioned into dissimilar fragments, then made whole through a process of judicious blending. /Musical temperament was a response to the frustrating discovery that nature’s proportions, in spite of man’s best efforts to force them into a regimented, reliable scheme, follow their own inexorable path (Isacoff 2003, 94-5).

other, attacks launched, arrows thrown at the adverse target, enterprises of undermining and destruction, thrusts of lances and wounds, a battle...’, ‘falls of images in the middle of words, verbal lightning that traverse drawings...’, ‘incisions of discourse in the form of things’, and inversely” (Deleuze 2004 [1986], 72-3; I translate). Note how Deleuze, with these citations, succeeds in making audible the peculiar writing and speaking style of Foucault, which abounds in enumerations that try to circumscribe a concept in its many possible variations. For an acoustic and rhetorical analysis of the difference in style between Deleuze and Foucault, see the *Portrait oratoire de Gilles Deleuze aux yeux jaunes* (Jaeglé 2005, 41-46).

Below, through the second, artistico-political fold of this third chapter, I refold what musicians and musicologists call equal temperament—a mode of tuning that prevails in “the West” since the early 20th century—onto problematizations of political importance. Through this first, politological fold, what the notion of temperament readily stirs up is a broad field of problems that concern the relations between dispositions and actions.

As another name for inclination, leaning, attitude, character, or even personality, temperament relates to aesthetics for it seeks to circumscribe something upon which sense-making is conditional. Temperament effectively appears to be a key factor in how what occurs is sensed—in how signals are received and processed by perceiving entities, to put it in the language of information theory. The existence of many temperaments that are, in virtue of their multiplicity, more or less able to coexist may thus account for how different entities—say, individuals and/or groups—sense and make sense differently. Politics, in that sense, resounds as a practice that modulates this multiplicity.

It may or may not be the case that all human sense-making presupposes sensibility in the form of what Kant called a transcendental aesthetic, which is to say in the guise of a priori representations of space and time that structure the very relations of intuition to the understanding, reason, and imagination. It seems indubitable, however, that *one had to be Kant* to turn the intuition of formulating the problem of sense in this way into the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It seems equally certain that one—*already?*—has to have, or to be of, a singular temperament to find *something* in Kant⁸⁷.

⁸⁷ As a mundane illustration of this claim, consider how students of political thought who read Kant closely will tend to be considered—and will perhaps consider themselves—as “nerds” of a certain type, especially when they find themselves with people who never read Kant. Some may claim that a temperament thusly inclined, “driven toward” the “canonical history” of Western philosophy and political thought, is politically inapt in many ways, but this disagreement (or *mésentente*) regarding what is politically sound also seems a matter of temperament. One can argue that temperaments (“a nerdy disposition”, “a practical character”) inform, or even determine what one is to do of one’s life—or conversely, that what one does informs, or even

Politologies phrased in terms of temperament ring truest when they describe variations in the seductiveness of an “entity”—say, of an idea. In a nutshell, they claim different people like different things. It is something of a platitude to say that one has to be just who one is to do what one does, and to find important what one finds important. If this is a banal claim, it is also notable that Western thought also teaches that “who one is” is largely determined by what ones does, heard as an expression of what has become or is becoming important in a singular configuration. Political sociology further teaches that one always becomes *through* one’s context(s), culture(s), and environment(s), through where, when, and how one lives. Perhaps one had to become Plato—but *what does this require exactly? growing up in Athens around 400 BCE in a rather wealthy family? does it include developing broad shoulders, as his name reputedly indicates?*—to dramatize so forcefully the political importance of how difficult it is (or how impossible it seems) for people to be *just* who they are, to become and remain *nothing but* who they “truly” are.

*

The list of political thinkers who claim that something like temperament plays political roles of the utmost importance, and the list of those whose works tend to be heard (often in return) as expressions of their “own” supposed or documented temperament, which would offer sufficient reasons for what they do and even can find important, is virtually

determines what can finally be said to have been one’s temperament. A relation of co-determination between dispositions and deeds is the safest hypothesis to start with.

A perhaps less banal iteration of these considerations can be found in accounts of the very history of Western philosophy and political thought. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, for instance, claimed in an interview that “it is evident that one had to be Kant to find what Kant found in Rousseau” (in Deutsch 2008; I translate). In the same passage, he refuses for himself (and most others) the title of “philosopher”, preferring that of philosophy professor, because he considers that “a philosopher is a very rare thing[.] There may be one or two in a century”. His remarks revolve around the difference between “public thinkers” (such as Kant and Hegel, who were university professors) and those Lacoue-Labarthe calls “private thinkers” (such as Nietzsche and Rousseau), a group in which he includes himself because of the form of his writings (something like “the essay”), even though he held a position at the University of Strasbourg and, as such, he had to “profess”, to make himself heard publicly.

endless⁸⁸. Still, it would seem ill advised for a student of Western political thought not to put Plato near or at the top of both lists. Plato appears to be the thinker par excellence of politics as a practice of tempering various already-modulated ardors, and the mode of political tempering he seems to have privileged is often said to be grounded in his “own”

⁸⁸ What counts as documentation of a temperament? As an indication, one can quickly consider influential readings of two canonical figures of Modern-Western political thought: Machiavelli and Hobbes. In Machiavelli’s case, it is notorious that his very name became the name of something like a temperament or a character trait marked by quiet scheming, a disposition that arguably plays an important role in what is commonly called petty politics. While *The Prince* is often taken to be the guide to Machiavellian politics, the question of whether “Machiavelli-himself” was at all Machiavellian in the common understanding of the term has been debated for centuries, starting quite soon after his short treatise began to circulate (for a genealogy of the reception of Machiavelli, see Lefort 1986 [1975]; for a reiteration of the “commonsense” characterization of Machiavelli as “a teacher of evil”, see Strauss 1969 [1958]). In Hobbes’ case, a number of conversations in the field of the history of political thought have centered on the roles of fear and vainglory in both his “political writings” and his “personal life”. These have often tried to expose a close relationship between the two. In a recent article that surveys and criticizes influential readings of “Hobbes himself” as being characterized by a vainglorious, immodest temperament, Julie E. Cooper presents a rhetorical analysis of textual evidence in support of Hobbes’ own claims to modesty. Regarding fear, beside mentioning the influence of the English civil war(s) on Hobbes’ political works, Cooper dwells on famous lines from Hobbes’ late autobiography in verse, often referred to as the *Vita carmine expressa*, in which he imagines the atmosphere of his birth as *setting the tone* for his whole life. Cooper writes: “The *Vita* demonstrates the contribution of fear to the shaping of Hobbes’s philosophical and political projects. Hobbes, whose birth coincides with the Anglo-Spanish war, opens with a lament for ‘Th’ill Times, and Ills born with me’ – foremost among them, fear. As Hobbes famously relates, the threat of invasion by the Spanish Armada spooked his pregnant mother, prompting her to deliver a pair of twins. ‘For Fame had rumour’d, that a Fleet at Sea, /Wou’d cause our Nations Catastrophe; /And hereupon it was my Mother Dear /Did bring forth Twins at once, both Me, and Fear.’ [...] Although the fear that seizes Hobbes’s mother remains unnamed, the perilous circumstances of her labour clue readers in to the fact that Hobbes’s twin is not generic fear. Rather, it is *fear of violent death* at the hands of invading Spaniards. Thus, Hobbes’s twin is also a twin to the ‘Feare of Death’ that deflates vanity, and inclines men to peace, in *Leviathan*’s state of nature. (And, in its materialism and appeal to self-interest, the fear of violent death is itself a consciously deflated double of the lofty religious notion of human finitude.)” (Cooper 2007, 536-7; note how Cooper’s remarks suggest that “the international” is similar, if not equivalent, to the Hobbesian “state of nature”). In the following sub-section, I return to what may be called “the question of the mother” by engaging the ways in which life in the womb has been said to shape the temperament of individual human beings in a crucial manner through in utero hearing.

As indicated above, it seems the list of political thinkers who pay attention to temperament and who are heard in terms of their “own” temperament may grow infinitely (for a history of Western philosophy explicitly composed in terms of “Philosophical temperaments”, see Sloterdijk 2013b [2009]; for an analysis of the relationships between problematizations of “reason” in terms of “resonance” and in terms of “reflection”, see Erlmann 2010). For a more recent “case” than Machiavelli and Hobbes, consider accounts of Louis Althusser’s struggle with “melancholia” (this is his term), which would have led to him murdering his wife. These accounts put his lifelong practice of psychoanalytic cure in relation to the “ambiguous mix of Marx and Freud” that characterizes his political thought (Roudinesco 2005, 179-236; for his own account, see Althusser 1992). The mention of Hobbes’ and Althusser’s autobiographies raises, in return, the question of the extent to which one can *hear* one’s own temperament, and what participates in the composition of one’s “tone” (see Derrida 1982). Is not the variable ability for such hearing always already a matter of temperament? As my discussion of Bourdieu’s *La distinction* suggested in Chapter II, it seems one cannot but be partially blind—or deaf—to one’s own dispositions—perhaps just as one never quite hears one’s voice as others hear it, even when it is recorded.

disposition—his being “a man of philosophical leaning” would explain his claim that philosophers should become kings, or kings, philosophers⁸⁹.

Plato’s *Republic* (1991 [380 BCE]) is a site well worth engaging at some length for refolding the roles of aesthetics of temperament in problematizations of the variations in distributions of political importance. This is so not least because, in its very polysemy, what I call temperament plays many roles in this “inaugural” dialogue. For one, Socrates’ definitions of justice “in the city” and “in the individual” both depict a character and attitude—a *psyche* and an *ethos*—to be “cultivated” if justice is to be practiced. This “just” temperament can itself be qualified as tempered and tempering (beside the fact that temperance sometimes translates *sophrosune*, the “virtue” most often rendered as moderation). Justice “in the city” is famously equated with not tampering with the business of others. Its presentation mobilizes the sense of hearing:

“In my opinion, [Socrates said,] we have been saying and hearing it all along without learning from ourselves that we were in a way saying it.” /“A long prelude,” [Glaucon] said, “for one who desires to hear.” /“Listen whether after all I make any sense,” I said. “That rule we set down at the beginning as to what must be done in everything when we were founding the city—this, or a certain form of it, is, in my opinion, justice. Surely we set down and often said, if you remember, that each one must practice one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit.” /“Yes, we were saying that.” /“And further, that justice is the minding of one’s own business and not being a busybody, this we have both heard from many others and have often said ourselves.” /“Yes, we have.” /“Well, then, my friend,” I said, “this—the practice

⁸⁹ Reading and teaching *The Republic* with undergraduate students in a political science department has taught me that the first reaction of a remarkable number of students to Plato’s Socrates’ “city in speech”—which is also “the city of the military camp”, as Strauss repeatedly puts it—, whose condition of appearance is said to be that philosophers become kings, or kings, philosophers (Plato 1991, 473d-e), is: *of course, Plato and Socrates would say that, they are philosophers*. In that sense, Thrasymachus’ claim that democracies make democratic laws and tyrannies tyrannical laws (338e-339a) is reiterated in the form: philosophers make philosophical laws, which is grasped as nothing but a corporatist claim.

of minding one's own business—when it comes into being in a certain way, is probably justice.” (432e-433b)⁹⁰

Justice “in the individual”, for its part, requires a temperament that can acknowledge what “truly concerns” oneself, what *must* import given just who one is “by nature”:

“And this, Glaucon, turns out to be after all a kind of phantom of justice—that’s also why it’s helpful—the fact that the shoemaker by nature rightly practices shoemaking and does nothing else, and the carpenter practices carpentry, and so on for the rest.” /“It looks like it.” /“But in truth justice was, as it seems, something of this sort; however, not with respect to a man’s minding his external business, but with respect to what is within, with respect to what truly concerns him and his own. He doesn’t let each part in him mind other people’s business or the three classes in the soul [appetites, wisdom and courage] meddle with each other, but really sets his own house in good order and rules himself; *he arranges himself, becomes his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts, exactly like three notes in a harmonic scale, lowest, highest and middle. And if there are some other parts in between, he binds them together and becomes entirely one from many, moderate [or temperate] and harmonized.* Then, and only then, he acts, if he does act in some way—either concerning the acquisition of money, or the care of the body, *or something*

⁹⁰ Plato’s Socrates acknowledges how it readily appears impracticable for most people to remain content with practicing nothing but “one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit”. It is one of the main roles of the “noble lie”, of the “myth of metals” which grounds the distribution of parts and places within the *polis* in something like divine chance or decision (Plato 1991, 414c-417b) to help foster the acceptance of what counts as a “function”, and to support a broadly stable distribution of who is most fit for what. This “myth”—presented as such—seeks to bring individuals of various temperaments to believe that each one of them is but *one*, or that “subjects” (to put it in Modern terms) are, or at least *can be*, truly undivided. (It appears that a similar device would be required in what Alexandre Kojève, following Hegel, called “the universal and homogeneous State” that is “bound” to come with “the End of History”. See Kojève 1999 [1954]; see also Strauss 2000, which includes an English translation of Kojève’s text, and remarks on this “State” by Strauss.) The so-called social mobility allowed by the presentation of the myth of metals accommodates the practical possibility that children may be “most fit” for a function other than the one practiced by each of their parents, no matter if the latter’s souls are of “gold”, “silver” or “bronze”. It is also the case, however, that it is often assumed in the text itself that there are much more chances for a “golden soul” to be the product of the encounter of two “golden souls” than of any other combination.

Note that in my engagement with *The Republic*, I always indicate which characters are said to have voiced the lines that I cite, for arguably, there are important differences in temperament between Socrates and his interlocutors, and between the interlocutors themselves. Plato’s two brothers, in particular, Glaucon and Adeimantus, have long been heard as the bearers of very distinct inclinations: Glaucon is the most enthusiast, thymotic and “musical” one, while Adeimantus is more sober and suspicious, perhaps more “reasonable”. According to Strauss, in particular, the practical wisdom of Socrates is precisely shown to the (careful) reader by how he modulates his claims in accord with his interlocutor’s temperament.

political, or concerning private contracts. In all these actions he believes and names a just and fine action one that preserves and helps to produce this condition, and wisdom the knowledge that supervises this action; while he believes and names an unjust action one that undoes this condition, and lack of learning, in its turn, the opinion that supervises this action.” (443c-e; I underline)

Harmonia is thereby phrased as a prerequisite for determining what matters politically.

The analogy between “the city” and “the individual” also resonates with aesthetics of temperament. What is at stake, here, is a continuum along which justice can manifest itself. Justice is said to be a possible characteristic of both a *polis* and a “man” (368e). The acceptance of this claim justifies the building of a “city in speech” throughout the *Republic*, the wager being that justice is “easier to observe closely” when a “bigger”, or “more important” entity is engaged⁹¹. The apprehension of justice stands and falls by the soundness of this analogy between “city” and “man”: were justice found to differ significantly at either end of the scale, one would know justice *itself* has not been truly grasped. This is so because the *idea* of justice is *one*. As an Idea or Form, Justice is eternal and identical with itself. It *must* be self-similar at all scales⁹².

⁹¹ The analogy is accepted in passing by Adeimantus. Socrates says: “‘I’ll tell you,’ I said. ‘There is, we say, justice of one man; and there is, surely, justice of a whole city too?’ / ‘Certainly,’ [Adeimantus] said. / ‘Is a city bigger than one man?’ / ‘Yes, it is bigger,’ he said. / ‘So then, perhaps there would be more justice in the bigger and it would be easier to observe closely. If you want, first we’ll investigate what justice is like in the cities. Then, we’ll go on to consider it in individuals, considering the likeness of the bigger in the *idea* of the littler?’ / ‘What you say seems fine to me,’ he said.” (Plato 1991, 368e-369a) To the word “bigger” in Socrates’ question “Is a city bigger than one man?”, Bloom appends this note: “This could also mean ‘more important’” (448n23). Note also the speculative character of Socrates’ claim, indicated by his use of “perhaps”.

⁹² It is noteworthy that in the last lines of the reading of *The Republic* he presents in the central chapter of *The City and Man*, Strauss reiterates that for the “careful reader” the analogy or “parallel” between the city and man does not hold all the way through the dialogue. He writes: “Let us remember here again the fact that the parallel between soul and city, which is the premise of the doctrine of the soul stated in the *Republic*, is evidently questionable and even untenable. The *Republic* cannot bring to light the nature of the soul because it abstracts from the body and from *eros*; by abstracting from the body and *eros*, the *Republic* in fact abstracts from the soul; the *Republic* abstracts from nature; this abstraction is necessary if justice as full dedication to the common good of a particular city is to be praised as choiceworthy for its own sake; and why this praise is necessary, should not be in need of an argument. If we are concerned with finding out precisely what justice is, we must take ‘another longer way around’ in our study of the soul than the way which is taken in the *Republic* (503b; cf. 506d). This does not mean that what we learn from the *Republic* about justice is not true

The fate of the very claim that there exist Ideas or Forms is repeatedly discussed in the dialogue in relation to the fact that there exist many temperaments. People who are philosophically inclined “by nature” (474c) will learn to accept it, as if by necessity, for they love Wisdom and seek Truth, which is also *one* (475e-476a). “The many” (*hoi polloi*), for their part, reject this claim more or less forcefully. They tend not to believe that “beauty itself” exists; they rather hold there are “only beautiful things”, and as they often seem unable to “follow” one who tries to “lead [them] to the knowledge of it”, they are not “awake” but “dreaming” (476c). The story of the ship pilot (488a-489a) and the allegory of the cave (514a-517c) both dramatize this difference in temperaments.

At this point, a first complication to consider stems from nuances made by Plato’s Socrates regarding the disposition of “the many” to accept that there *are* Ideas, if not to practice philosophy. After presenting the allegory of the cave, Socrates says:

“[E]ducation is not what the professions of certain men assert it to be. They presumably assert that they put into the soul knowledge that isn’t in it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes.” /“Yes,” [Glaucón] said, “they do indeed assert that.” /“But the present argument, on the other hand,” I said, “indicates that this power is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns—just as an eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body—must be turned around from that

or is altogether provisional. The first book surely does not teach what justice is, and yet by presenting Socrates’ taming of Thrasymachus as an act of justice, it lets us see justice. The teaching of the *Republic* regarding justice can be true although it is not complete, in so far as the nature of justice depends decisively on the nature of the city—for even the trans-political cannot be understood as such except if the city is understood—and the city is completely intelligible because its limits can be made perfectly manifest: to see these limits, one need not have answered the question regarding the whole; it is sufficient for the purpose to have raised the question regarding the whole. The *Republic* then indeed makes clear what justice is. As Cicero has observed, the *Republic* does not bring to light the best possible regime but rather the nature of political things—the nature of the city. Socrates makes clear in the *Republic* of what character the city would have to be in order to satisfy the highest need of man. By letting us see that the city constructed in accordance with this requirement is not possible, he lets us see the essential limits, the nature, of the city” (Strauss 1978 [1964], 138). It is for this reason that, for Strauss, “the *Republic* conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made” (127). That the “ideal” is impossible, however, does not mean that one should not try to “get closer to it”. I return to this claim in the third section of this chapter.

which *is coming into being* together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which *is* and the brightest part of that which *is*. And we affirm that this is the good, don't we?" / "Yes." / "There would, therefore," I said, "be an art of this turning around, concerned with the way in which this power can most easily and efficiently be turned around, not an art of producing sight in it. Rather, this art takes as given that sight is there, but not rightly turned nor looking at what it ought to look at, and accomplishes this object." (518b-d)⁹³

While it is repeatedly stated in the text that the "philosophical disposition" is most rare, and that much conspires against it, "the many" are depicted as being able to accept the "virtue" of philosophers if it is properly, or diplomatically explained to them (500a). Arguably, this is so because "no one [...] voluntarily wishes to lie about the most sovereign things to what is most sovereign in himself. Rather, he fears holding a lie there more than anything." (382a) In any case, those who truly threaten the project of ruling the *polis* rationally and truthfully are less "the many" than sophists and demagogues. Only "true" philosophers, in Plato's world, are of an emancipatory temperament. This is why their presence in a "dreaming city" may destroy (497d), or at least disturb that city.

A second complication concerns how a city is not only bigger or more important than an individual: it is also *made* of individuals (among other things). At the beginning

⁹³ Arguably, the ear is even less mobile than the eye—to "turn" it also requires a reorientation of the head, and of "the whole body". To the phrase "this power is in the soul of each", Bloom appends a note to "each" in which he writes that "[philologist J. H. Kells] makes a persuasive argument that this clause should be translated: '...that this power is the power which already exists in each man's soul...'" (in Plato 1991, 465n3). The sentence can thus be used to support an "egalitarian" reading of Plato. In a radio show where he discussed his recent "rewriting" of Plato's *Republic*, to which I briefly return below, Alain Badiou mentioned this very passage when he explained his "philosophical" decision to translate *psyche* by "Subject", rather than by "soul". His interlocutor, Plato scholar Monique Dixsaut, disagrees with Badiou's decision, which serves to support his claim that anyone *can* be a philosopher insofar as everyone *desires* to know something of "the truth". According to Dixsaut, the belief that *everyone* fundamentally desires to know and understand is Aristotelian. For Plato, the scarcity of those who "can" become philosophers is less a matter of "capacity" or "ability" than a matter of different desires; if it is a matter of capacity, what is at stake is the ability to modulate desires. Every *psyche* is a battlefield where various desires seek to prevail. Dixsaut agrees with Plato's "elitism" insofar as it is phrased as an "acknowledgment" of how "for most people it is the desire to make money that prevails, or the desire to have power", not the desire to know (in Van Reeth & Berger 2013).

of Book VIII, Socrates asks Glaucon: “‘Do you know,’ I said, ‘that it is necessary that there also be as many forms of human characters as there are forms of regimes? Or do you suppose that the regimes arise ‘from an oak or rocks’ and not from the dispositions of the men in the cities, which, tipping the scale as it were, draw the rest along with them?’” (544d-e)⁹⁴ This framing of the distribution of temperaments grounds the discussion of four “imperfect regimes” (timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny), along with the four “imperfect characters” that seemingly bring them into being.

Regarding “existing regimes”, one is told that democracies, in particular, where the *demos*—equated with “the poor” (557a)—rule, resound with misnomers. Individuals of a “democratic character” call “freedom” what is in truth “anarchy” (560e). The cardinal “fault” of democracies is that they are intrinsically multiple *and thus directionless*: they contain “all sorts of human beings” and “all species of regimes” (557c-e). The “democratic individual” also treats all pleasures equally: “To whichever one happens along, as though it were chosen by the lot, he hands over the rule within himself until it is

⁹⁴ In Book IV, in a passage that puts forth a geographical distribution of characters, attributes different prevailing temperaments to different peoples, and thereby seems to justify in passing Greek rule over Barbarians in virtue of the formers’ “love of wisdom”, Socrates already made a similar point: “‘Isn’t it quite necessary for us to agree that the very same forms and dispositions as are in the city are in each of us?’ I said. ‘Surely they haven’t come there from any other place. It would be ridiculous if someone should think that the spiritedness didn’t come into the cities from those private men who are just the ones imputed with having this character, such as those in Thrace, Scythia, and pretty nearly the whole upper region; or the love of learning, which one could most impute to our region, or the love of money, which one could affirm is to be found not least among the Phoenicians and those in Egypt.’” (Plato 1991, 435e-436a) Bloom appends this note to the last sentence: “The different stocks of men and the particular political talents connected with them, as formed by the climates of the north, the center, and the south, are constant themes of political thought, beginning with Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle, and continuing through Montesquieu” (457n25). In this respect, it is remarkable that the Mediterranean climate is said to be “temperate”.

A generous interpretation of the passage just cited could argue that Socrates, who was ceaselessly showing to his contemporaries that they are *not* philosophers, is being ironic in attributing “the love of learning” as that temperament “which one could most impute to our region”, in contradistinction to thymotic “spiritedness” and to “love of money”. In this respect, the veneration of “the Greek miracle” would almost amount to buying an inside joke... This interpretation, however, would not affect the fact that “Westerners” have and often still do mobilize “the Greeks” to claim a superiority.

satisfied; and then again to another, dishonoring none but fostering them all on the basis of equality” (561b). S/he turns a deaf ear to claims about “canons”:

“And,” I said, “he doesn’t admit true speech or let it pass into the guardhouse, if someone says that there are some pleasures belonging to fine and good desires and some belonging to bad desires, and that the ones must be practiced and honored and the others checked and enslaved. Rather, he shakes his head at all this and says that all are alike and must be honored on an equal basis.” / “That’s exactly,” [Adeimantus] said, “what a man in this condition does.” / “Then,” I said, “he also lives along day by day, gratifying the desire that occurs to him, at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another downing water and reducing; now practicing gymnastic, and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometimes spending his time as though he were occupied with philosophy. *Often he engages in politics and, jumping up, says and does whatever chances to come to him*; and if he ever admires any soldiers, he turns in that direction; and if it’s money-makers, in that one. And *there is neither order nor necessity in his life*, but calling this life sweet, free, and blessed he follows it throughout.” (561b-d; I underline)

This description is a mirror image of that of “the just man”. The democratic individual is an atonic busybody, for Plato’s Socrates and many epigones (see Bloom 1987, 87-8), as *s/he does not care* for “what truly matters”, both politically and “in general”. The prevalence of this temperament is deemed especially problematic because its “lack of direction” is said to leave multiple openings for a tyrant of some sort to take control—and, according to many lines of thought, tyranny is the worst of all political worlds⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ Once again, it is interesting to make audible a remark formulated by Strauss. The first paragraph of his 1950 “Restatement”, written in response to Alexandre Kojève’s critique of his *On Tyranny*, which offered an exegesis of Xenophon’s *Hiero* (a dialogue that can be read as an account of a tyrant’s temperament and of the value of the tyrannical life), reads: “A social science that cannot speak of tyranny with the same confidence with which medicine speaks, for example, of cancer, cannot understand social phenomena as what they are. It is therefore not scientific. Present day social science finds itself in this unenviable state. If it is true that present day social science is the inevitable product of modern philosophy, one is forced to think of the restoration of classical social science. <More particularly, if one wants to understand tyranny as what it is, one must have recourse in the first place to Xenophon’s *Hiero*.> Once we have learned again from the classics what tyranny is, we shall be enabled and forced to diagnose as tyrannies a number of contemporary regimes which appear

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What matters politically, following Plato's story, may be invariant in principle—*pursuing justice?*—but it varies in practice with the types of individuals concerned. In return, the types of people there are vary for a large part with the “regimes” that exist. There is a co-determination of individuals' temperament(s) and of the temperament(s) of a *polis*. This is arguably why *The Republic* deals at such length with education, with how to breed and rear certain *types* of individuals. Education may effectively facilitate (if not cause; Plato's Socrates acknowledges that there always remains a part for chance in political life) the coming into being and the perpetuation of a “city” that, in turn, may help produce certain types of “men”. To educate, in Plato's text, is to mold. It is constantly phrased in the tactile lexicon of imprinting, forging and shaping. Stories, however, are the main tools for this molding. In a telling passage of Book II, Socrates thus asks Adeimantus:

“Don't you know that the beginning is the most important part of every work and that this is especially so with anything young and tender? For at that stage it's most plastic, and each thing assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give to it.” /“Quite so.” /“Then shall we so easily let the children hear just any tales fashioned by just anyone and take into their souls opinions for the most part opposite to those we'll suppose they must have when they are grown up?” /“In no event will we permit it.” /“First, as it seems, we must supervise the makers of tales; and if they make a fine tale, it must be approved, but if it's not, it must be rejected. We'll persuade nurses and mothers to tell the approved tales to their children and to shape their souls with tales more than their bodies with hands. Most of those they now tell must be thrown out.” (Plato 1991, 377a-c)

in the guise of dictatorships. This diagnosis can only be the first step toward an exact analysis of present day tyranny, for present day tyranny is fundamentally different from the tyranny analyzed by the classics.” (Strauss 2008 [1950], 29; the sentence within <...> is described by the editor of this critical edition as “not present in the American editions”). For the archive of the Strauss-Kojève encounter (first arranged in a single volume by the two friends), including their correspondence (added to the “archive” posthumously), see the expanded version of *On Tyranny* (Strauss 2000).

These claims assume that “the rearing in music is most sovereign [because] rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves *into the inmost part of the soul* and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them” (401d; I underline). They thereby support the expulsion of poets in Book III⁹⁶. This expulsion of *some* poets offers grounds for exclusion that have to do with the temperament of those to be rejected, and with their foreseeable disharmonizing influence on the temperament of others, with the risks involved in their being considered worthy models. It shows quite well what it can mean to think politics as a practice of tempering, and it has been heard as the archetype of exclusion, or of those exclusions that invoke some impropriety, disharmony, messiness, or manifoldness, some unstable *mimesis* (Guiet 2006; Lacoue-Labarthe 1989)—but precisely, all exclusions seem to rely on such an invocation, as all *mimesis* is unstable.

These claims on the exemplarity of Plato’s *Republic* regarding the very ways in which it deals with the problem of exemplarity as that of good and bad examples raise the question of its contemporary audibility. Translators often underline the difficulty of hearing adequately and of making audible the concepts crafted in old books—of carrying,

⁹⁶ After distinguishing an imitative and a narrative style of poetry (or music, both being closely related), and after describing what is worth imitating, Socrates asks: “Do all the poets and the men who say anything fall into one of these patterns of style or the other, or make some mixture of them both?” / ‘Necessarily,’ [Adeimantus] said. / ‘What will we do then?’ I said. ‘Shall we admit all of them into the city, or one of the unmixed, or the one who is mixed?’ / ‘If my side wins,’ he said, ‘it will be the unmixed imitator of the decent.’ / ‘However, Adeimantus, the man who is mixed is pleasing; and by far the most pleasing to boys and their teachers, and to the great mob too, is the man opposed to the one you choose.’ / ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘he is the most pleasing.’ / ‘But,’ I said, ‘*perhaps you would say he doesn’t harmonize with our regime because there’s no double man among us, nor a manifold one, since each man does one thing.*’ / ‘No, he doesn’t harmonize.’ / ‘Isn’t it for this reason that it’s only in such a city that we’ll find the shoemaker a shoemaker, and not a pilot along with his shoemaking, and the farmer a farmer, and not a judge along with his farming, and the skilled warrior a skilled warrior, and not a moneymaker along with his warmaking, and so on with them all?’ / ‘True,’ he said. / ‘Now, as it seems, if a man who is able *by wisdom* to become every sort of thing and to imitate all things should come to our city, *wishing to make a display of himself and his poems*, we would fall on our knees before him as a man sacred, wonderful, and pleasing; but we would say that there is no such man among us in the city, nor is it lawful for such a man to be born there. We would send him to another city, with myrrh poured over his head and crowned with wool, while we ourselves would use a more austere and less pleasing poet and teller of tales for the sake of benefit, one who would imitate the style of the decent man and would say what he says in those models we set down as laws at the beginning, when we undertook to educate the soldiers.’” (Plato 1991, 397c-398b; I underline)

say, just what *polis* could and did mean in Plato's Athens, and how it relates to what is now called city, state, society, community, and even culture (see Bloom's very first note in Plato 1991, 439n1). Can *we*, here and now, hear what Plato heard when he wrote of *mythos* (442n17), *techne* (443n22), *logos* (n25), *arete* (444n27), *nomos* (446n3), *thymos* (449n33), *mousike* (n36), *poiein* (n37), *harmonia* (453n44), *tropos* (456n7)—or aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny? Commentators often insist that the contemporary ear has to be patiently attuned or retuned, to become able to hear—again or for the first time—what those who came before told (e.g. Strauss 2008 [1950], 40; Heidegger 1996 [1942], 66). Translators' notes accordingly tend to ask readers to keep hearing the polysemy that hums under a given word that is most often translated in the text at hand by a single other one. The latter, however, is never quite equivalent to the former. It rarely seems able to gather all the appropriate connotations, but estimating success or failure in this respect would already presuppose that one could aptly hear the web of resonances that need to resound in the first place.

Proposing an adequate translation seems to require an ear for the “universals” expressed or hinted at in a text, beyond the “particular” words that are used. It is this ability to hear that Alain Badiou claims to exemplify by his recent “rewriting” of *The Republic*, which he presents as an attempt to find new ways to make audible “what Plato ceaselessly tried to make the deaf hear” (Badiou 2012a, 10; I translate)⁹⁷. This project of “updating” the text—a work of “passion” (9), according to Badiou—led him to write of a

⁹⁷ For Badiou, what Plato was trying to make the deaf hear is that *there are* eternal truths. Interestingly, Badiou's French “translation” has itself been translated in English very shortly after its publication (see Badiou 2012b, which includes an “Author's Preface to the English Edition” where he briefly unfolds the sense of translating this “translation”). I put “translation” within scare quotes because Badiou himself considers the liberties he took with the text (making Adeimantus into a woman, Amantha, referring to authors and events that came after Plato to illustrate parts of the dialogue, etc.) make it something else than a translation in the usual sense of the word. Badiou's *The Republic of Plato* thus seems as distant as possible from Bloom's, which claimed to be the most literal to date in English.

movie theater rather than a cave (363), of Subject rather than soul (251), of Truth rather than the Good (370), etc. In doing so, the philosopher claims to pierce and modulate a centuries-old echo chamber, that of the Christian-moralist reading of Plato (Badiou 2013b). But surely, the *polis* and *psyche* at stake in Plato's *Republic* are not quite, or even not at all what the Modern-Western notions of State and Subject problematize!

This insistent objection, for its part, amounts to a quiet admission that Plato's Socrates got quite close to voicing a truth when he claimed that political life has to do with modulating the many resonances of what is and what should be audible in a singular "community". If the soundscapes of contemporary politics and politology differ from those of Plato's space-time, if the songs and stories informing what is deemed politically important in contemporary conjunctures do not quite, or do not harmonize at all with some of the stories that went around the Piraeus in 380 BCE, it still seems to be the case that political thought participates in and of a sonosphere of some sort.

1.2 Politology as a phonotopology

Some of the relationships between aesthetics of temperament, the politics of hearing, and distributions of political importance can be made explicit through this concept of sonosphere, or through the equivalent concept of phonotope. Peter Sloterdijk proposes the two in the first and third volumes of his *Spheres* trilogy, respectively titled *Bubbles* (Sloterdijk 2011 [1998], 477-520) and *Foams* (Sloterdijk 2005 [2004], 333-41)⁹⁸. The

⁹⁸ For the purpose of this chapter, I prefer the term phonotope, mainly because I feel it leaves open the question of whether the *topos* in question is necessarily spherical or whether it can be otherwise. I also prefer phonotope to R. Murray Shafer's concept of soundscape because I consider the former readily implies practices of insulation as a crucial aspect of the *topos* at stake, and because Sloterdijk's *grand récit* refers less readily to the notions of modernity and nature (see Shafer 1994 [1977]). For this reason, however, it is more difficult to evaluate what would constitute "noise pollution" in a phonotope. The term phonotope also has the merit of evoking the opposition between *phone* and *logos*. Sloterdijk, however, evokes this distinction only to "erase" it in the very first line written on the concept (to which I return below): "The phonotope (or logotope)

concept of phonotope has the merit of formalizing acoustic considerations such as those unfolded above through my ventriloquism of Plato's *Republic*. In the section of *Foams* titled "Anthropogenous Islands", Sloterdijk discusses at length nine "spheres", or islands: the chirotope, the phonotope, the uterotope, the thermotope, the erototope, the ergotope, the alethotope, the thanatotope, and the nomotope (316-433), in this order⁹⁹. Each sphere is a *topos* in and through which human beings live and inhabit, a dimension of what Sloterdijk calls the (nine-dimensional) "anthroposphere". Each dimension is "in itself indispensable" (320), but it can be distinguished by the "world-constituting services" it "offers", by how it factors in enabling human life—hence their qualification as anthropogenous, as fostering, or as generative of "the species".

that produces the vocal bell..." (Sloterdijk 2005, 321). The question of "truth" is assigned to a different *topos*, the "alethotope", in echo to the conception of truth as *aletheia* (see the list of "spheres" in the following note). Finally, the Greek *topos* resonates less immediately with practices of measurement and the register of visibility than the Greek *skapos*, which means "rod" or "staff" and is said to relate to scepter, a prime sign of sovereignty. As with the term sonosphere, however, one could argue that phonotope and soundscape are equivalent, not least since Sloterdijk mentions soundscapes, using the English word, as he defines his concept.

In terms of the sociology of edition and translation, one should note that, at the time of writing, only the first volume of the *Spheres* trilogy, *Bubbles: Microsphereology*, has been translated into English (Sloterdijk 2011). All three volumes have been translated in French in the second part of the last decade. This (and the fact that I do not read German!) explain my using the French edition of *Foams: Plural Spherology (Écumes)*. It is interesting to note that *Globes: Macrosphereology*, the second volume of the trilogy, has been translated last into French "according to the author's wish" (Sloterdijk 2005, 9n1; see Sloterdijk 2010b), seemingly to avoid being received as "just one more book" on the popular trope of globalization. It is not clear whether the same is to occur in English. In this respect, it should be noted that before the publication of *Bubbles*, Semiotext(e) published an excerpt from *Foams* titled *Terror from the Air* (see Sloterdijk 2009d). The original editions in German have been published in 1998 (*Sphären I*), 1999 (*Sphären II*), and 2004 (*Sphären III*). The monumental trilogy adds up to nearly 2500 pages. It should be recalled that Sloterdijk presents himself as "suffering" from "megalopathia", as being "a patient of big questions" (cited in Oosterling 2007, 358), rather than as a megalomaniac.

⁹⁹ The following phrases make explicit what each *topos* involves: (1) "The chirotope – The world within a hand's reach" (Sloterdijk 2005, 322; I translate); (2) "The phonotope – Being within hearing's reach" (333); (3) "The uterotope – Caves of We, incubators of the world" (341); (4) "The thermotope – The space of pampering" (350); (5) "The erototope – Fields of jealousy, landings of desire" (357); (6) "The ergotope – Effort communities and combat alliances" (364); (7) "The alethotope – Republics of knowledge" (378); (8) "The thanatotope – The province of the divine" (389); and (9) "The nomotope – First constitutional theory" (413). In this chapter, I privilege the phonotope over these other *topoi* not only because I am concerned with the politics of hearing, but also because I am concerned with aesthetics of temperament in relation to distributions of political importance. Insofar as "Society is the sum of its spoken songs (*chants*)" (337), these distributions have a sonic aspect. What is more, as I argue below, the phonotope especially matters because it is presented as bearing on "the most intimate soul bubble".

The phonotope “(or logotope) that produces the vocal bell within which the co-existing listen to one another, speak with one another, give one another orders and mutually inspire one another” (321) concerns aesthetics of politics in at least two ways. First, it is the *topos* of a specific type of sense data, as analytic philosophers would put it, namely of those worldly signals that affect the ear and weave singular sonic worlds. More generally, it seeks to account for those occurrences that act as “mechanical waves” oscillating at a determinable frequency. This acoustic dimension has to do with politics not only since speech is a sonorous occurrence through which collective determinations of what is deemed possible and impossible take place (337), but also since any collective singularizes itself by the sounds it makes and that envelop it:

When we reach the anthropogenous island, we immediately live an acoustic experience: the sound of the place depends on its inhabitants. If the savannah that surrounds us temporarily finds itself in silence, the places of rest disseminated in it, some hominids and some first men appear as oases of sounds where a state of acoustic exception reigns. At the same time, for these inhabitants, this state constitutes the most normal situation. These islands constantly resonate with their own sounds, they form *soundscape*s of a singular character, they are full of the noises of the life of their members, of the noise of labor, the clicks of utensils and tools, of this murmur that must be able to accompany all our representations. [...] It constitutes its sonospheric coherence by the undulating presence of voices and noises with which the group impregnates itself as a proprioceptive entity. One has to sojourn there to understand how it sounds, and to sojourn a long time to integrate it to one’s own existence as a specific mood that rubs off on oneself, just like a sonic unconscious. From an acoustic point of view, the island of Being is in a permanent state of emission and reception (333-4).

Alterity, the “us-and-them” aspect of political life, is configured acoustically if only through the variety of “mother tongues”. Each group has, or functions as such within or

through distinctive tonalities that more or less harmonize with other tonalities, with the tonalities of others. Comparative politology studies this multiplicity of phonotopes.

The concept of phonotope also bears on aesthetics of politics in a second sense of the term. An aesthetic mode of thought is one that can acknowledge an “identity of contraries”. While *this* phonotope is a characteristic dimension of *this* collective, it also seems that every individual “has” a singularly unique sonic world. Arguably, no two individuals ever hear exactly the same thing in exactly the same way, although they may partake of the same collective—perhaps sitting beside one another at a concert, or as members of the nebula of those who watch (in Québec, we say *qui écoutent*, who listen to) the evening news on television. Since Sloterdijk’s spherological project seeks to make “the dyad” into the minimal unit of analysis of human life against the Modern-Western insistence on the monad, the “personal” phonotope is obviously never strictly independent, or sovereign. But for this very reason, the phonotopic dimension appears to be both what is most common and what is most exclusive, what is most collective and most personal. This appearance becomes more distinct when one ponders how

We do not obtain a rational Ego (*Moi*) without isolation. Husserl’s *epoché* is still tied to [the monastic] culture of the retreat out of the group’s noise that reigns in our heads; what phenomenologists call the putting-in-parentheses of the naive attitude toward life is in reality an active vacation from the prejudices and gesticulations that make it so that the interior is as noisy as the exterior. What is a firm conviction, if not a sonorous and well-trained inner voice? It is precisely this doxic scream within myself that philosophical meditation reduces to silence. The *homo silens* is the guardian of psychic de-automation. /The main side effect of the *silentium* effect appears in the dissociation between the public and the private. [...] The private appears in this context as an enclave of lower communications, spared by the noise of the group, even as

a space of silence where individuals rest from the stress of the collective sound (339-40).

In that sense, “The ear is the organ that connects the intimate and the public” (Sloterdijk 2011, 520). This claim can be heard as an attempt to ground the slogan *the personal is political* in the experience of hearing, of being sensible to vibrations, or to resonances.

The claim that “a firm conviction [is nothing but] a sonorous and well-trained inner voice”, distinct from the “inner ear” philosophical meditation seeks to open, folds the issue of distributions of importance onto aesthetics of temperament through the very “concrete” experience of hearing. According to the *grand récit* of Sloterdijk’s spherology, political research should supplement its usual insistence on the “paternal” superego with considerations of the maternal envelope from which every human being hitherto has been born, this chamber of echoes that is the womb—and which Sloterdijk compares, functionally, to an apartment, and vice versa. In *Bubbles*, he claims that a primordial axiology is composed through the first vibrations that one feels:

In our attempts to reveal the cause of individuals’ accessibility to the messages of their own kind, we have now touched on the region of the most subtle resonance games. What we call the soul in the language of immemorial traditions is, in its most sensitive core area, a system of resonance that is worked out in the audio-vocal communion of the prenatal mother-child sphere. Here, human bondage begins as acuteness or hardness of hearing. The accessibility of humans to intimate appeals has its origin in the synchronicity of greetings and listening; this movement towards each other forms the most intimate soul bubble. When the mother-to-be speaks inwards, she steps on the primal scene for free communion with the intimate other. *With a sufficiently good greeting, the fetal ear can filter an adequate amount of high enlivening frequencies from the maternal milieu: it stretches out towards these sounds, and in its ability to hear well, it experiences the pleasure of being in the ascendant through its ability to be at all.* Now the original unity of alertness, self-stimulation,

intentionality and anticipation is rehearsed almost automatically. In this quaternity, the first blossoms of subjectivity open up (510-1; I underline).

These lines suggest that human life, which can hardly not be thought of as a living-with, a life in common, *and thus* as a political life, is from the outset a matter of resonances. This is what politologies that presuppose or posit aesthetics of temperament have tended to claim, and I argue that it is in similar terms that many contemporary accounts of variations in distributions of political importance tend to resound and be heard¹⁰⁰.

2. Equalizers: aural (dis)articulations & hammered wolves

Phonotopes are not given. They are engaged in processes of becoming. One can try to retrace their (re)compositions in a more or less genealogical manner, even if it is arguably impossible to hear all that could once be heard, to retrieve a whole sonic world from the archive. Politically, there are good reasons for trying to act on a phonotope if one believes that the acoustic worlds people inhabit affect what they find important, and that what is heard informs what is done. This belief is expressed in critiques of the deleterious effects of “rock music” on “education” (Bloom 1987, 68-81), or in the claim (often attributed to Goebbels) that a lie repeated a thousand times becomes a truth, for instance.

In presenting his concept of phonotope, Sloterdijk ties the acoustic dimension of the anthroposphere to the Western genealogy of what counts as politics. He writes:

¹⁰⁰ A few lines below the passage cited above, Sloterdijk makes a remark on the “method” exemplified by these lines: “Upon reflection, these observations cannot really contain anything new, as they describe fundamental conditions that have always had to be known and cared for via some idea or other. The novelty in these matters can only ever lie in the electric, perhaps demonic explicitness of their presentation. If the unfolding of the theory is to be effective, one must hear the rustling of the wrapping paper in which something almost familiar and almost forgotten is handed to the owner once again like something new. This is the typical sound accompanying the gifts phenomenology has to offer, for giving phenomenologically means giving nothing new in an entirely new way. Obviously midwives, mothers and great mothers have always looked after this area of knowledge [with] correct intuitions, and it is only through the victorious individualistic abstractions of the last centuries that the sphere of fetal communions has been pushed ever further away from the feelings and the cognizance of individuals” (Sloterdijk 2011, 512-3).

The fact that the public represents a modification of the phonotope is not only expressed, in European Antiquity, through the invention of tragic theater, with its choruses and its sonic masks, but also in the culture of public allocutions that serve the formation of the will in popular assemblies. What will later be called politics is at first a cultural form of the noisy discourse—destined to place, by a penetrating individual voice and by way of hearing, the group's body in the desired ambiance, be it, in an expressive manner, in the sense of the *communis opinio* that expresses itself loudly in the orator's plea, or, in a persuasive manner, with the goal of changing the ambiance of an assembled crowd so that it distances itself from its ordinary opinion. One had to wait for Plato and his *Politeia* to witness the appearance of a type of politician that did not only have to act as a loudspeaker anymore, but also as a receptor of silent ideas—with a poor outcome, as we know, since we are still waiting today the arrival of the politician who speaks quietly; it would be a *contradictio in adiecto*, because politics, the art of what is possible in noise, remains assigned to the noisy side of the phonotope (Sloterdijk 2005, 341).

What is called petty politics, however, seems aptly described as the realm of whisperers.

To weave these aesthetic aspects of the politics of hearing to temperings of and within distributions of importance, it is useful to engage this strangely shaped site: the ear.

2.1 “The ear is the quintessentially egoistic organ”

In a remarkable excursus in his magnum opus, *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*, first published in 1908, Georg Simmel sketches a sociological account of the distinct roles played by different senses, inviting and exemplifying research in “the Sociology of Sense Impression” (Simmel 2009, 570-83)¹⁰¹. The first half of this text contrasts the “sociological” roles of the eye and the ear. According to Simmel, there is a

¹⁰¹ This excursus is not very well known in political circles, perhaps because it is eclipsed by the much shorter following one, the “Excursus on the Stranger” (Simmel 2009, 601-5), which is part of the same chapter, “Space and the Spatial Ordering of Society” (543-620). This “Excursus on the Stranger” has been discussed at some length recently at the borders of “international political sociology” by Étienne Balibar and Zygmunt Bauman, in particular (see Balibar 2009, 204n21; Bauman 2004 [1991], 59-60; Karakayali 2006;

division of labor between the senses. Apart from many modifications, what we see in a person is what is lasting in that individual, what is drawn on the face, as in a cross-section of geological layers, the history of a person's life and what lies at the foundation of that person's nature as a timeless dowry. The vicissitudes of historical expression do not approximate the variety of the differentiation that we detect through the ear. What we hear is what is momentary about someone, the flow of someone's nature. First, all sorts of secondary perceptions and conclusions reveal to us, even in someone's features, the mood of the moment and what is invariant in that person in a person's words. Otherwise in the whole of nature, as it is offered to immediate sense impression, the lasting and the fleeing are allocated much more unevenly than among people. The permanent rock and the flowing stream are polar symbols of this unevenness. Only human beings are simultaneously something that always persists and flows before our senses; both the fleeing and the lasting have reached a height within them by which one is always measured against the other and is expressed in the other. The formation of this duality stands in an interaction with that of eye and ear; for if neither of these two completely ignores both kinds of perception, they are still, in general, dependent on mutual complementarity, on ascertaining the permanently plastic nature of human beings through the eye, and on their surfacing and submerging expressions through the ear (574-5).

While the eye gives rise to an "impression"—that is, not quite to a "knowledge" (572)—of someone's temperament, grasped as what is invariant, the ear, for its part, tells this general lesson: what is invariant never manifests itself outside of singular situations, of a "mood of the moment". In that sense, a given temperament is always tempered in some ways by the circumstances in which it cannot but find itself, even if this tempering takes the form of or is expressed as a stoic indifference to the very circumstances at hand.

In Simmel's account, both sense organs further differ in matters of reciprocity: "By its nature, the eye cannot receive something without giving at the same time, while the

Lyon 2010, 329). Note that the excursus on "The Sociology of Sense Impression" has recently been published in French as the accompaniment to a famous lecture, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (Simmel 2013).

ear is the quintessentially egoistic organ that only takes but does not give; its outer shape almost seems to symbolize this in that it serves somewhat as a passive appendage of the human phenomenon, the most unmovable of all the organs on the head” (575). The ear, however, “atones for this egoism by not being able to turn away or close like the eye, but since it only takes, it is also condemned to take all that comes near it—the sociological consequences of which is yet to be shown.” This trope, the ear cannot close, seems a *passage obligé* in accounts of the singularity of hearing. In that sense, Jean-Luc Nancy writes: “‘The ears have no [ear]lids’ (*paupières*) is an old theme that is often reprised. Also, the sound that penetrates by the ear propagates something of its effects through the whole body, which we cannot say of the visual signal in an equivalent manner” (Nancy 2002b, 34; I translate)¹⁰². Difficult “topological” questions quickly start to proliferate: “Where is an ear? What is the inside and the outside of an ear? What is it, for an ear, to (be) open? What is it to prick up one’s ear (*tendre l’oreille*)? To hear (*entendre*) or not to hear? To be deaf, not to be able or not to be willing to hear, [to] turn, as is said in French and English, a ‘deaf hear’? [...] Where then is the ear that we lend, as is said in French and English, in particular the ear we lend to the voice of the friend?” (Derrida 1993b, 164) The ear seems passive, unmovable, but its “vestibular system” is an active seat of balance, and thus of orientation and confident movement. Its very shape bears witness to—or “almost seems to symbolize”, as Simmel puts it—the relations of interiority and exteriority that make up the knotted *topos* of “the human phenomenon”.

¹⁰² In the fourth section of this chapter, below, I evoke this last consideration as it points to how the sense of hearing can be thought to function, in practice, through the sense of touch. Sound is defined as a “mechanical wave”. This “mechanical” aspect is most readily felt when one encounters very low frequencies that quite literally move what they meet. The capacity of young humans for hearing very high frequencies, for its part, is nowadays used to make them move away from certain places, as various businesses make use of sonic devices that are commercialized and installed as “anti-loitering” tools. Here, temperament is intertwined with friction and endurance, and with possibilities of prevalence and emancipation.

Sloterdijk insists, however, that something “contradicts the common myth of the fatefully unclosable ear”, namely the ways in which one *needs* to “learn to avert [one’s] ears at an early stage” lest one would “be ravaged by permanent noise torture” from the sojourn in the womb onward (Sloterdijk 2011, 502). In that sense, it appears that

The ear decides, within certain boundaries, how welcome or unwelcome the various acoustic stimuli are. This distinction precedes that between significant and insignificant ones. It is a typical error of contemporary semiotics to view the significant as something that is brought to light through selection from the insignificant—as if the subject made an arbitrary choice among an initial, indifferent assortment of noises of which it has an over-“view” in order to obtain privately meaningful data. In reality, the field of the insignificant only comes about when the ear turns away from the bothersome noise presences; these are hence “posited” as uninformative or indifferent, and consequently excluded from the waking perception. There is not first a field of indistinct noise and then a filtering of information from this; rather, the indistinct noise arises as a correlate of averting the ears from unwelcome sounds. At the same time, however, our hearing approaches in a special way those sounds it expects to grant particular enlivenment. [...] For the subject-to-be, only those sounds which tell it that it is being welcomed are themselves welcome (502-3)¹⁰³.

Hearing—be it “simply hearing” or “listening closely”—is not only a metaphor, but also a “privileged metonymy” (Derrida 1993b, 164) of how importance is distributed. To hear *politically*, singular temperings and tempers therefore appear to be required.

¹⁰³ This passage offers a site among many where Sloterdijk shows he “internalized” key intuitions exposed in Heidegger’s works. It is no accident that the claim that one’s ears are always inclined in one way or another echoes Heidegger’s reflections, in *Being and Time*, on being-in-the-world as a “thrownness” that is always marked by a *Stimmung*, by a mood or a tonality; “Dasein” always *is* in one mood or another; true moodlessness is impossible. Summarizing Heidegger’s problematization of hearing in relation to Saussurian linguistics, in a passage that prefigures Sloterdijk’s formulation, Howard Eiland writes: “The immediate linguistic datum is *what is said*. In order to perceive a phoneme as pure sound (*Lautschall*), we must first willfully listen away from the words, just as, in order to hear bare noise or undifferentiated acoustical sensations, we have to listen away from things—that is, listen abstractly. We do not first hear a throng of impressions but rather the distant roar of an engine, a door slamming, a dog barking. Even in auditing an unknown language, we never hear mere sounds but unintelligible words” (Eiland 1982, 44).

In return, Sloterdijk's claim that "averting the ears from unwelcome sounds" is a condition of—or a prerequisite to—the distinction between significant and insignificant noises begs the question of the condition(s)—or the prerequisite(s)—of this very difference between welcome and unwelcome, which is a difference of importance. This difference is axiological: it has to do with *value*. It is also aesthetic: it is sensed before it is thought. It is more a matter of affects and percepts than of concepts, to use Deleuze & Guattari's (Kantian) terminology (2005 [1991]). In that sense, configurations of affects and percepts participate both in and of circumstantial temperings of temperaments.

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Simmel and Sloterdijk both sketch political histories of hearing. In effect, they write of transformations in the circumstances in and through which this sense functions, which they relate to reconfigurations in practices of sense-making. In 1908, Simmel narrates an increasing prevalence of sight and the fate of hearing in "the metropolis" thusly:

Before the development of buses, trains, and streetcars in the nineteenth century, people were not at all in a position to be able or to have to view one other for minutes or hours at a time without speaking to one another. Modern traffic, which involves by far the overwhelming portion of all perceptible relations between person and person, leaves people to an ever greater extent with the mere perception of the face and must therefore leave universal sociological feelings to fully altered presuppositions. On account of the mentioned shift, the just mentioned greater incomprehensibility of people being only seen over that of people being heard contributes to the problematic of the modern feel of life, to the feeling of disorientation in collective living, of the isolation, and that one is surrounded on all sides by closed doors (Simmel 2009, 573-4)¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁴ The "greater incomprehensibility" that Simmel mentions refers to his claim, a few lines above, that "the *sociological tone* of the blind is altogether different than that of the deaf. For the blind, the other is present actually only in the succession, in the sequence of that person's utterances" (Simmel 2009, 573; I underline).

For Simmel, “merely seeing” disorients because while the eyes may inform on what is invariant, they do not suffice to grasp someone’s *present* disposition with acuity. The dissemination of portable “personal audio-visual devices”, like the Walkman and the so-called smart phone, arguably increases the relevance of his diagnosis since it multiplies individual sonic bubbles. “Postmodern traffic” would thereby seem more disorienting and isolating than ever. A self-described “rare” posture consists in deploring the effects of such devices, which are remarkably integrated in the daily life of many youths (Bloom 1987, 70; 75)¹⁰⁵. This leaning, for its part, often sounds as a monotone replaying of the nostalgic political trope par excellence, the rather old story of the dilution of “the common world”, of the loss of “the social bond”, of “the sense of high and low”, and of “the sense of loss itself” in the ever-encroaching desert of “relativistic individualism”¹⁰⁶.

On the other hand, when one does not hear yet sees others, one only faces “The restless, disturbing concurrence of characteristic traits, of the traces from all of one’s past, as it lies outspread in the face of a person, [which] escapes the blind, and that might be the reason for the *peaceful and calm, uniformly friendly disposition toward the surroundings* that is so often observed among the blind” (I underline). It is interesting to note the dissonance between this depiction and that made by Norbert Wiener a few decades later in a lecture on “Problems of Sensory Prothesis”. As he also compares deafness and blindness, the mathematician-cyberneticist writes: “Notice that these two afflictions are sensory defects, that is, defects in the reception of impressions from the outer universe and from other human beings. From the standpoint of the outer universe, blindness is overwhelmingly the greater of the two losses. The sense of hearing, as brought out by such investigations as have been made by the Bell Telephone Company in their study of speech, and as further evidenced by the size of speech areas in the brain, is a sense with vastly less variety than the sense of sight. On the other hand, normal communication between man and man goes by mouth and ear much more than by all other channels, and the social and emotional damage done by deafness is disproportionately great when one compares it with the social loss of the blind. The typical emotional picture of the deaf man is that of a reserved, self-contained, neurotic personality, whereas the typical picture of the blind man who has achieved any degree whatever of equilibrium is that of a euphorically confident and rather cocky personality” (Wiener 1951b, 27; see also Wiener 1949). In other words, what Simmel sees as friendliness Wiener sees as cockiness. I return to Wiener below. Following Simmel’s and Wiener’s remarks, it is interesting to note that contemporary military and police drones tend to target individuals based on the *visual* recognition of “life patterns” which are cross-referenced with lists of who called who on the phone, yet most often without knowing just who said what. Drones, in that sense, are deaf (see Chamayou 2013).

¹⁰⁵ The last two sentences of the “Music” chapter in the first part of Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* are exemplary: “But as long as they [young students] have the Walkman on, they cannot hear what the great tradition has to say. And, after its prolonged use, when they take it off, they find they are deaf” (Bloom 1987, 81). I do not deny that such technological devices participate in remodulating “attention spans”. I am hesitant, however, to say they *destroy* attention (for the opposite view, see Stiegler 2013).

¹⁰⁶ In his 1924 preface to the second edition of his 1919 *Political Romanticism*, Carl Schmitt already gave a forceful description of this “reconfiguration”, writing: “It is only in an individualistically disintegrated society

Sloterdijk's spherology is useful, here, because it insists on how *some* insulation—a term less bound to nostalgia, depression, and other “sad passions” than isolation—is useful, and even necessary to maintain a “structured *psyche*”. For the philosopher,

If we consider that a creature of the type *homo sapiens* becomes what it listens to, the passage to the optional auto-tuning of individuals constitutes an anthropological caesura: the exterior constraint and the interiorized constraint of listening, for which psychoanalysis had proposed a partial paraphrase with the concept of the superego (which concerns the moral aspect of the putting-in-minority and of the empire imposed on the individual by his [or her] collective), dissolves into the tendency to choose for and by oneself one's acoustic environment. Within the individual characterized by an individual phonotopic constitution, however, there will always be layers of internal listening where what is heard involuntarily precedes elective listening (Sloterdijk 2005, 525).

In this respect, structuring and filling this “involuntary” phonotope with *the right kind of noise* remains a “social engineering”, a *cybernetic* problem for sonorous collectives.

2.2 Well-tempered, well-tuned, and (thus) well-behaved?

By its very name, cybernetics signals it is both descriptive and prescriptive, both a scientific and a sociopolitical project (assuming the two can ever be distinguished). In a

that the aesthetically productive subject could shift the intellectual center into itself, only in a bourgeois world that isolates the individual in the domain of the intellectual, makes the individual its own point of reference, and imposes upon it the entire burden that otherwise was hierarchically distributed among different functions in a social order. In this society, it is left to the private individual to be his own priest. But not only that. Because of the central significance and consistency of the religious, it is also left to him to be his own poet, his own philosopher, his own king, and his own master builder in the cathedral of his personality. The ultimate roots of romanticism and the romantic phenomenon lie in the private priesthood. If we consider the situation from aspects such as these, then we should not always focus only on the good-natured pastoralists. On the contrary, we must also see the despair that lies behind the romantic movement—regardless of whether this despair becomes lyrically enraptured with God and the world on a sweet, moonlit night, utters a lament as the world-weariness and the sickness of the century, pessimistically lacerates itself, or frenetically plunges into the abyss of instinct and life. We must see the three persons whose deformed visages penetrate the colorful romantic veil: Byron, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche, the three high priests, and at the same time the three sacrificial victims, of this private priesthood” (Schmitt 1986, 20). In *The Hatred of Democracy*, Rancière (2005) shows that this reading is already that of “the counter-revolutionary” interpretation of the French Revolution that started to circulate quite soon in the 1790s.

lecture presented to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston on March 8, 1950—the very day Marshal Voroshilov announced in Minsk that the USSR had “its own atom bomb” (Reuter 1950)—, Norbert Wiener stated that “The word *cybernetics* has been taken from the Greek word [*kubernetes*] meaning steersman. It has been invented because there is not in the literature any adequate term describing the general study of communication and the related study of control in both machines and living beings” (Wiener 1950, 2)¹⁰⁷. Wiener sought to make sociopolitical considerations audible in the technical language of information. On homeostasis, for instance, he wrote that

¹⁰⁷ Two years earlier, in his introduction to *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, Wiener had already indicated: “We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the name *Cybernetics*, which we form from the Greek [*kubernetes*] or *steersman*. In choosing this term, we wish to recognize that the first significant paper on feed-back mechanisms is an article on governors, which was published by [James] Clerk Maxwell in 1868, and that *governor* is derived from a Latin corruption of [*kubernetes*]. We also wish to refer to the fact that the steering engines of a ship are indeed one of the earliest and best-developed forms of feed-back mechanisms” (Wiener 1985 [1948], 11-2; I transliterate *kubernetes* from the Greek. For a discussion of the “we” of early cybernetics, which gathered during the Macy Conferences in the 1940s around Bell Telephone, see Pfohl 1997). In his 1965 “The Development of Cybernetics”, Charles R. Dechert reiterates Wiener’s story of origins and adds: “Plato uses [*kubernetes*] to describe the prudential aspect of the art of government. Ampere in his [1838] *Essay on the Philosophy of Science* used the term *cybernétique* for the science of civil government. The Latin term *gubernator* is derived from the Greek and hence also our word governor. In English we use the term governor in at least two ways: first in the traditional sense of a public steersman or political decision-maker; second to refer to the self-adjusting value mechanism on a steam engine which keeps the engine at a constant speed under varying conditions of load. [...] What is essentially involved in steering behavior or control behavior of the type illustrated by the steam engine is a feedback loop through which the output of the system is linked to its input in such a way that variations in output from some pre-established or ‘programmed’ norm results in compensatory behavior that tends to restore the system output to that norm” (Dechert 1965, 15). It is no chance occurrence that this phrasing seems to apply to both “natural” and “social” sciences—and that its “primary” sense seems sociopolitical, rather than “scientific”. For one, these are people who had to read “the Greeks” in Greek at school. Also, it is a key aspect of the cybernetic project to build a language capable of accounting for many, and even all orders or spheres of “reality”. This attempt is famously formulated in terms of information. In biology, today, “life itself” is phrased as a matter of communication.

Regarding Plato’s uses of *kubernetes*, Dechert cites Book I of *The Republic* (346b-c), where Socrates is attempting to silence Thrasymachus by arguing that those who practice a *techne* do so to the benefit of the object of that art (a herd, health, etc.), and not for their own benefit, say in the form of money. Socrates’ examples are the herdsman, the physician and the pilot or navigator, i.e. the *kubernetes*. Plato also uses *kubernetess* in the so-called story of the ship pilot (488a-489a). In his “Plato and the Ship of State”, David Keyt summarizes philological issues raised by this term: “The words on the stem *kubern* – *kubernan*, *kubernêsis*, *kubernêtês*, *kubernêtikos* – are a problem for translators. In the *Complete Works of Plato* (1997) edited by Cooper and Hutchinson, for example, the noun *kubernêtês* is variously rendered ‘steersman,’ ‘captain,’ ‘helmsman,’ and ‘navigator.’ The phrase *hê kubernêtikê* (sc. *Technê*) for the art of the *kubernêtês*, is variously rendered as ‘steersmanship,’ ‘helmsmanship,’ ‘helmsman’s skill,’ ‘pilot’s art,’ ‘art of sailing,’ ‘navigation,’ ‘nautical expertise,’ and ‘expertise that captain’s [*sic*] have.’ A reader with no Greek or no Greek text in front of him will reasonably think that Plato in these various passages is referring to different things; a reader who is following the Greek will wonder whether the translators are trying to resolve an ambiguity. We

with all the power that we now possess, the body corporeal does not possess an adequate homeostasis for all its needs. Even less does the body politic. /The body politic is not without its homeostasis, or at least the intention of having homeostasis. This is what we mean, for example, by calling the Constitution of the United States “a Constitution of checks and balances.” It is our intention that the administration serve as a protection against any inordinate assumption of power on the part of the Legislature, and that the Legislature watch jealously over any incursions of the Executive into its own particular realm, while the Judiciary should observe the action of both and see that they conform to national traditions. I have said, “national traditions.” There is the rub. On the one hand, we do not wish to be bound forever to decisions made in the past, under what were perhaps irrelevant circumstances. On the other hand, national traditions will not function without a certain minimum of historical consciousness and sagacity on the part of the population at large. We are very sensitive about a policy which will lead to great unemployment or to great poverty, provided we may expect this policy to come to ripeness within our own time. On the other hand, as the history of the slogan, “Peace in our time,” has shown, we are not very sensitive to a future catastrophe, however certain we are that it will arise to plague our children when we are laid in our graves. The future is terribly unreal to the majority of us. And how shall it not be, when the past is equally unreal to us? (Wiener 1951a, 67-8)

In this story, the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary have distinct, more or less harmonious temperaments. For Wiener, “we” also have distinct temperaments in relation to the conditions of the type of entity “we” are: the “terrible unreality” of the future may be such for “the majority of us”, but it seems that a few can feel otherwise.

Cybernetics seeks to describe and modulate the “feedback loops” that make the “outputs” of a practice inform future “inputs”, and thus future “outputs”. To describe

need to ask whether *kubernêtês* and *hê kubernêtiké* are ambiguous (or generic) terms. Were there three different officers on a typical Greek merchantman with three distinct skills, a captain, a helmsman, and a navigator, each of whom was called *kubernêtês*, or ‘steersman’? /The answer is ‘No’: the steersman was captain, helmsman, and navigator all rolled into one. In vase paintings we see him sitting at the stern facing the bow with his hands on the tillers and shouting commands to his crew [...]. This is clearly how Plato pictures him” (Keyt 2006, 191-2). The story of the *kubernetes* is a story of entitlement, of a distribution of legitimate and illegitimate titles to govern, to pilot, steer and navigate, to try to take and exercise control.

structures of behavior and memory on all scales, for all sorts of entities, one needs *ears to hear* “perhaps irrelevant circumstances”. In effect, an adequate description requires taking into account what singularizes an entity *here-and-now*. Politically, cybernetics asks questions like: how can “historical consciousness and sagacity on the part of the population at large” be modulated *here today*? The contemporary ear should find it easy to add terms like governance and normalization to the harmonic series of cybernetics.

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This term, harmonic series—the sounds that resonate with a single sound—, brings me to engage “equal temperament”. The lingua of cybernetics makes it possible to hear some of the political implications of this musical practice, and refolding the politics of this prevalent tuning system can make audible how cybernetics may act as a translating media between the allegedly autonomous spheres of politics and aesthetics. Consider, for one, the difference in tone of the titles of two recent books on equal temperament: Stuart Isacoff’s *Temperament: How Music Became a Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilization* (2003), and Ross W. Duffin’s *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and Why You Should Care)* (2007). They already articulate distinct claims on the importance of equal temperament. This difference is made even more distinct by the title of the first edition of Isacoff’s book, *Temperament: The Idea that Solved Music’s Greatest Riddle* (2001). It is to this claim of “solving” that Duffin refers when he writes: “Not long ago someone wrote a popular book on the history of musical temperament and concluded that Rameau discovered equal temperament (ET) in 1737, and basically we all lived happily ever after. What a relief! Evolution to a more perfect state of being! Natural selection! Progress in scientific understanding! Now we can get on with making music,

having solved that nasty conundrum of dividing the octave into twelve notes” (Duffin 2007, 16). This caricature of Isacoff’s argument has the merit of explicating how equal temperament can be thought of not only as a technical practice, but also as a significant expression of “Modern-Western” sociopolitical tropes. As its name signals, equal temperament involves equalizing modulations of the musical phonotope.

In tonal Western music, the octave—an acoustic interval with a ratio of 2:1, say between A 440, the contemporary “pitch standard” at 440 Hertz (Hz), or cycles per second, and A 880—is divided into twelve equal steps of one semitone each. It goes:

$$A [440] - A^\# / B^b - B - C - C^\# / D^b - D - D^\# / E^b - E - F - F^\# / G^b - G - G^\# / A^b - A [880]$$

By definition, this octave is divided into 1200 “cents” so that 100 cents separate each semitone from its neighbors. This is a “cultural” fact: there is a long history (or rather, many histories) of the construction of this distribution, which is that of “twelve-tone equal temperament” (12-TET). Isacoff and Duffin both show the octave has been and can be divided otherwise, say in 19, or in 24 equal steps (which gives other types of “equal temperament”), or even in a number of unequal steps. Other intervals, like the “pure fifth” (a ratio of 3:2), can be used to construct a “just intonation” system, for instance. Equal temperament privileges the octave as its structuring interval¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁸ While on a piano, a harpsichord, an organ, or other “fixed pitch” instruments tuned in twelve-tone equal temperament, A[#] and B^b, for instance, are the same (a single key corresponds to both in a given octave), on a cello, or using one’s voice, they can differ, however slightly. This is so because sound is then produced “continuously”, as it were, rather than “discretely”. Still, given the prevalence of the piano in Western musical practice, contemporary cellists and singers tend to adjust to equal temperament as well. The fact that, in this system, A[#] and B^b are the same but are not *necessarily* so in other tuning systems is significant because it expresses a reduction of acoustic possibilities. It is the wager of equal temperament that, in practice, this contingent limitation offers a valuable, useful, and even emancipatory modulation of possibilities. In cybernetic terms, sound is information, and practices of tempering amount to a *selection* of information which seeks to increase “harmonious circulation”. As sound is said to affect “the soul”, it does not take much effort to add to these considerations that modulating what is heard can modulate what is thought and done. The control of music would thereby constitute a part of “social control”, distinct yet related to the control of lyrics.

The reason Isacoff writes of a “riddle”, and Duffin of a “nasty conundrum” concerning the division of the octave in twelve has to do with the relationships between the mathematics and the perception of harmony, namely of the pleasant consonance or the “unity in diversity” (Beiser 2009, 8) of two tones or more. Beside many variations in details, the traditional story of origins of Western musicology has Pythagoras walking by a forge, hearing a number of hammers striking an anvil, some of which produce pleasing sounds, and then recreating the “experiment” at home with strings of different lengths to discover that the most harmonious sounds result from pairs of strings whose length ratios are “derived from the *tetractys* (1, 2, 3, 4), the sequence of numbers that he regarded as the mystical source of all things in the universe. In music 2:1 (and 4:2) corresponds to the octave; 3:1, to the octave plus the fifth; 4:1, to the double octave; 3:2, to the fifth; and 4:3, to the fourth” (Duffin 2007, 24; see also Heller-Roazen 2011, 11-7; Isacoff 2003, 26-42). When trying to tune a single fixed pitch instrument so that it can accommodate *all* these “pure” intervals in *all* keys, however, one soon realizes that “the musical tones that will produce those perfect 2:1 relationships across the keyboard are different from the ones needed to create perfect 3:2 relationships. So, making all the *octaves* (the distance from *do* to *do*) ‘pure’ guarantees that all the *fifths* (the distance from *do* to *sol*, or *re* to *la*) can’t be” (Isacoff 2003, 15-6). In mathematical terms,

If you were to start at a very low note on the piano and tune acoustically pure fifths up from there, eventually you’d expect to get back to the note you started on. [...] Twelve fifths should equal seven octaves and come back around the ‘circle’ [...]. This is what actually happens in ET. But twelve *acoustically pure* fifths don’t make a nice circle like that. Look at the ratios. A pure fifth has the ratio 3:2, so if we compare twelve of them with seven 2:1 octaves (multiplying the ratios as we add the intervals), what do we get? [...]

$$\begin{aligned} & \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \\ & \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} = 129.746 \end{aligned}$$

$$\frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} \times \frac{2}{1} = 128.0$$

[...] That twelfth fifth, the one we expect to complete the circle and bring us back to our starting note, actually overshoots the target pitch and puts us in a ratio of 129.746:128, or 1.014:1 instead of 1:1. In musical terms, it puts us about a quarter of a semitone too high. That may not seem like much, but in fact it's an excruciating discrepancy called a "comma," which renders that note unusable as a substitute for a unison or octave (Duffin 2007, 25).

This "comma" makes it so that the final note is dissonant when played with or after the first. This dissonance is also called a "wolf" because it recalls a howl (Isacoff 2003, 5). In practice, it takes the form of a more or less audible beating sound. This situation recurs (with variations in the size of the wolf, or the speed of the beat) with the other pure, "Pythagorean" intervals. Equal temperament seeks to solve this problem of "wolves".

Equal temperament's "pragmatic" solution—which, again, is one among many—consists in tempering *all* the tones (safe for the As), in modulating them by fractions of semitones so that practically *all* intervals are "impure", *but not so impure as to be unusable*. This is a practicable solution as it seems "the human ear easily learns to accept tempered intervals" (141), to appreciate intervals close to yet short of acoustic "purity"¹⁰⁹. This habituation occurs with repetition, hammering. Some tempered intervals, however, seem to be intolerable to some ears. Duffin writes:

¹⁰⁹ As Daniel Heller-Roazen puts it, "A physical and mathematical law dictates this rule: not all musical sounds may be strictly reconciled with each other. The term 'strictly', however, points to a further fact of capital importance: though many intervals are incommensurable in their pure forms, they may also be played impurely. Then the discrepancies between them grow less audible to the ear, and the incompatibilities between intervals can no longer clearly be heard. 'Temperament' is the name traditionally given to the activity whereby a musician lessens the exactness of musical consonance, thereby diminishing, in a single gesture, both the purity of concord and the perceptibility of a real discord" (Heller-Roazen 2011, 80). This last sentence has obvious political overtones (or undertones). Duffin, for his part, cites James Lecky, a late 19th century musicologist, who wrote: "By constantly listening to the equally tempered scale, the ear may be

Temperament is a way of tuning the notes of the scale using intervals that have been modified (tempered) from their pure forms. The usual reason for doing this is utility, which is to say, to make a tuning system more useful in a wider variety of musical situations. [...] ET is a temperament because its fifths are narrowed very slightly from the acoustically pure ratio of 3:2, so that twelve ET fifths in sequence arrive at a note that is seven octaves above the starting note, creating, at the same time, a scale where all twelve notes in the octave are equidistant [...]. *Its great advantage is that it is universally usable: it can be used in every key with identical musical effect. Its drawback is that its major third is much, much wider than an acoustically pure major third, and sounds quite harsh* (Duffin 2007, 38-9; I underline).

This “solution”—which, as Duffin puts it, *sacrifices* the major third (5:4) to the benefit of other intervals—became prevalent at the turn of the 20th century¹¹⁰.

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The dissemination of the equal-tempered piano, in particular, has been heard as an expression of “egalitarian” and “democratic” political ideals:

What a coincidence that the tuning instructions that finally set the instrument free from even unintentionally unequal tunings were published in the same year as the Russian Revolution—history’s ultimate expression of the triumph of “social equality”! Seen in that light, ET becomes almost an expression of political will—a thoroughly democratic musical system in which all notes are created equal and every key is given equal opportunity. The so-called

brought not only to tolerate its intervals, but to prefer them to those of any other system, at least as far as melody is concerned” (in Duffin 2007, 138).

¹¹⁰ Note that the major third (5:4) was *not* part of the Pythagorean “pure” intervals because 5 is not part of the *tetractys*. This interval, however, is “the very next one” to present itself after the simple Pythagorean intervals, and it was widely used in the Middle Ages. On the sacrificial logic of cybernetics, see Stephen Pfaller’s “The cybernetic delirium of Norbert Wiener”, in which one reads: “The command, control, and communicative possibilities of cybernetics are rooted in the repeated sacrifice of other ways of being in and communicating about the worlds ‘we’ are in. This makes cybernetics a restrictive economic practice [in Bataille’s sense]. It sacrificially banishes other possible worlds for the purpose of provisionally fixing, stabilizing, and communicatively controlling boundaries which stake out the ‘contingent world’ of which cybernetics is itself constitutively a part. Cybernetics also seeks to monitor, regulate, and modify the dynamic loops of feedback governing this contingent world’s continuance. And its change. In cybernetics, the material effect of dynamic flows of feedback is the ongoing informational shaping of some worlds, to the statistical reduction of others”.

“American century”—when the American vision of democracy was spread worldwide—thus became the vessel for the safe passage of the most democratic temperament in history, even unto the shores of our own day (140-1).

The capitalistic imperatives of the mass production of instruments also played a role in disseminating equal temperament¹¹¹. Instrument makers were brought “to cut corners—to streamline and simplify manufacturing techniques—so that the subtle tuning systems of several nineteenth-century instruments got replaced with basic ET systems” (141), even though “all [equal temperament] chords are ‘equally out of tune’” (142). For Duffin, “We, in effect, have been the heirs of [the] mid-nineteenth-century pedagogical impulse

¹¹¹ The question of the dissemination of equal temperament is quite complex. Initially, I intended to treat the politics of this tuning system through an engagement with Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and La Monte Young’s much more recent *Well-Tuned Piano*. I soon discovered, however, that the tuning system for which Bach’s piece was composed is a subject of heated debates among musicologists. This question constitutes one of the many sites of tension between Isacoff and Duffin, for instance. According to Isacoff, “Johann Sebastian Bach based his monumental *Well-Tempered Clavier* (which also used all twenty-four major and minor keys) on Fischer’s *Ariadne*—he even borrowed some of Fischer’s themes for the piece. /Such wide-ranging works were a direct challenge to mean-tone temperament, since no keyboard can execute all these different scales in mean-tone tuning without falling prey to the ‘wolves’” (Isacoff 2003, 215). Isacoff acknowledges that “There is a controversy to this day over whether Bach preferred equal or well temperament. Some theorists contend that there is internal evidence in his music—differences in the way he handles different keys—to suggest he had well temperament in mind. [...] There is as much evidence on the other side [...]” (217). Duffin, for his part, when he engages irregular temperaments, writes: “This is the kind of system Johann Sebastian Bach intended for the preludes and fugues of his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Sometimes you will see Bach’s term, *wohltemperit*, translated as ‘equal temperament,’ but that is not what it referred to, and it’s not what Bach meant” (Duffin 2007, 40). A few pages later, he writes: “Indeed, Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* was not written to demonstrate the superiority of ET, as is often claimed. It wasn’t even written for ET, but for an irregular temperament that worked in a wide variety of keys. Such a temperament was convenient, yes, because the player didn’t have to retune all the time as the keys changed (as would have been necessary with a regular meantone system), but its irregularity also meant that the flavor of the chords was slightly different in each key, and the character of each key was thus slightly different. It is no accident that this was the era when descriptions of key characteristics really came into their own” (44). This “era” was also that of privately owned pieces. In his “Excursus on the Sociology of Sense Impression”, Simmel writes: “In general one can only ‘posses’ something visible while that which can only be heard is already in the past along with the moment of its present and no ‘property’ is preserved. It was an extraordinary exception when in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the great families strove to possess works of music that were only written for them and that were not allowed to be published. A number of Bach concertos originated from a prince’s order for them. It pertained to the prominence of a house to possess works of music that were withheld from every other house. For our sensibility there is something perverse in this, since hearing is supra-individualistic in its nature: all those who are in a room must hear what transpires in it, and the fact that one picks it up does not take it away from another” (Simmel 2009 [1908], 575). On the piano as “a piece of bourgeois furniture” whose “present unshakeable position rests on its universal usefulness as a means of becoming acquainted at home with almost all the treasures of musical literature, on the immeasurable riches of its own literature and finally on its character as the universal instrument for the accompanist and the learner”, see Max Weber’s short history of the instrument (Weber 1998 [1921]).

to spare students the subtleties of professional tuning practices” (102). Equal temperament, however, does not only come short of the ideal of “Pythagorean” purity.

In truth, equal temperament [itself] is actually impossible to attain even on today’s pianos. A modern piano’s strings are in a condition of permanent out-of-tuneness known as *inharmonic*ity. Such factors as stiffness, width, temperature, humidity and rust all exert an influence in this direction; a further complication arises from the fact that various materials used in the construction of musical instruments each contribute different resonating properties. All these stand in the way of a perfect tuning. Indeed, inside a contemporary grand piano there are places where a single hammer strikes two or three strings simultaneously in order to amplify the sound of a single tone, and *those paired strings never produce a true unison—the sound is fuller, and more characteristic of a piano, when they don’t*. Tuning is still an art governed by the ear, not the slide rule. It will always be so (Isacoff 2003, 226-7; I underline).

These complicated relationships between the principles and the practices of tuning, between the perception of discord and the creation of concord through modulations of “purity” and “wolves”, regulative ideals and characteristic feels, posit “souls” capable of dealing with how what is perhaps the most artificial seems most natural. Claims that “something always resists” (Heller-Roazen 2011, 10) to musical enciphering echo the claim that to “expect the possibility of perfect harmony among human beings in general” is untenable “short of divine intervention” (Strauss 1997 [1962], 331), that in practice as in principle, a “pure” political harmony is humanly—*ultimately?*—impossible.

3. Tense melodies, woven & pierced

Regulative ideals appear to temper distributions of political importance. What is held to import often seems to be what resonates with “the ideal” as such, with a pointer or a signpost that *sets the tone* for a series of practices. By the very ways in which it presides

over contemporary tuning practices while being unattainable, the idealization of equal temperament, which is itself a “compromise” short of the “ideal” of “acoustic purity” that only preserves the “purity” of (some) octaves—*the most important interval?*—, expresses the stance according to which that “perfection is not of this world” implies in no way that one should not strive to get “closer” to it—perhaps at all costs, but certainly at the risk of being mistaken on the ideal “itself”. Plato’s Forms and Kant’s things-in-themselves function in a similar manner: to say they are ungraspable does not mean they do not exist, nor that one is not to try to reach them—and yet, their ultimate distance asks to be acknowledged. In seemingly more directly political terms, one may argue that how people(s) are never “simply” self-identical and how they rarely if ever act in accordance with the categorical imperative only jeopardizes these two “ideals” for those who commit paralogsms. The politics of equal temperament also show that there are—*always?*—more than one ideal in circulation. Even where one expects a totalizing “Answer”, say in *The Closing of the American Mind*, one reads: “A serious life means being fully aware of the alternatives, thinking about them with all the intensity one brings to bear on life-and-death questions, in full recognition that every choice is a great risk with necessary consequences that are hard to bear” (Bloom 1987, 227). For Bloom, however, this precisely implies that all “alternatives” are *not* equally worthy.

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Throughout this dissertation, I have been attributing some importance to the “ideal” of faithful etymology, to the belief that the “stories of origins” of the words we use enfold, within the very makeup of these words, certain “properties”, or rather, some indications of characteristic traits of what they denote, of the entities or processes they name, of the

“things” they *stand for*. I am mobilizing this ideal while being quite aware of “the arbitrariness of the sign” that has been made explicit since at least the end of the 19th century. I am trying to do *as if* this “ideal” of significant etymology was true because I feel etymological considerations can open possibilities for thinking. In doing so, I am assuming the insistent question of this ideal’s “actual” truth can be suspended, put aside, muted, or downplayed. My use of etymology has therefore not been a matter of discovering a truth hidden or concealed *in* the words; it is a continued attempt at weaving, at producing resonances by using words themselves as thought-provoking sites to try and make audible considerations that I deem important for this work precisely as they bear on problematizations of political importance. This somewhat playful use of etymology can even partake in explicating what qualifies as a relevant and useful consideration for thinking distributions of importance. In that sense, “Etymology may be said to ‘energize’ the commonplaces of idiom” (Eiland 1982, 48). In return, a polemological engagement with this last term, idiom—from *idios*, “particular to oneself”—, can help to refold how aesthetics of temperament act as prerequisites to formulations of importance in terms of often quite violent resonances.

3.1 Sarajevo, 1993

This “place, date” sign may suffice to evoke a dense if somewhat fuzzy landscape of violences that have (or had) much to do with idioms, with multiple idioms that became the sites of forceful attempts at disentanglement, purification, or even “cleansing”¹¹². As Jean-Luc Nancy put it in March, 1993, in his “Éloge de la Mêlée (Pour Sarajevo)”,

¹¹² This claim is uncomfortable in a number of ways. In this subsection, I am interested in “Sarajevo, 1993” from what should be called “an outsider’s perspective”: I have never been to Sarajevo (more precisely, I was not there, then...), and have not lived anything like a war in the places I dwelled. I do not claim to be capable

“Sarajevo” has become *the* expression of a complete system for the reduction to identity. It is no longer a sign on the way, or a sign in history; it is no longer a possible destination for business trips or illicit rendezvous, or the uncertain space for a fortuitous meeting or distracted wandering. It is a dimension-less point on a diagram of sovereignty, an ortho-normative gauge on a ballistic and political computer, a target frozen in a telescopic sight, and it is the very figure of the exactitude of taking aim, the pure taking aim of an essence. Somewhere, a pure Subject declares that it is the People, the Law, the State, the Identity in the name of which “Sarajevo” must be identified purely and simply as a target. /Sarajevo is not even a name anymore, it is a placard being nailed to our eyes so that there will no longer be a Sarajevo landscape, or trips to Sarajevo, but only a pure and naked identity. It is such so that nothing else will get mixed in with it, and so that we do not get mixed up in it, that is, we other cosmopolitan Europeans (Nancy 2000 [1993], 145; translation slightly modified).

Now that some twenty years have passed, Sarajevo may well have become otherwise. Perhaps, once again, there are “trips to Sarajevo”. These, however, often sound as journeys to this very Sarajevo that was recently reduced to nothing but a target—return trips to a *post-war* Sarajevo that show how “Violence does not transform what it assaults; rather, it takes away its form and meaning. It makes it into nothing other than a sign of its own rage, an assaulted or violated thing or being: a thing or being whose very essence now consists in its having been assaulted or violated” (Nancy 2005 [2003], 16)¹¹³. In

of giving an adequate account of what happened there and then. The so-called Balkan Wars in the former Yugoslavia have played a certain role in my own upbringing, however, for these are the first wars I clearly recall. I reached the so-called “age of reason” in those years when Québécois television was broadcasting daily coverage of the siege of Sarajevo. What I can therefore offer is *one* account of the “reception” of these events. The very fact that I conceive of writing and speaking of “Sarajevo, 1993” in terms of “reception”, however, bears witness to a *distance*.

¹¹³ A surprisingly common stance (which I am trying to resist) goes as far as arguing that the very etymology of Balkan, “honey” (*bal*) and “blood” (*kan*), bears witness to a “natural” inclination toward violence... In the next paragraphs, I am trying to create resonances between Nancy’s “Éloge de la mêlée” (Nancy 2000 [1993]) and this more recent text, “Image and violence” (Nancy 2005 [2003]), not least because, as the previous note suggests, my own encounter with “Sarajevo, 1993” has been highly mediated with and by images—images of violences, and violent images, either photographic or video, most often accompanied by voice-overs and translations. In this respect, the short film *Je vous salue, Sarajevo*, created by Jean-Luc Godard in 1993,

terms of what can be called symbolic cultural representations, the atmosphere woven by this phrase, “Sarajevo, 1993”, is (to my ears) tragic, terrible—it is the mood of a siege, of bombs and snipers, of struggles for life and of a certain weakness of words.

Contrapuntally, however, a different melody seems to insistently manage to resound under or along that of this requiem, even in the midst of besiegement: the melody of Sarajevo as the very opposite sign, as precisely *anything but* “a complete system of the reduction to identity”, as the exemplary site of neither purity nor of a mixture of otherwise pure elements (peoples, cultures, religions, civilizations, etc.), but as a *mêlée*¹¹⁴. Sarajevo is often heard as the name of a “pure mix”:

Everything that is possible in the world existed in Sarajevo—distilled, reduced to its nucleus. Sarajevo was the center of the world, for the external is always and completely contained within the internal, and hence within the center as well. Sarajevo is like the fortuneteller’s crystal ball that contains all events, all that any human being can experience, all the phenomena of the world. Like Borges’s *Aleph*, showing in itself all that could be, Sarajevo holds within itself all that constitutes the world to the west of India. [...] /Sarajevo became a new Babylon and a new Jerusalem—a city of new linguistic mingling and a city in which temples of all faiths of the Book can be seen in one glance. /This mixture of languages, faiths, cultures, and

captures the atmosphere that I came to associate with this “event” (see Godard 2000 [1993]; for an attempt at reading and listening to Jean-Luc Nancy’s and Jean-Luc Godard’s addresses to “Sarajevo” together, see Chénier & Labrecque 2011).

¹¹⁴ A soundtrack of the “Western reactions” to the siege of Sarajevo can be summarily assembled. It would include popular songs like the 1995 *Miss Sarajevo*, by U2’s Bono and Luciano Pavarotti, and The Cranberries’ 1996 *War Child* and *Bosnia*, for instance, but also Mozart’s *Requiem* (whose “property” or authorship is famously uncertain), which was performed in 1994 in the ruins of Sarajevo’s National Library (Sudetic 1994). This presence of the *Requiem* may explain the title of a 1997 film by Godard, *For ever Mozart*, in which we follow a small crew that goes to Sarajevo to stage Marivaux’s *Les jeux de l’amour et du hazard*, in echo to Susan Sontag’s staging of Beckett’s *Endgame* in Sarajevo in 1993 (see Sontag 1993). Sarajevo also plays a role in Godard’s *Notre Musique*, released in 2004. A famous image from the siege of Sarajevo shows Vedran Smailovic, “the cellist of Sarajevo”, playing his instrument in the ruins of the National Library, in 1992. Interestingly, Smailovic, who once played in this setting for 22 days to mourn the 22 victims of a bomb, now lives in Ireland and has recently declared he felt his identity was “stolen” by novelist Steven Galloway who fictionalized his gestures in the 2008 novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. According to a reporter, “Smailovic is so angry that he is threatening to stage another protest and burn his famous cello in the spot where he played Albinoni’s *Adagio* during those 22 days of mourning and protest in 1992” (Sharrock 2008).

peoples living together in such a small place produced a cultural system unique to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially to Sarajevo. It was clearly their own, original and distinctive. There were, of course, many regions and many cities in the ethnically and religiously mixed Turkish Empire where peoples, languages, and religions were entwined with each other. Yet there surely was no city—not even in that vast domain—where so many languages, religions, and cultures met and mixed with one another in such a small place (Karahasan 1994, 4-5).

To claim, with Nancy, that Sarajevo is the site of a *mêlée* rather than a mixture or a *mélange* is to claim that “languages, religions and cultures” are always already *mêlées*, that is: impure, singularly plural, of “mixed blood” as it were—not unlike a single sound is always many sounds at once, a harmonic series that stems from and rises with “the fundamental”¹¹⁵. There is no such thing as purity “pure and simple”. This is not to say,

¹¹⁵ On languages, Nancy writes: “A language is always a *mêlée* of languages, something half-way in-between Babel as the form of total confusion and glossolalia (or speaking in tongues) as the form of immediate transparency. A style is always a crisscrossing of tones, borrowed elements, dispersions, and developments, to which it gives a new twist or turn. Of course, each style seems to tend toward making an ultimate or sovereign turn, the turn toward an absolutely proper language, an absolute idiolect. But an absolute idiolect or idiom would no longer be a language, and could no longer mix with others in order to be the language that it is: *being no longer translatable exactly in order to be the untranslatable that it is*. A pure idiolect would be *idiotic*, utterly *deprived of relations* and, therefore, of identity. A pure culture, a pure property, would be *idiotic*” (Nancy 2000 [1993], 154). Among the attempts at “purification” that can be linked to “Sarajevo, 1993”, consider the linguistic policies of “Croatianization”, “Bosnianization” and “Serbianization” that have sought very explicitly to *make* distinct, separate languages out of this *mêlée* that was “Serbo-Croatian”, or “Bosniak-Serbo-Croatian”, or, in any case, this or those language(s) people speak in this region (see Leclerc 2013; 2012). In this respect, the title page and the “Translator’s Note” in Dzevad Karahasan’s *Sarajevo, Exodus of a City* is quite telling. On the title page, one reads: “Translated from the Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian by Slobodan Drakulic”. The beginning of Drakulic’s note, for its part, reads: “There is currently a debate about the name of the majority language of the former Yugoslavia involving claims that it is really two, three, or even more separate languages (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, etc.). For the purpose of identification on the title page of this book, the author has decided to use the term Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian, which is a new term in English. I have used Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin dictionaries in translating this book, since there are as yet no Bosnian dictionaries” (in Karahasan 1994 [1993], n.p.).

Nancy’s remarks echo Isacoff’s account of the science of harmonic series in the 18th century: “Daniel Bernouilli [1700-1782] discovered that the series of overtones resonating above a string’s fundamental musical tone extends much farther than anyone had suspected. A close inspection revealed that the sounds of the octave, the fifth, and the third ranging above that initial note are only the beginning: They are joined by a multitude of higher tones, difficult to hear because of their diminishing strength. These additional sounds expand the series endlessly with tones that are not generally harmonious. Most, in fact, create peculiar, dissonant harmonies that were long considered *unnatural*. Bernouilli found that the individual character of an instrument’s sound—that which gives it its own special personality—is determined largely by which of these myriad overtones are enhanced, and which are suppressed. /Thus, all vibrating bodies naturally float in an ocean of discord. What science had previously supported, it now exposed as fiction. The idea that the justly

however, that there are no such things as “Serbian culture”, for instance, or “Croatian” or “Bosnian culture”, or a *la*. It is to say that any such “one” is never totally, simply, and transparently present to itself and others. It is, rather, properly uncircumscribable.

Attempting to circumscribe an identity, a singularity, a “one”, or what Nancy calls an “ipseity” appears to be a necessarily violent gesture. In effect, according to Nancy,

As soon as the proper name enframes (*arraisonne*) a presence in person, a sovereign Subject, this sovereign is threatened; it is encircled, besieged. In order to live in Sarajevo, there was no need to identify Sarajevo. But now, those who die in Sarajevo die from the death of Sarajevo *itself*; they die from the possibility—imposed by gunfire—of identifying some substance or presence by this name, a presence measured by the yardstick of the “national” or the “state,” a body-symbol set up precisely in order to create body and symbol where there had only been place and passage. Those who are exiled from Sarajevo are exiled from the mix, from that *mêlée* that made up Sarajevo, but which, as a result, *made* nothing, engendered no *ego*. The “proper” name must always serve to dissolve the *ego*: the latter opens up a meaning, a pure source of meaning; the former indicates a *mêlée*, raises up a melody: *Sarajevo* (Nancy 2000, 146; translation slightly modified).

This last sentence phrases an idealized obligation or exigency: “The ‘proper’ name *must* always serve to dissolve the *ego*”. It appears that this is not a necessity in the strictest sense, however: it is not something that cannot not happen; “the ‘proper’ name” *can* serve ends “imposed by gunfire”. “Sarajevo, 1993” signals what this can sound like.

*

Attempts at circumscription, enframing and, in Nancy’s terms, besiegement, appear to be *idiotic*—or even “evil”, if the latter “[always] consists in a closed identification, an idolatry, a figuration without remainder” (Nancy 2013 [2010], 74). Their idiocy is that of

tuned concordances—harmonies produced by the simple ratios of 2:1, 3:2, 4:3, and 5:4—are preferred by nature had, it seemed, been permanently destroyed” (Isacoff 2003, 196-7).

a certain violence, and even of violence “itself”, for it is the idiocy of that temperament, of that temper which, precisely, ““doesn’t want to hear it”; it has no interest in knowing. [...] This is why violence is profoundly stupid. It is stupid in the strongest sense, the thickest and most irremediable sense. [...] It is the calculated absence of thought willed by a rigid intelligence” (Nancy 2005, 16-7). Hence “Racist violence is exemplary. It is the violence that knocks someone in the face, simply because—as the stupid twat might say—it ‘doesn’t like the look’ on this face” (17). Nancy writes that “All racism is stupid, obtuse, and fearful. I always hold my peace in the face of long discourses and great colloquia on the subject of racism. It seems to me that too much honor is paid to this trash” (Nancy 2000, 148-9)¹¹⁶. But is it ever sufficient, politically, to treat “the racist” as a “twat”—a term Nancy qualifies as “doubly violent: it is violent as slang, but also because of the obscene and invasive image that it evokes” (Nancy 2005, 17)—, as stupid or evil? What resonances can such a “treatment” produce and modulate?

One is tempted to qualify Nancy’s stance as a luxury, as a posture that is only affordable to those who are not targeted daily and structurally by racism and other forms of “the reduction to identity”—to those, for instance, who live in France and take public transports yet are not asked for their “papers” three or four times a day every single day by police officers (see Rigouste 2012, 10-1). First, however, I think one should ponder who in the world entertains the idea of paying attention to what resounds in “long discourses and great colloquia” to the point of articulating a sound refusal to participate

¹¹⁶ Nancy makes this remark after having clarified that, while neither the model of “purity” nor the model of “*mélange*” are able to account for “the *mêlée*”, “the simplistic eulogy [*éloge*, i.e. the praise] of the *mélange* has and is capable of producing errors, but the simplistic eulogy of purity has supported and still supports crimes. As such, there is no symmetry in this regard, no equilibrium to hold to, no fair medium. There is nothing to be discussed. The least bit of discussion, the smallest deferral to racism or to purification, in whatever form, already participates in such crime” (Nancy 2000 [1993], 148). The notion of “crime”, here, seems to echo the traditions of “natural law” more than those of positive legal norms.

in some of them... This question is not as distant as it may seem from what ties “Sarajevo, 1993” to the role(s) of aesthetics of temperament in distributions of political importance through more or less harmonious resonances. It is, in effect, a question on the many temperaments of “intellectuals” (Said 1994) and, more broadly, on the import of their—*of our*—interventions, on the “concrete” resonances of scholarly “idealizations” (Kojève 1999 [1954]). Nancy’s intervention, “for Sarajevo”, dedicated “to Sarajevo” (“*pour Sarajevo*”), centers around the claim that “the more [a] ‘one’ is clearly distinct and distinguished, the less it may be its own or pure foundation. Undoubtedly, the task is wholly a matter of not confusing distinction and foundation; in fact, this point contains everything that is at stake philosophically, ethically, and politically in what is brewing (*se trame*) around ‘identities’ and ‘subjects’ of all sorts” (Nancy 2000, 152). Again, asking what this nuanced claim can do *for* and *to* “Sarajevo, 1993” is to question the political effects of “abstractions” in relation to—both “in the face” and “at the root” of—what Carl Schmitt called “the real possibility of physical killing”, in this case: in the midst of a very real siege, and within an ear’s reach of practices of “ethnic cleansing”.

It has been argued that one of the “roots”, or at least one of the catalysts of the wars that took place across the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s was a “betrayal of the Yugoslav elites”. Laurent Joffrin, for instance, claims that, beside a few exceptions, “intellectuals massively put themselves in the service of intolerance. [...] We search in vain, all over the Balkans, for the Camus, the Sartre[s], the Mauriac[s] of these wars of Algeria, for the Norman Mailer[s] or the Bertrand Russell[s] of these post-communist Vietnams. In Serbia, in Croatia or in Bosnia, when it did not issue calls to murder,

intelligence remained mute” (Joffrin 1999, 10; I translate)¹¹⁷. Through these claims—which I am not in a position to verify or falsify in any satisfactory manner—and through questions like “Are ‘war criminals’ ordinary men?” (Evmoon 2009), there resounds another, perhaps broader interrogation that bears on how political importance is “concretely” modulated: “how did the public opinions of these societies come to consider war as a sound policy”, or at least as a “live option”? One of the answers that circulate most steadily bears the name propaganda, a practice generally heard as the orchestrated fabrication and dissemination of “ideology”¹¹⁸. What matters, here, is that it is broadly assumed that the key to successful propaganda (and to counter- or anti-propaganda) lies in an ability to strike a chord—in French, *à toucher une corde sensible*, to touch a sensitive string—, that is to make claims that are able to resonate with pre-existing beliefs, opinions or myths, to retune and intensify a series of “resonant forces” and “dispositions” by telling people “what they need to hear” (see Vivod 2013; Anzulovic 1999). This problematization of modulations of importance through aesthetics of temperament underlies interpretations of “Sarajevo, 1993” in terms of a psychoanalytic return of the repressed, of a re-plowing of a welcoming soil of “archaic drives” to “pure identities”, or, again, in terms of a very tense phonotope that was being reconfigured by and through the circulatory amplification of polemogenous slogans.

¹¹⁷ Evidence for the latter is difficult to gather since it amounts to counting silences. Attempts at gathering evidence for the former—“intelligence” (or intellectuals) issuing “calls to murder”—produced a number of genealogies (e.g. Grmek, Gjidara & Simac 2002 [1993]). Note that Norman Mailer will briefly reappear in the fourth section of this chapter.

¹¹⁸ To formulate these considerations in terms of another space-time—one whose power of evocation through surnames signals that it functions as something like a contemporary Western *Inferno*—, Goebbels is often said to explain Eichmann, and Hitler is often said to explain Goebbels. The question of what or who explains Hitler, however, is far from being settled: while some propose historical, socio-economic, and/or psychoanalytic answers, others mobilize the word “evil” and sometimes argue that further “explaining”, as an attempt to “understand”, is a first step toward “complicity” and should thus be avoided.

3.2 “The slogans are jamming the airwaves”

I borrow the title of this subsection to Leonard Cohen, who phrased this claim in a recent interview for the CBC. When asked about the role of writing in his life, he said:

L. Cohen. – In writing, if you can discard the slogans that naturally come to you, especially in a highly politicized time like we are now, where gender politics and regular politics and environmental politics, you know, where there’s a good thing to say about everything if you’re on the right side—these times are very difficult to write in because the slogans are really, are jamming the airwaves. So, writing is a very good way, if you’re interested in...

Jian Ghomeshi. – Sorry, what do you mean by “slogans”?

L. Cohen. – Well, what is right: what is right, what is the good position... It’s something that goes beyond what has been called political correctness. It’s a kind of tyranny of a posture, a kind of tyranny that exists today of what the right thing should be. So those ideas are swarming through the air like locusts, and it’s difficult for the writer to determine what he really thinks about things, what he really feels about things. So, in my own case, I have to write the verse, and then see if it’s a slogan or not, and then toss it. But I can’t toss it until I’ve worked on it and seen what it really is. So I find that process of writing the verse, and discarding it until I get down to something that doesn’t sound like a slogan, that doesn’t sound like something that’s easy, that surprises, that surprises me... (Q with Jian Ghomeshi 2009; I transcribe)

For Cohen, creation is a matter of subtraction, of deflating or piercing deafening slogans.

The word slogan is said to descend from the Scottish Gaelic *sluagh-ghairm*, “army-shout”¹¹⁹. Etymologically, a slogan is a war cry. From this consideration, one gets that, to

¹¹⁹ In the subsection “Invisible Crowds” of his *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti presents a slightly different etymology: “Some peoples imagine their dead, or certain of them, as fighting hosts. The Celts of the Scottish Highlands have a special word for the host of the dead: *sluagh*, meaning ‘spirit-multitude’. ‘The spirits fly and come back to the scenes of their earthly transgressions. With their venomous unerring darts they kill cats and dogs, sheep and cattle. They fight battles in the air as men do on the earth. They may be heard and seen on clear, frosty nights, advancing and retreating, retreating and advancing against one another. After a battle their crimson blood may be seen staining rocks and stones.’ The word *ghairm* means shout or cry, and *sluagh-ghairm* was the battle-cry of the dead. This word later became ‘slogan’. The expression we use for the battle-cries of our modern crowds derives from the Highland hosts of the dead” (Canetti 1981 [1960], 43).

put it mildly, slogans tend not to be the most nuanced utterances. Their practical function is to catch the ear and encourage, to rally and lead forward, which arguably asks to silence potentially paralyzing subtleties. This simplifying, reductive aspect of sloganeering evidently applies to the cries that resound on “the battlefield”; this is not the place to ask “real questions”... Perhaps less obviously, it also characterizes those cries that may bring people(s) to a field to do battle in the first place, to the *political* slogans of “demagogues” who seek to assemble and shape a crowd by their “art of speaking” (see Canetti 1981 [1960], 181-3; 311). By repetition, by hammering, slogans weave a more or less smooth phonotope, an echo chamber where they reverberate.

If successful, they can become slogans in the sense unfolded by Cohen in the interview cited above, or in the equivalent sense of what Dalie Giroux calls “communication, [which is] isomorphic to the monetary circulation, the circulation of commodities, and the circulation of workers, [a] cosmological reverberation [whose] content is the differential that makes it possible” (Giroux 2008, 557; I translate). The redundant slogans of communication in “the order of the democratic police”, as Giroux puts it, may be distinguished from “the expressive, emancipatory speech (*parole*)” that is “intuited”, especially by (some) “poets” (558). As such, however, the “normal” or the most common condition of such “fissuring speech” appears to be a form of inaudibility.

If it does not undulate at the frequency of the being of the democratic police, speech (*la parole*) is noise, break, it is marked with the sign of heresy. A hindrance to the flux that is said to be immanent to the real, the fissuring speech is an object of blame in the salons, of economic punishment, of police intervention. Accidental, unpredicted, irruption and disruption—including in its silence (when the public opinion thinks nothing of a problem that it did not choose, when the working class does not show up for the strike, when the peasant at the border rejects the identitarian

survey)—the paradigmatic political speech is inaudible or unintelligible to policed ears. In an exemplary (paradigmatic) manner, it recalls its power (*puissance*) to articulate space and time. It recalls that this faculty to trace the lines of the world is common to all (559).

Still, “There is always a moment where expression turns into (*se fait*) communication, calcifies itself, puts in order, a moment where political action turns into its opposite. Order, as just as it is, is realized on the basis of an intimate, repetitive linguistic violence that will inevitably ruin that order” (560). In other words, even Leonard Cohen’s most carefully crafted songs risk becoming utter kitsch at one point, if only for a time.

*

When encountering a violent slogan—*and what cry is not violent?*—, a sound reply that makes itself heard, if quietly, goes something like this: *listen to yourself!* This readily sounds like a line from a movie—say from a scene in which an enthusiastic young man with peculiar new garments, maybe an armband, faces his old mother, in whose reply—*listen to yourself!*—we hear disappointment, maybe pity, or fear. I imagine the young man then pauses to ponder whether he should stay—it is likely that this is a parting scene—, or whether he should go, to rejoin what I imagine is a group of young men who share a “cause” of some sort. A different scene may resound with a very similar reply: say a young woman is welcomed home after her first year at university by her father, who listens to her and then fondly says: *listen to you!* To my (Francophone) ears, *listen to yourself!* expresses disapproval, while *listen to you!* expresses something closer to approval. To my (PhD candidate) ears, “going to university” sounds like a generally noble endeavor, while joining a thymotic group, a sloganeering collective that strives on “rage” or “courage”, does not, or much less so. It is quite possible, however, that a sensible person will hold the opposite opinion—the opposite view, as the prevalence of

sight incites me to put it. Had I ever found myself in a position to deem “defending my land” with firearms to be the most urgent imperative, I may very well think otherwise of thymotic groups, and I may even believe that universities deflect attention from what matters most. Are such differences a question of values? Are they matters of nurture, or nature? Whether one elects one of these terms or fiercely rejects this problematization altogether, a multiplicity of differing temperaments is presumed to exist and to vibrate.

In this respect, it should be noted that recent political anthropologies of war and genocide (e.g. Docker 2008; Zanic 2007; Colovic 2002) have proposed accounts of the influence of myths and media on modulations of violences—especially on how “fighting” can become “the most urgent” and/or “the most noble”, and *therewith the most important*—that are remarkably similar to the account of the effects of stories and music on the possibilities of harmonizing “the city” and “the soul” in Plato’s *Republic*. The latter also resonates with—or better, durably prefigures—accounts of less extreme situations, such as sociological descriptions of how people come to do what they do “for a living”, what they “do with their life”, how they “choose” a “profession” or “are chosen” by one. The intertwining of predispositions and education has recently been brought to bear, for instance, on what are said to be the two main “social profiles” and the “particular psycho-affective inclination” of those who become police officers in France, namely “the sons of police officers who enter the profession very early on and already completely socialized, acculturated through the policing habitus, and young men from the working classes (*classes populaires*) who have had many precarious jobs and who integrate the profession somewhat by default and for ‘job security’” (Rigouste 2012, 164; I translate). Joining a police force may very well elicit the two replies evoked above—

listen to yourself! and *listen to you!*—, depending on “context”, on series of circumstances (on who the police-to-be speaks with, for instance) and on “the mood of the moment” (on that recruit’s tone, for example, which may be heard as betraying his or her motives). The training that is then to be undergone will seek to mold the recruit adequately, to harmonize him or her with both “the spirit” and “the body” of the force.

4. What hums under & through

The problem of the composition of typologies haunts accounts of variations in distributions of political importance formulated in terms of qualifiable resonances. As this chapter suggests, these accounts tend to mobilize hearing as a distributed capacity. I argue that they do so in a way that requires aesthetics of temperament. What is required are *aesthetics* since temperaments are made to account for both nature and nurture, for the intricate intertwinement or even the identity of these supposed opposites.

Temperament is a term more general than both prevalence and emancipation insofar as there are both “prevailing” and “emancipatory” temperaments at play in distributions of political importance. This is not to say, however, that the prevailing and/or the emancipatory effects of the language of temperament are not problematic. Considering the “domineering” temperaments privileged by “the police”, for example, is to raise the question of the resonances that are sought and produced between “the spirit of the institution”, of *this* or *that* police force, and “the spirit of the age”, of the world-historical “climate” in which this force acts and which it may affect in return. It is perhaps the case, as a former French police officer put it, that “The smell of gunpowder and the thunder of gunshots have *always* procured men with a kind of drunkenness” (cited in Rigouste 2012, 166; I translate & underline), but it is equally plausible that

contemporary conjunctures foster “the fabrication of a fierce psyche [...] throughout a [policeman’s] career, via contacts with situations, violence, and weapons” (165) so that “the body of policemen [becomes] a human accumulator of State violence” (163), a tool of the specific “social apartheid” that arguably characterize “our neoliberal societies”.

4.1 To be in tune with one’s time(s)

The philosophy of history that underlies, haunts, and possibly structures contemporary problematizations of distributions of political importance seems to take for granted that “every individual is a *child of his time*” (Hegel 2008 [1820], 15). I believe it is generally assumed that individual temperaments, as the temperament(s) of this or that individual, are tempered by the tone of the age, by the chords and melodies of the era, the tuning of the epoch. If it is so, anyone can then be qualified as becoming more or less in tune with one’s time(s). Building on this assumption, histories of mentalities and political sociologies of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors work to unfold the *types* of people(s) there are in a singular space-time. The genealogies of contingent, changing “systems” such as “the warrior ethics” (see Chamayou 2013; Gros 2006) are traced and recounted broadly in line with—or in ways that remain similar to—Max Weber’s account of “the protestant ethic” (Weber 2002 [1905]; see Kroker 2006), or Carl Schmitt’s account of “political romanticism” (Schmitt 1986 [1919/25]; see Knee 2007). These typifications should, in return, be considered the progenies of singular conjunctures. It has been argued that the notions of “the individual” and of space and time as the given coordinates of the linear succession of events through landscapes are children of a singular space-time, often named “Western-Modernity”, and that the “Modern-Western” philosophy of history itself has a rather complicated history (Fasolt 2004). The situation seems inextricable, abysmal.

An influential way of formulating these considerations can be termed “the Straussian critique of historicism”. In a nutshell, Strauss argues that “historicism culminated in nihilism” (Strauss 1965 [1953], 18) as it treated its own historicity as a revealing abyss. Its close kin, “cultural relativism”, tends to present itself as an “absolute” perspective. Incoherence, absurdity, and a form of distastefulness are said to weaken the tenability of these perspectives, which are nonetheless said to be prevalent in “our age”.

Readers of Nietzsche, however—thus surely Strauss himself (26)—, are brought to put into question just *who* finds such perspectives untenable, and to try to qualify this untenability. According to Deleuze, *Who?* is the Nietzschean question par excellence:

the question: Who? resonates for all things and on all things: which forces, which will? It is the *tragic* question. [...] From this form of question there derives a method. A concept, a feeling (*sentiment*), a belief being given, one will treat them as the symptoms of a will that wills something. What does he want, *he who* says this, who thinks or feels (*éprouve*) that? It is a matter of showing that he could not say, think or sense it if he did not have this will, these forces, this manner of being. [...] Willing is not an act like all others. Willing is both the genetic and the critical instance of all our actions, feelings and thoughts. The method consists in this: to relate (*rapporter*) a concept [back] to the will to power, in order to make it into the symptom of a will without which it could not even be thought (nor the feeling felt, nor the action undertaken). Such a method corresponds to the tragic question. It is itself the *tragic method*. Or more precisely, if we subtract from the word “drama” all the dialectical and Christian pathos jeopardizing its sense, it is the method of *dramatization*. [...] What a will wills, following its quality, is to affirm its difference or to negate what differs. One only ever wills qualities: the heavy, the light... What a will wills is always its own quality, and the quality of the corresponding forces (Deleuze 1983 [1962], 88-9; I translate).

Who, today, finds “historicism” and “relativism” untenable—with, but also perhaps against so-called Straussians? Who, to use a very Nietzschean verb, cannot *stomach*

thinking what matters politically in terms of isms? To argue over, to praise or deplore the effects of formulating the issue of political importance as a matter of historical contingencies and/or perennial problems, pitting these two temperamental refoldings against one another, is to dramatize practices that are lived more or less harmoniously.

*

In contemporary conjunctures, texts like this one are sometimes deemed symptoms of a cowardly will to retreat from the difficult, constraining alternatives of “real politics”. This dissertation will not stop a new “Sarajevo, 1993”—say: Homs, 2013. It is indeed doubtful that *any* text could... Still, the insistence on the aesthetic resonances, on the experiential undertones and the artistic overtones of political life has been deemed dangerously depoliticizing. In *Political Romanticism*, Schmitt argues it amounts to escapism. For him,

tones, intervals, chords, dissonances, and musical lines can be especially easily used as starting points for romantic emotions and maundering moods. Here experience can shift into associations without any further object; it can blend with other experiences in harmonies and dissonances; and it can clothe itself in song, as in the music of the lyrical poem. [...] And just as every point in the world can become the beginning point for the romantic novel and can serve as the occasion for the romantic “play of the world,” so the musical line or the chord is a vessel for the most diverse contents of experience. An unbounded world of associations and intimations can be related to every melody, every chord, indeed to a single keynote. There are no limits to the possibility of interpretation. The same melody can be a frivolous love song today and a gripping song of repentance some years hence. What a boundless region for the game of associations abandoned to its own devices! (Schmitt 1986 [1919/25], 104-5)

In their more or less scholarly work, Friedrich Schlegel and Adam Müller

attempted to form their accompanying affect with intellectualized material and to preserve it with philosophical, literary, historical, and legal arguments. A

new hybrid romantic artifact, composed of aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific elements, is the result. Having surrendered to the impression of the most immediate reality, they provide an intellectualistic underpinning for their feeling. They clothe affect with philosophical and scientific raiments and words rich in associations, collecting the material for this from the literature of the entire world, from all peoples, ages, and cultures. In consequence, the momentary impression of an enormous richness results. Entire worlds seem to be conquered! [...] Words and impressions such as *transcendental*, *totality*, *culture*, *life*, *tradition*, *duration*, *nobility*, *state*, and *Church* are underpinned with an argument that is itself constituted on the basis of configurations of affect. The totality is a rational resonance in which words and arguments are fused into a lyrical political philosophy, a poetic science of finance, and a musical agronomy—everything determined by the aim, not of articulating the great impression that moves the romantic, but of paraphrasing it in an expression that makes a correspondingly great impression. The “antithetical,” the antinomic, and the dialectical are conflicting emotional states. A strange sound is blended from the echo of contentious realities. The antithetical quality of speculation in the philosophy of nature and the psychology of mysticism also rest on emotive oppositions of pleasure and aversion, love and hate, joy and pain. Thus for the romantic, here there is a storehouse of idioms that are rich in moods and associations. But he uses them as a creative subject for his web that is half aesthetic and half scientific, a web that can then be a starting point for serious suggestions (106-7).

According to Schmitt, “romantic productivity” is always parasitic in that it requires “complete complexes of arguments, images, and pregnant—or, more accurately, suggestive—turns of phrase with which the specifically romantic productivity can develop itself in order to produce, at least superficially, a chain of conclusions and results. Arguments that have already been formulated as such can be accentuated and stressed, rhetorically embellished with trills, and ‘antithetically’ contrasted” (130). The so-called “romantic interest in famous names” is an expression of similar motives: “A great name is a reservoir of suggestions. The work of a great man contains so many

objectifications of spiritual values that [as Novalis put it] ‘in order to be a prophet, one only needs to put his tongue or his hand in motion with a fine sense for their fingering, their tempo, their musical spirit, and the delicate effect of their inner nature’” (132). This “poeticizing” attitude, along with the use of “irony” and the belief in a “subjectified occasionalism” for which the individual (rather than God) is that central, radiating point through which everything that occurs can make sense, are depoliticizing: “Politics is just as alien to [the romantic] as ethics or logic” (146). For Schmitt, this is the case because no moral value, no legal norm and no political decision are intelligible as such for this subjective type he calls “the romantic”, who only hears aesthetic nuances everywhere.

This subjective type is described as the product of a very peculiar world-historical conjuncture: “a bourgeois order based on rules. Otherwise the ‘external conditions’ for the undisturbed occupation with one’s own mood are not satisfied. Psychologically and historically, romanticism is a product of bourgeois security” (99). What may be called the romantic epoch is said to date from the late eighteenth century. The varied, often contradictory responses to the French Revolution in German bourgeois circles already express, for Schmitt, the lack of any serious orientation, save for the “self-centeredness” that is typical of “the romantic”. It is sometimes assumed that this epoch is still “ours”—Schmitt, at least, thought it paved the way to “his” times, “the age of neutralizations and depoliticizations” to which “technology” was perhaps putting an end (Schmitt 2007 [1929], 84; 94). For the jurist, however, every depoliticization involves a (re)politicization, and every claim to neutrality implies the taking of a stance: not taking sides means quietly taking the side of the stronger; aestheticism in the midst of “the liberal age” is an approval of the *status quo* of “bourgeois” ethics and economics.

Guy Oakes, in the introduction to his translation of Schmitt's early polemical book, claims the 1960s in the United States of America were times of intense romanticism:

Like Adam Müller and Friedrich Schlegel, the German romantics of the early nineteenth century whom Schmitt regards as the paradigmatic figures of political romanticism, the American political romantics of the 1960s were obsessively fascinated with themselves and compulsively devoted to self-disclosure and self-celebration. During this period, no one achieved the poeticization of the political more completely than the irrepressible Norman Mailer. [...] Suppose we rejoin him in Washington, D.C., in October 1967. The occasion is the protest against American participation in Vietnam. Some 35, 000 people held a rally at the Lincoln Memorial and then crossed the Arlington Memorial Bridge to march to the Pentagon, where some were arrested for attempting to occupy the Department of Defense and disrupt its operations. Why is Norman Mailer in Washington, and what is he doing? /In fact, he doesn't seem to know. Apparently there were so many reasons and they were so equivocal that Mailer was unable to identify even one of them. The reasons, if indeed there were any, are transformed into conversational material for the self-congratulatory musings over breakfast at the Hey-Adams Hotel in the company of poet Robert Lowell and the critic Dwight McDonald. They were an occasion for good feelings and an 'unspoken happy confidence,' and ultimately they provided the raw material for the book in which Mailer records his experience of the march and the impact this experience made on him: *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* [which won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction]. [...] Mailer does not try to resolve the conflicts over American foreign policy that provided the occasion for the march. Nor does he see the march, his experience, and the book in which he reflects on his experience as a contribution to their resolution. Mailer does not participate in any decision on what should be done about these issues. He makes no commitment and accepts no responsibility for the march or its consequences. Indeed, as his speech at the Ambassador Theater shows, he is not even prepared to assume responsibility for his own conduct. Mailer's acts are exercises of the imagination in which he plays with the material of politics and history, material that serves as the

beginning of a “novel” in which he is both the artist and the protagonist (Oakes, in Schmitt 1986, xxviii-xxx).

With Schmitt, Oakes claims “[the romantic] does not develop new ideas or positions. On the contrary, he takes up what strikes his fancy and impulsively discards it when this is no longer the case, only to move on to some other fleetingly more intriguing issue. [...] In his acceptance of the existing political scheme of things, [he] implicitly consents to the order that actually obtains” (xxx). In this respect, the “romantic” subject is characterized by “a general indecisiveness and a disposition to escape the either-or of ultimate value conflicts, both of which result in the inability to make choices. Because moral and political decisions appear as the imposition of an antiromantic tyranny, the romantic attitude suspends practical judgments in the interest of preserving the spontaneity of sentiment” (xxx). I am led to believe Hunter S. Thompson, who ran for Sheriff in Aspen in 1970 and had very strong views on who is “a crook” (Thompson 1994), would have to be portrayed by Oakes as much more responsible, politically, than Mailer¹²⁰...

¹²⁰ Given Thompson’s “lifestyle”, I suppose Oakes would only reluctantly portray him in a favorable light. “Dr. Gonzo”, however, certainly had a remarkable ability to make “political portraits” that ring as true as possible. Apart from his portrait of Richard Nixon as “a crook” in the “eulogy” written shortly after his death (Thompson 1994), consider the portrayal of Jimmy Carter in a text first written for *Rolling Stone*, “Fear & Loathing on the Campaign Trail 76 – Third-Rate Romance, Low-Rent Rendezvous”, and republished in *The Great Shark Hunt* under the title “Jimmy Carter and the Great Leap of Faith” (Thompson 1979, 452-85). The central part of the article comments on Carter’s “Law Day Address” at the University of Georgia Law School, in 1974 (the address is reproduced after Thompson’s text, 486-94). In an interview he gave to the CBC shortly after, in 1977, Thompson was asked about his article on Carter, and said: “[Thompson:] I think he’s one of the three meanest men I’ve ever met. The other two were Muhammad Ali and Sonny Barger, the president of the Hell’s Angels. Those three men are a whole cut above everybody else I’ve ever run into, in terms of sheer functional meanness. / [Interviewer:] Functional meanness? / [T:] Yes, meaning the ability to get from A to either, B, C, M, Z, whatever you want. Carter would cut my head off to carry North Dakota, would cut both your legs off to carry a ward in Pitkin. He’d never apologize for it. He understands the system. That’s why he won. That’s really all I said... I admire the man. A person who played the game as well as he did, and in a kind of magnolia shade he played it in for a while... He was perceived as a sort of a southern dingbat. But that’s why he pushed Teddy Kennedy around down in Athens and Atlanta. I’d never seen Kennedy pushed around anywhere, in any room, and I was stunned. And I thought ‘Oh, oh!’—this was 1974—, I thought ‘whoops! This is a bad one! You have to watch him’. And sure enough, he announced he’s gonna run for president [...]. When he did I thought, that’s when I went down to see him, I thought I should go talk to this man. [...] he would just play the whip, and serious whip at all lawyers at the Law Day alumni speech. And this wasn’t just the alumni of the University of Georgia Law School, it was the distinguished alumni, the [inaudible], all the state senators, judges, he just beat the hell out of ’em. He’d been governor for two and a

4.2 Rhythmic thresholds

Schmitt's account of political romanticism and Oakes' recent reiteration suggest that determining what matters politically is—or can be—a “rational” endeavor, acknowledging (and yet sometimes silencing) that there are many “rationalities”. This endeavor requires a peculiar temperament, capable of abstracting from the “chatter” of “the market place” to listen attentively to what hums under and through, yet without becoming fascinated by this very capacity for careful, thoughtful listening. In that sense, typologies of temperaments can—and even must—be composed in relation to what each “character” is inclined to believe is what matters most, politically and/or otherwise. This last specification, for its part, seeks to make audible how it is quite possible that politics “itself” is not considered, by some or by many, to be what matters most—even, perhaps, and although this may seem paradoxical, as what matters most *politically*, for perhaps ethics, or economics, or aesthetics, or happiness, or the good life is what matters most politically, what politics should ultimately be concerned with, what those who are engaged in politics should pay attention to and be “driven” by. In return, however, this last formulation raises the question of just *who* can be said to be “truly” engaged in, or to be doing this “thing” that is commonly called politics. When, where and how can some “one” be said to be acting politically? Is there a threshold of political qualification, and if so, is it independent of *who* is dealing with the question?

half years, and they'd given him a hard time, the whole bunch had been against him and he stomped on them, in public. I'd never seen a politician do that before. And he just push Teddy aside, 'outta my way', you know, 'I got work to do, move aside'. And Kennedy was stunned. I was stunned! I don't tape politician speeches no longer, but about ten minutes into it I went to the car and got my tape recorder because I thought 'I've never heard anything like this in my life', and I still haven't, from Carter either. /I:] But what you're impressed by was the toughness... /T:] Oh yeah! He will eat your shoulder right off, if he thinks it's right. /I:] Have you changed your original impression of him since he came to power, since he became president? /T:] No, he said 'that's what I'll do' and that's what he's done. He's just eating Russian shoulders right now, instead of Humphrey's" (CBCtv 2011). Carter, at least, would seemingly merit Oakes' admiration.

Max Weber, a renowned composer of typologies, wrote in his famous lecture on “The Profession and Vocation [*Beruf*] of Politics”, one year before his death, that

If one says that a question is a ‘political’ question, or that a minister or official is a ‘political’ official, or that a decision is determined ‘politically’, what is meant in each case is that interests in the distribution, preservation or transfer of power play a decisive role in answering that question, determining this decision or defining the sphere of activity of the official in question. Anyone engaged in politics is striving for power, either power as a means to attain other goals (which may be ideal or selfish), or power ‘for its own sake’, which is to say, in order to enjoy the feeling of prestige given by power (Weber 1994 [1919], 311).

I believe it is important to engage this “commonsense” problematization of politics.

The economist-sociologist claims “We are all ‘occasional’ politicians when we post our ballot slips or express our will in some similar way, such as voicing approval or protest at a ‘political’ meeting, making a ‘political’ speech and so on, and for many people this is the entire extent of their involvement in politics” (316-7). The largest part of his lecture, however, is dedicated to the presentation of various “figures” of what Weber calls “the professional politician”, of those who live “from politics” and/or “for politics”. After relating the history of a number of these figures (the counselor to the prince, the court noble, the clerk, the party leader, the political journalist, etc.) to the development of the Modern-Western state, and after contrasting the characters that once have and that “now” populate party politics in England, America, and Germany, Weber formulates two general questions: “What kinds of inner joy does politics have to offer, and what kinds of personal qualifications does it presuppose in anyone turning to this career?” (352) The “feeling of power” raises, for each “politician”, the question of “which qualities will enable him to do justice to this power (however narrowly

circumscribed it may actually be in any particular case), and thus to the responsibility it imposes on him. This takes us into the area of ethical questions, for to ask what kind of a human being one must be in order to have the right to seize the spokes of the wheel of history is to pose an ethical question". Weber offers this answer:

One can say that three qualities are pre-eminently decisive for a politician: passion, a sense of responsibility, judgement. Passion in the sense of *concern for the thing itself* (*Sachlichkeit*), the passionate commitment to a 'cause' (*Sache*), to the god or demon who commands that cause. Not in the sense of that inner attitude which my late friend Georg Simmel was wont to describe as 'sterile excitement'. This is characteristic of a particular type of intellectual (especially Russian intellectuals, but of course not all of them!), and also plays such a large part amongst our own intellectuals at this carnival which is being graced with the proud name of a 'revolution'; it is the 'romanticism of the intellectually interesting', directed into the void and lacking all objective (*sachlich*) sense of responsibility. Simply to feel passion, however genuinely, is not sufficient to make a politician unless, in the form of service to a 'cause', *responsibility* for that cause becomes the decisive lode-star of all action. This requires (and this is the decisive psychological quality of the politician) *judgement*, the ability to maintain one's inner composure and calm while being receptive to realities, in other words *distance* from things and people. A 'lack of distance', in and of itself, is one of the deadly sins for any politician and it is one of those qualities which will condemn our future intellectuals to political incompetence if they cultivate it. For the problem is precisely this: how are hot passion and cool judgement to be forced together in a single soul? Politics is an activity conducted with the head, not with other parts of the body or soul. Yet if politics is to be genuinely human action, rather than some frivolous intellectual game, dedication to it can only be generated and sustained by passion. Only if one accustoms oneself to distance, in every sense of the word, can one achieve that powerful control over the soul which distinguishes the passionate politician from the mere 'sterile excitement' of the political amateur. The 'strength' of a political

‘personality’ means, first and foremost, the possession of these qualities (352-3)¹²¹.

These considerations inform Weber’s famous distinction between an “ethics of conviction” and an “ethics of responsibility”, which are, arguably, two temperaments.

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Weber insists on how the unpredictability of the outcome of any action does not mean that “service to a *cause*” is dispensable, quite the contrary. It appears that

The *nature* of the cause the politician seeks to serve by striving for and using power is a question of faith. He can serve a national goal or the whole of humanity, or social and ethical goals, or goals which are cultural, inner-worldly or religious; he may be sustained by a strong faith in ‘progress’ (however this is understood), or he may coolly reject this kind of faith; he can claim to be the servant of an ‘idea’ or, rejecting on principle any such aspirations, he may claim to serve external goals of everyday life—but some kind of belief must always be *present*. Otherwise (and there can be no denying this) even political achievements which, outwardly, are supremely successful will be cursed with the nullity of all mortal undertakings (355).

Engaging “the ethos of politics as a ‘cause’ (*Sache*)” thus means acknowledging that “ultimate *Weltanschauungen* collide, and [that] one has eventually to *choose* between them.” Beyond or beside the “content” of opposing world-views or causes, however, “form” matters. Weber claims “ethically oriented activity can follow two fundamentally

¹²¹ It is noteworthy that the first edition of Schmitt’s *Political Romanticism*, published in 1919, largely echoes Weber’s concerns in his “Vocation” lecture, and perhaps especially this passage, which speaks of “the ‘romanticism of the intellectually interesting’, directed into the void and lacking all objective (*sachlich*) sense of responsibility”. Weber’s lecture was delivered in January 1919, in Munich, and published in October of the same year (Weber 1994, 309n1). In 1919, Munich was indeed a very tense city, politically. One can easily imagine Schmitt, who was then 21 years old, being *moved* by this lecture, and even finding himself in the audience of students to which Weber was speaking—this is only speculation on my part, however, for although Schmitt repeatedly shows in his writings that he has read and that he respected Weber’s work, I have found no documentation of his being in Munich in 1919, or of his presence (or absence) on this now famous occasion. It is nonetheless interesting, from the perspective of a sociological history of political thought, to put what Schmitt was to become, politically, in the following decades, in resonance with the worries and the wishes expressed by Weber in the last and most lyrical pages of the lecture, which I engage below.

different, irreconcilably posed maxims. It can follow the ‘ethic of principled conviction’ (*Gesinnung*) or the ‘ethic of responsibility’. It is not that the ethic of conviction is identical with irresponsibility, nor that the ethic of responsibility means the absence of principled conviction—there is of course no question of that” (359). But while the former is “absolutist”—while s/he who subscribes to it “feels ‘responsible’ only for ensuring that the flame of pure conviction (for example, the flame of protest against the injustice of the social order) is never extinguished” (360)—, the latter implies that “one must answer for the (foreseeable) *consequences* of one’s actions”. The “convinced” person has “to *reject any action which employs morally dangerous means*” (361), what is “moral” being determined by the conviction at play, which is often “unworldly”. But

In the real world, admittedly, we repeatedly see the proponent of the ‘ethics of conviction’ suddenly turning into a chiliastic prophet. Those who have been preaching ‘love against force’ one minute, for example, issue a call to force the next; they call for one *last* act of force to create the situation in which *all* violence will have been destroyed for ever—just like our military leaders who said to the soldiers before every attack that this would be the last, that it would bring victory and then peace. The man who espouses an ethic of conviction cannot bear the ethical irrationality of the world. He is a cosmic-ethical rationalist. [...] It is not possible to unite the ethic of conviction with the ethic of responsibility, nor can one issue an ethical decree determining which end shall sanctify *which* means, if indeed any concession at all is to be made to this principle (361-2)¹²².

¹²² For Weber, who wrote extensively on “the sociology of religion”, the ethics of the “Sermon on the Mount” is the paradigmatic case of an ethics of conviction, precisely because of its “unworldly” and “all-or-nothing” characters. What is more, he considers that the issue of “the experience of the irrationality of the world [...] was, after all, the driving force behind all religious development. The Indian doctrine of *karma*, Persian dualism, original sin, predestination and the concept of the *deus absconditus*, all these notions have grown out of precisely this experience. The early Christian too knew very well that the world was governed by demons, that anyone who gets involved with politics, which is to say with the means of power and violence, is making a pact with diabolical powers, and that it does *not* hold true of his actions that only good can come from good and only evil from evil, but rather that the opposite is often the case. Anyone who fails to see this is indeed a child in political matters” (Weber 1994 [1919], 362). The question of what, for Weber, counts as a

The “responsible” person, on the other hand, seems more apt to take into account how “Anyone wishing to practice politics of any kind, and especially anyone who wishes to make a profession of politics, has to be conscious of these ethical paradoxes and of his responsibility for what may become of *himself* under pressure from them” (365). This is so because “He is becoming involved, I repeat, with the diabolical powers that lurk in all violence”. In this respect, “Anyone seeking to save his own soul and the souls of others does not take the path of politics in order to reach this goal, for politics has quite different tasks, namely those which can only be achieved by force” (366). Referring to Machiavelli’s “Florentine histories”, in which the Italian “has one of his heroes praise those citizens who placed the greatness of their native city above the salvation of their souls”, Weber suggests that this is what a *political* temperament truly sounds like.

“What matters”, in practice, “[is] the trained ability to look at the realities of life with an unsparing gaze, to bear these realities and be a match for them inwardly” (367). This seems to be the case whatever the belief, the cause, or even the form of ethics that happens to be *one’s own*. At the very least, “whether one *ought* to act on the basis of an ethics of conviction or one of responsibility, and *when* one should do the one or the other, these are not things about which one can give instruction to anybody”. This is seemingly

conviction—or more generally, as an “ideal” or a “value”—is intertwined with the question of his “relativism”. Strauss, who claims that Weber has no choice, if he is to be coherent, to accept any stance whatsoever as a “value” that is of an equal worth to all others, claims that “Weber’s regard for ‘rational self-determination’ and ‘intellectual honesty’ is a trait of his character which has no basis but his nonrational preference for ‘rational self-determination’ and ‘intellectual honesty.’ /One may call the nihilism to which Weber’s thesis leads ‘noble nihilism.’ For that nihilism stems not from a primary indifference to everything noble but from the alleged or real insight into the baseless character of everything thought to be noble. Yet one cannot make a distinction between noble and base nihilism except if one has some knowledge of what is noble and what is base. But such knowledge transcends nihilism. In order to be entitled to describe Weber’s nihilism as noble, one must have broken with his position” (Strauss 1965 [1953], 48; on Weber’s own “temperament”, which has been qualified as that of “a volcano”, but also as that of “a melancholic”, see Lallement 2013).

why, as the end of Weber's lecture is drawing near, the tone of his remarks changes and becomes notably more "subjective", lyrical, and somewhat testamentary.

In a remark whose tone, in retrospect—having been pronounced in Munich in 1919—, cannot but sound at least slightly prophetic, Weber envisages, "in these times of excitement", the possibility that "*suddenly*, conviction-politicians spring up all around, proclaiming, 'The world is stupid and base (*gemein*), not I. Responsibility for the consequences does not fall on me but on the others, in whose service I work and whose stupidity or baseness I shall eradicate'". He says he can only imagine one response—and it brings together both ethics (it also mobilizes the sense of touch, through the notion of "being moved", as well as what I will call aesthetics of endurance):

then I say plainly that I want to know how much *inner weight* is carried by this ethic of conviction. For it is my impression that, in nine cases out of ten, I am dealing with windbags, people who are intoxicated with romantic sensations but who do not truly feel what they are taking upon themselves. Such conduct holds little human interest for me and it most certainly does not shake me to the core. On the other hand it is immensely moving when a mature person (whether old or young) who feels with his whole soul the responsibility he bears for the real consequences of his actions, and who acts on the basis of an ethics of responsibility, says at some point, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' That is something genuinely human and profoundly moving. For it must be *possible* for *each* of us to find ourselves in such a situation at some point if we are not inwardly dead. In this respect, the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposite. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being who is *capable* of having a 'vocation for politics' (367-8).

Fearing that "*ten years* from now [...] an age of reaction [will have] set in" (368), and many hopes be bygone, Weber muses on: "then I would very much like to see what has become of those of you—what has 'become' of you in the innermost sense of the word—

who at present feel themselves genuinely to be ‘politicians of conviction’ and who share in the intoxication (*Rausch*) which this revolution signifies.” He ends with this sentence: “Only someone who is certain that he will not be broken when the world, seen from his point of view, is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer it, and who is certain that he will be able to say ‘Nevertheless’ in spite of everything—only someone like this has a ‘vocation’ for politics” (369). It all seems a matter of interiority.

*

Weber’s “tragic” account is useful for refolding what haunts problematizations of political importance in terms of resonances because it makes audible how interiority, the “inward strength” allegedly required for a responsible conviction or a convinced responsibility, is always enmeshed in an exteriority, entwined with the singular world-historical climates that affect and are affected by those who populate them. In this respect, his account echoes the penultimate chapter of Machiavelli’s *Prince*, “XXV – Of Fortune’s power in human affairs and how she can be resisted” (Machiavelli 2005 [1513/32], 84-7). On “resisting Fortune in general” (85), Machiavelli claims that “proper virtue” can act like “dikes and dams” that *may* channel an overflowing river. With regard to “particulars”, he believes “the prince who relies completely upon Fortune will come to ruin as soon as she changes. I also believe that the man who adapts his method of procedure to the nature of the times will prosper, and likewise, that the man who establishes his procedures out of tune with the times will come to grief”. But it seems

No man is so prudent that he knows how to adapt himself to this fact, both because he cannot deviate from that to which he is by nature inclined, and also because he cannot be persuaded to depart from a path after having always prospered by following it. And therefore, when it is time to act impetuously the cautious man does not know how to do

so, and is ruined as a result; for if he had changed his conduct with the times, Fortune would not have changed (85-6).

If Machiavelli “conclude[s] that, since Fortune varies and men remain obstinate in their ways, men prosper when the two are in harmony and fail to prosper when they are not in accord” (86), his wager is that “it is better to be impetuous than cautious”. Prosperity, or “glory and wealth” (85), are scarce, for they are intensely differential attributes.

Questions of timing and intensity, of rhythms and thresholds thus haunt the politics of hearing, thought through the positing of aesthetics of temperament. What is one to do when, as Jean-Luc Godard puts it, “Today what changed is that the crooks are sincere” (Godard 2010, 13; I translate), when they—*but just who are “they”?*—take responsibility even for mass murders? Is *prudence* what is required? “Straussians”—who are reputed, in so-called poststructuralist circles, for holding there are perennial problems, for sometimes presupposing there are perennial solutions to these problems, and for assuming there exists a stable distribution of what matters most—, hear “political prudence” or “political wisdom” (which they distinguish from wisdom *tout court*) as a crucial, trained ability to evaluate what the times call for, to determine what is apt in a series of conjunctures that modulate, if only by the “interpretations” that circulate more or less successfully, what *should* be deemed to matter most, politically. “Foucauldians”—who tend to articulate the problem of what matters politically in terms of “fields of power relations” traversed by “strategies” that are more or less successful in virtue of how they *work*, of the resonances they effectively modulate and the tactical openings they can provoke (Colebrook 2001)—also acknowledge that tempering one’s ardors is very often essential, politically. Even financiers have created concepts like *harmonic trading* (see Carney 2010) to name a “methodology” for “price pattern recognition” that can allegedly help to temper and

maximize attempts at affecting the oscillations of “the market”. Timing and intensity, rhythms and thresholds are haunting notions because they posit aesthetics other than those of prevalence, emancipation, and temperament: they require, they presuppose aesthetics of friction, and endurance.

Refolding distributions of importance (III)

The politics of hearing touch upon the politics of touch through the abundance of tactile metaphors and metonymies in political and political accounts of what matters and of how what matters is determined as such, how importance is distributed in contemporary conjunctures. “To move” and “to be moved”, which can be the fact of a sound, a noise, a melody or a slogan, of a hum, a drone or a screech that oscillates in singular configurations of resonances, appear to be fundamental occurrences, even “in this big conviction-park, this big religious bazaar [that] is the modern world, [where] so-called ultimate orientations can be exchanged more or less easily” (Sloterdijk 2009a, 249) and where it sometimes seems that “all attractors are too weak to catch you, [and] your life just becomes a meaningless drift”. I refold this line of thought throughout the fourth chapter of this dissertation, arguing that problematizations of importance through the politics of touch require aesthetics of friction. This refolding, in turn, acts as a preparation to my fifth refolding of problematizations of political importance, which engages what is reputedly the most evanescent sense of the age-old fivefold, the most difficult one to deal with in an attentive and thoughtful fashion, and seemingly the least “political” of all the senses, smell. I will argue that this sense becomes politically interesting through its intertwinement with aesthetics of endurance.

Chapter IV – Aesthetics of Friction: the Politics of Touch

Men in general judge more by their eyes than their hands: everyone can see, but few can feel. Everyone sees what you seem to be, few touch upon what you are, and those few do not dare to contradict the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the state to defend them. In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no tribunal to which to appeal, one must consider the final result. Therefore, let a prince conquer and maintain the state, and his methods will always be judged honourable and praised by all. For ordinary people are always taken in by the appearances and by the outcome of an event. And in the world there are only ordinary people; and the few have no place, while the many have a spot on which to lean. A certain prince of present times, whom it is best not to name, preaches nothing but peace and faith, and to both one and the other he is extremely hostile. If he had observed both peace and faith, he would have had either his reputation or his state taken away from him many times over.

Niccolò Machiavelli (2005 [1513], Ch. XVIII)

“I cannot put my finger on it now”

A friend of mine—this very friend who likes to repeat “*O mes amis, il n’y a nul amy*”—once told me a tale that left a spectral trace. While I recall being marked, his carefully precise words now escape me. The story went something like this: “when I go through airport security, and am (*as always!*) randomly selected for a thorough search, I always choose frisking over being screened within a contactless body scan, for then I may give the agent an occasion to feel his or her violence, a chance to apprehend and reflect on the sense and effects of this inquisitive touch”. I do not remember my initial response to his sentence but I feel I am bound to have voiced that, as far as airport security is concerned,

and inasmuch as I also incline to hold I am “randomly selected” more often than randomness would predict, I usually choose to stand within the so-called body scan over being touched. My reasons are not quite explicit, even to myself, but with respect to offering security agents an occasion to feel the sense of their own deeds, I hold the awkward posture demanded of those who enter the screening apparatus is at least as likely to appear ridiculously humiliating as is the allegedly direct contact of a thorough pat down. In any case, I seldom believe in my (*in our?*) chances to increase the likelihood of a sudden, critical *prise de conscience* of agents “on the job”, during their dayshift—and I trust my friend would agree with me on this. To put it in terms that could well be his, there is something far too Christian in this hope that one’s suffering will, or even can “redeem” another, pushing him or her ever so slightly closer to a “conversion-point” of sorts. It seems much wiser to weight, to ponder just how the rationalizations of one’s everyday gestures can keep withstanding impressive legions of betrayals.

Another friend—this will not turn into an inventory; rather, it is (*merely?*) a way into how distributions of importance relate to the sense of touch, and thus into how “ways into” are thought to be burrowed—once told me she can hardly stand music with a 4/4 time signature. Apart from being, or indeed, as a typically “North-Western” tempo, this is the rhythm of military marches, the beat of parade-ground drills, and it cannot—or very rarely—be the occasion of a proper dance. It is far too square (not to say “squareheaded”), and this heavy squareness of quadruple meter stands as a massive symbol of rigid straightness. Politically, its prevalence arguably signals lacunae in the subtleness, suppleness, and swing required for strategies and tactics to be efficient and effective in tactful, that is, non-brutal ways. The 2/4 tempo of samba or the shifting time

signatures of jazz seem far more suitable expressions of the responsiveness asked for by attentively situated interventions in always already intricately enmeshed, mundane practical configurations. These rhythmic considerations seem to touch on what are often called cultural differences in the ways in which dancing, and touching practices “in general” are dealt with in various moments and places, at different sites, with various effects. There is a practical wisdom in grasping just when, where, and how one can touch who and what, with what effects. This is also what “knowing how to dance” means. *To dance one’s way through* may require to “talk the talk” expected of one, but it may also be the very best way to walk away unmarked from invasive checkpoints.

My two friends, by their modes of thought, and especially through their acute sensitivity to violences, have touched me in ways that have been shaping how I now think. They have a very different touch, however, different forms of tact and divergent tactics. But what is friendship, if not an always ultimately unique regime of touching and being touched, a style of feeling and being felt *together*, a shared *con*-tact, a fabric of proximities and distances whose constancy is (re)secreted through its (re)compositions?

The one occasion I can recall my two thoughtful friends getting into a somewhat heated public conversation with one another put into play the political significance and (*correlatively?*) veiled violences of the use of the notions of suspension and of insight-as-penetration in political thought. I recall feeling that they were quietly agreeing on the violences at stake, but that they clearly disagreed on how these violences work, and on how they can and should be modulated. Their respective stances were soon described to me as incommensurable. I was inclined to agree since the standstill impression left by their “dialogue” seemed to signal that neither of them could truly move the other out of

his or her initial position. The stance of my first friend, which recalled “onto-theology”, and the stance of my second friend, which recalled “governmentality”—at times, the two of them effectively seemed to be replaying the Derrida-Foucault “debate” on madness, history, and philosophy, if in a concentrated, updated form (see Derrida 1997 [1967], 51-97; Foucault 2001b [1972])—, can be said to relate to one another in a manner comparable to the wave-particle duality in contemporary physics¹²³. This is to say that one’s starting assumptions radically shape one’s questions, and therefore the plausible answers these questions can receive. In that sense, the apparent agreement of my two friends on the violences at stake in the notions of suspension and of insight-as-penetration should perhaps be re-qualified as just that, an appearance, a seeming *on the surface*.

I am inclined, however, to characterize the very incommensurability of their two stances as precisely that which may enable some grasp of how they think through the problem of what matters politically, and how this issue is “prehended” more generally. This characterization evokes many sedimented claims on how thinking works. For one, grasping a heated encounter between two incommensurable views, or at least two divergent series of claims as a site of friction that can, as such, constitute an interesting, useful, and productive site for thinking recalls a claim from *The Republic*, where Plato’s Socrates asserts that by considering justice in the city and justice in the individual “side

¹²³ I am indebted to R.B.J. Walker for suggesting the analogy between the onto-theology/governmentality knot in contemporary cultural, social, and political thought, and the wave-particle duality in physics as instances of incompatible, mutually exclusive, and even incommensurable perspectives. The wave-particle duality can be summarized thusly: “a photon behaves like a particle when particlelike properties are measured and it behaves like a wave when wavelike properties are measured. Since the interpretation of the results of [the] experiments conducted over several decades does not include the causes for which a photon exhibits such mutually exclusive properties, it is still a matter of debate. The debate will be over once the causes of these mutually exclusive properties are found” (Bhuiyan 2011, 16). It is uncertain, however, that a single overarching perspective can account for the duality; if such a perspective was found, it would precisely make the particle and the wave perspectives commensurable. For accounts of the Derrida-Foucault “debate” that insist on the incommensurability of onto-theology and governmentality, see Rekret 2012 and Campillo 2000.

by side and rubbing them together like sticks, we would make justice burst into flame, and once it's come to light, confirm it for ourselves" (Plato 1991 [ca. 380 BCE], 435a)¹²⁴. Qualifying disagreement as a productive, enriching force, a "motor" powered by the heat of resistances also recalls Marxist or Hegelian dialectics, and 20th centuries theories of science (see Burgoyne 2013). In a Weberian vein, if progress toward the Truth is not what is at stake, if not Reason, but divergent rationalizations are in tension, the spark of conflicting claims can be the occasion of a crucial decision among ultimate worldviews.

As I write these lines, however, gesturing very broadly toward grand tropes of Western thought, I anticipate the irritation caused to my two tactful friends. I imagine both of them would agree in characterizing such a tentatively conciliating posture as an at best agnostic reiteration of the falsely neutral liberal slogan *let's agree to disagree*... This slogan is irritating because one of its silenced effects is to reinforce the so-called status quo by asserting that the "dialoguing" stances at hand are equally tenable—but this "tolerance" is most likely voiced when the stances are equally indifferent, or insofar as

¹²⁴ In Plato's so-called *Seventh Letter* (whose authenticity is unclear), one finds a similar passage on the "enlightening" effect of the friction occasioned by comparisons: "In one word, neither receptivity nor memory will ever produce knowledge in him who has no affinity with the object, since it does not germinate to start with in alien states of mind; consequently neither those who have no natural connection or affinity with things just, and all else that is fair, although they are both receptive and retentive in various ways of other things, nor yet those who possess such affinity but are unreceptive and unretentive—none, I say, of these will ever learn to the utmost possible extent the truth of virtue nor yet of vice. For in learning these objects it is necessary to learn at the same time both what is false and what is true of the whole of Existence, and that through the most diligent and prolonged investigation, as I said at the commencement; and it is by means of the examination of each of these objects, comparing one with another—names and definitions, visions and sense-perceptions,—proving them by kindly proofs and employing questionings and answerings that are void of envy—it is by such means, and hardly so, that there bursts out the light of intelligence and reason regarding each object in the mind of him who uses every effort of which mankind is capable" (Plato 1966b, 344a-b). J. Haward proposes the following translation of the last sentence of this passage: "After much effort, as names, definitions, sights, and other data of sense, are *brought into contact and friction one with another*, in the course of scrutiny and kindly testing by men who proceed by question and answer without ill will, with a sudden flash there shines forth understanding about every problem, and an intelligence whose efforts reach the furthest limits of human powers" (Plato 1928; I underline). On philosophy, friendship, and "ill-will", see Derrida's *Béliers. Le dialogue interrompu : entre deux infinis, le poème* (Derrida 2003a), which engages, in a posthumous tribute to Hans-Georg Gadamer, the hermeneutical notion that "good-will" is required for a "fusion" of horizons of interpretation to have a chance to occur.

the prevalent one (*the one which can “afford” tolerance?*) is not seriously threatened. While I presume the obliqueness of my somewhat slippery engagement with the roles of aesthetics of politics in distributions of political importance may please at least one of my tactful friends, their two silent voices accompany me as I write (along with many other voices, of course, those of friends and “enemies”), and they become notably more insistent as I approach touch—*their* voices more than any others. If “The enemy is our own question as a figure”, it seems that friends can put (me) into question just as well¹²⁵.

1. Politics and/as friction: tweaking itchy togetherness

In this fourth chapter, I engage the following hypothesis: *aesthetics of friction act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distribution of political importance in terms of irritations*. Distributions of political importance tend to be grasped as gestures. Although the gesturer, the distributor, the active agent or the subject of distribution, and even the possible existence of a doer “behind” this deed are debatable, it seems indubitable that something happens to or with this “thing” I have been calling political importance. Importance is a differential notion, insofar as any “thing” that is held to import is qualified as such in relation to other instances of importance, to some other “things” that import more or less or to the same “thing” that imports differently in various conjunctures. In that sense, it appears that, as what matters varies, some processes of reordering, reclassification, resorting or redistribution occur, however “unconscious” these requalifications may be. Even those who hold that what matters politically only seems to vary, “on the surface”, but in truth remains invariant, “underneath”, phrase this

¹²⁵ The phrase “The enemy is our own question as a figure” is my translation of Jacques Derrida’s “*L’ennemi est notre propre question en tant que figure*”, which is his French translation, in *Politiques de l’amitié*, of a verse by poet Theodor Däubler that Carl Schmitt cited near the end of his 1945-47 *Ex Captivitate Salus*, which in the original German reads “*Der Feind ist unsre eigne Frage als Gestalt*” (in Derrida 1994, 190).

very maintenance as a gestural occurrence, as a holding fast that is also a holding-at-bay of the so-called superficial variations of opinion¹²⁶. Grasped as a movement, as a change or a transformation of variable magnitude, a variation in or of political importance irritates. In effect, it marks, it traces, leaving a mark or a trace—say a scar, a rash maybe, or perhaps the memory of a shiver. Such a variation is more or less effective, durable—important. For its many possible effects to be differentiable, various degrees or types of friction must be possible. Thinking how a surface or depth is marked, affected or touched, and how touches differ, is thus to presuppose the fact of frictions.

1.1 The veiled prevalence of a pineal hands conjecture

Insisting on qualifying touch as an overlooked, un-thought, neglected or devalued sense of the age-old fivefold is a somewhat common gesture in contemporary conjunctures. Michel Serres, for instance, in *Les Cinq Sens. Philosophie des corps mêlés—1*, writes that “Many philosophies refer to sight; few to hearing; fewer still place their trust in the tactile, or olfactory. Abstraction divides up the sentient body, eliminates taste, smell and touch, retains only sight and hearing, intuition and understanding. To abstract means to tear the body to pieces rather than merely to leave it behind: analysis” (Serres 2008 [1985] 26; see also Manning 2007, 56). This passage from *The Five Senses*’ first chapter, “Veils”, is helpful to begin refolding the politics of touch onto aesthetics of friction. For one, these lines point out that the Académicien’s project seeks to avoid both “tear[ing]

¹²⁶ In a Nietzschean perspective, one may read this stance as an expression of “the eternal return of the same”. In effect, it claims that what matters always returns, albeit in different settings that are more or less un/welcoming. Below, in the third, polemological fold of this chapter, I return to this reading by engaging what I call the logic of “incystence”. Through this neologism, I argue that “the same” that may be eternally returning in matters of political importance can be thought as always differing from itself in a manner that is homologous to the ways in which a cyst often seems to insistently reappear in the same place, despite cystectomies, despite procedures of “decysting”, as each time a new encystation *has* to have been occurring, making “it” a “different same cyst”.

the body to pieces” and “leav[ing] it behind”. Most interestingly, they do so through verbs indicating that the sense of touch is already at work in how practices of thought are grasped. In effect, “dividing up”, “eliminating”, “retaining”, “tearing” and “leaving behind” are gestures—arguably, hand gestures, and in any case: modalities of (un)touch. The verb “to refer”, used by Serres, and my own use of “to point out”, “to indicate” and “to grasp” are also working through a tactile register (see Cohen 2012). The importance of this register is arguably made explicit by the very makeup of the word “abstraction”, for even if one hears or reads it cursorily, it exposes, it lays bare its reliance on the notion of traction. To abs-tract, from the Latin *abstrahere*, is to draw off or to draw away from. In that sense, to think abstractly is to attempt to un-veil, to pull or lift up that (*infinite?*) piece of phenomenal cloth in which “Truth” reputedly envelops itself.

These considerations lead me (*push me*, or *pull me*) to assert that, throughout Western images of thought expressed in common parlance, something like a “pineal hands” conjecture or a “mind’s hand” hypothesis is at work, in ways that are homologous to the “pineal eye” or the “mind’s eye” hypothesis discussed in the fourth, hauntological fold of Chapter I, above¹²⁷. The French *comprendre* (together + take) carries tactile connotations that echo those of the English “to comprehend” and “to grasp”.

In trying to give examples of what this pineal hands conjecture does, of what it dis/enables and how it participates in and of the framing of distributions of political

¹²⁷ To my knowledge, the phrase “pineal hands” has seldom been used. However, the phrase “the mind’s hand” (in the singular) has recently been used in a few papers that present the results of neuropsychological research on “the observation of action” (Raos, Evangeliou & Savaki 2004; see also Ambrosini, Sinigaglia & Constantini 2012) and on “conceptual size judgments” (Connell, Lynott & Dreyer 2011). These papers outline close interactions between the eyes and the hands “in the brain”. It is noteworthy that when touching is at stake, both in scholarly research and in common parlance, the hands—rather than the skin as a whole, for instance, or other parts of the body—are usually at the center of attention. I return to this prevalence of the hand(s) in the fourth, hauntological fold of this chapter. The term “haptic” is now quite popular in “theory” circles to name an intricate entanglement of the eye and the hand, to name a sight that touches, not least following Deleuze’s reiterations of the term, first developed by psychologists in the 1930s, notably G. Revesz.

importance, one may start by considering this very practice of groping to reach examples.

In the long Latin treatise called *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for instance, one reads that

Exemplification is the citing of something done or said in the past, along with the definite naming of the doer or author. It is used with the same motives as a Comparison. It renders a thought more brilliant when used for no other purpose than beauty; clearer, when throwing more light upon what was somewhat obscure; more plausible, when giving the thought greater verisimilitude; *more vivid, when expressing everything so lucidly that the matter can, I may almost say, be touched by the hand* (Cicero [sic] 1954 [ca. 90 BCE], IV. XLIX-62; I underline)¹²⁸.

The tangible effects of rhetorical devices do not only move readers and listeners. Practices of composition—perhaps especially in writing—are attempts to craft, to shape, seize and mold, to get a grip (on). Even if “things-in-themselves”, for example, could be comprehended by what I call pineal hands, one would still have to try to secure or to maintain this grip, to not let what is held slip through one’s “pineal fingers”, as it were, nor to crush “it” because of a careless, excessive hold. Scholars arguably put their literal hands in the service of the metaphorical ones as they put down in writing the results of their investigative manipulations—say, the ungraspability of “things-in-themselves”¹²⁹.

¹²⁸ While the authorship of this treatise has traditionally been attributed to Cicero, as shown by the edition I am using, 20th century philological scholarship has argued that the author is in truth “still unidentifiable” (Douglas 1960, 65; on the date of the treatise, see also Winkel 1979). I owe the discovery of the passage cited to Maurizio Viroli, who cites most of it in his Introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of Machiavelli’s *Prince* (in Machiavelli 2005, xxvi). Viroli is arguing for “the rhetorical nature of *The Prince*” (xxv), and he uses the enumeration cited to characterize how “Machiavelli masterfully resorts to ancient and modern historical examples to make his arguments vivid, lucid, and persuasive, as well as to instill the desire to imitate the great political and military leaders” (xxvi). The *Discourses* also abound with examples, both “Ancient” and “Modern”, which are arguably to be mimed—or followed, as is most often said of examples.

¹²⁹ In the “Conclusion” section to the chapter on “The Philosophy Faculty versus the Faculty of Medicine”, which comes right before the strange “Postscript” to *The Conflict of the Faculties* which I cited in a note to Chapter II, above, Kant writes remarkable lines on the difficulties of putting what I would call one’s writing hand in the service of one’s “mind’s hand”. Presenting himself as an example, Kant writes: “All pathological attacks in which man’s mind can master these feelings by sheer steadfast will, as the superior power of a rational animal, are convulsive (cramplike) in nature. But we cannot convert this proposition and say that every convulsive seizure can be checked or eliminated merely by a firm resolution. For some of them are such that an attempt to subject them to the force of one’s resolution aggravates the convulsive ailment. This was

If, as Serres puts it, to think abstractly is “to tear the body to pieces” in an attempt to unveil, it is also to draw a veil over “the body” as an enfolded whole, over its “Truth”, or a part of it—or *her*, if one answers positively to Nietzsche’s famous question, in the fourth and last section of his Preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*: “Perhaps truth is a woman who has grounds for not showing her grounds?” (Nietzsche 2001 [1886], 8) Indeed, this whole passage by Nietzsche argues that *not* unveiling, “to stop bravely at the surface”, is a most noble, tactful gesture¹³⁰. Below, in the second, artistico-

true in my own case, when I contracted an illness that the *Copenhagen Newspaper* described, about a year ago, as ‘an epidemic of catarrh accompanied by *distress in the head*’ (I came down with it a year before this, but the symptoms were similar. *) [*Kant’s note: ‘I think it is a kind of gout that has to some extent penetrated the brain.’] The result of it was that I felt disorganized—or at least weakened and dulled—in my intellectual work; and since this ailment has attached itself to the natural weaknesses of my old age, it will end only with life itself. /This pathological condition of the patient, which accompanies and impedes his thinking, in so far as thinking is holding firmly onto a concept (of the unity of ideas connected in his consciousness), produces the feeling of a spasmodic state in his organ of thought (his brain). This feeling, as of a burden, does not really weaken his thought and reflection itself, or his memory of preceding thoughts; but when he is setting forth his thoughts (orally or in writing), the very need to guard against distractions which would interrupt the firm coherence of ideas in their temporal sequence produces an involuntary spasmodic condition of the brain, which takes the form of an inability to maintain unity of consciousness in his ideas, as one takes the place of the preceding one. In every discourse I first prepare (the reader or the audience) for what I intend to say by indicating, in prospect, my destination and, in retrospect, the starting point of my argument (without these two points of reference a discourse has no consistency). And the result of this pathological condition is that when the time comes for me to connect the two, I must suddenly ask my audience (or myself, silently): now where was I? where did I start from? This is a defect, not so much of the mind or of the memory alone, as rather of *presence of mind* (in connecting ideas)—that is, an involuntary *distraction*. It is a most distressing feeling, which one can guard against in writing, though only with great labor (especially in philosophical writing, where it is not always easy to look back to one’s starting point); but despite all one’s efforts, one can never obliterate it completely. /It is different with the mathematician, who can hold his concepts or their substitutes (symbols of quantity or number) before him in intuition and assure himself that, as far as he has gone, everything is correct. But the worker in the field of philosophy, especially pure philosophy (logic and metaphysics), must hold his object hanging in midair before him, and must always describe and examine it, not merely part by part, but within the totality of a system as well (the system of pure reason). Hence it is not surprising if metaphysicians are incapacitated sooner than scholars in other fields or in applied philosophy. Yet some people must devote themselves entirely to metaphysics, because without it there would be not philosophy at all” (Kant 1979 [1799], 205-9). Kant then raises a number of questions on “the art of prolonging human life”, asking himself why he persists in his old age. For a discussion on the long passage cited, see Lyotard’s “Judicieux dans le diffèrent” (1985, 195-7), which relates this passage to Jean-Luc Nancy’s intervention in the colloquia on Lyotard that was the occasion of the book in which both Lyotard’s and Nancy’s texts can be found (see Nancy 1985).

¹³⁰ It is worth citing in its entirety: “Finally, lest what is most important remain unsaid: from such abysses, from such severe illness, also from the illness of severe suspicion, one returns *newborn*, having shed one’s skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a more tender tongue for all good things, with merrier senses, joyful with a more dangerous second innocence, more childlike, and at the same time a hundred times subtler than one had ever been before. How repulsive enjoyment is to us now, that crude, muggy, brown enjoyment as understood by those who enjoy it, our ‘educated’, our rich, and our rulers! How maliciously we nowadays listen to the great fairground boom-boom with which the ‘educated person’ and

political fold of this chapter, I address the “Nietzschean” praise of surfaces over depths in contemporary problematizations of political importance. In this first, politological fold, however, I must face the pressing demand to make explicit the role(s) of touch in politological accounts of how distributions of political importance are thought to vary.

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Serres’ claim that very few philosophies “put their trust in the tactile, or the olfactory” challenges one to grope for these rare “philosophies”. As tactile politologies go, students of the history of Western political thought may rapidly think of the passage in Plato’s *Republic* on the enlightening effect of “rubbing together like sticks” the accounts of justice in the city and in the individual, cited in the opening section above, or of this passage of Machiavelli’s *Prince*, cited at the inception of this chapter, on how “very few can feel” the core of a prince’s temperament, while “everyone can see” its surface (see Panagia 2009, 94; 177n65). Both passages, however, seem most aptly read as expressions

urbanite today allows art, books and music – aided by spirituous beverages – to rape him for ‘forms of spiritual enjoyment’! How the theatrical cry of passion now hurts our ears; that whole romantic uproar and tumult of the senses that is loved by the educated mob together with its aspirations towards the sublime, the elevated, the distorted, how foreign it has become to our taste! No, if we convalescents still need art, it is *another kind* of art – a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a bright flame, blazes into an unclouded sky! Above all: an art for artists, only for artists! In addition we will know better what is first and foremost needed *for that*: cheerfulness – any cheerfulness, my friends! As artists, too, we will know this – I would like to prove it. There are some things we now know too well, we knowing ones: oh, how we nowadays learn as artists to forget well, to be good at *not* knowing! And as for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths who make temples unsafe at night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. No, we have grown sick of this bad taste, this will to truth, to ‘truth at any price’, this youthful madness in the love of truth: we are too experienced, too serious, too jovial, too burned, too deep for that... We no longer believe that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, to be present everywhere, to understand and ‘know’ everything. ‘Is it true that God is everywhere?’ a little girl asked her mother; ‘I find that indecent!’ – a hint for philosophers! One should have more respect for the *bashfulness* with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps truth is a woman who has grounds for not showing her grounds? Perhaps her name is – to speak Greek – *Baubo*?... Oh those Greeks! They knew how to *live*: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words – in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial – *out of profundity*! And is not this precisely what we are coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of current thought and looked around from up there, looked *down* from up there? Are we not just in this respect – Greeks? Worshippers of shapes, tones, words? And therefore – artists?” (Nietzsche 2001 [1886], 7-9)

of the prevalence of sight. While they refer to touch and even to “pineal hands”, Plato and Machiavelli can hardly be said to “place their trust” in this sense.

After Machiavelli, Hobbes is the next figure in line within the gallery of the linearized history of “the canon” of Western political thought. While Hobbes’ attempt at geometrizing political thought, at founding a “new science” of politics readily seems to further exemplify and strengthen the prevalence of sight, it has been argued that touch is the key sense in the account of experience that “grounds” his political philosophy.

This implicit importance of touch for Hobbes is unambiguously asserted in a letter from Strauss to Kojève, written in London on June 3, 1934, as Strauss was researching what would become *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*. After summarizing his “findings” on how, “In his ‘youth,’ i.e. until he was 41, that is to say before he became acquainted with Euclid and *thereafter with Galileo* etc., H<obbes> had been influenced by four forces: Scholasticism, Puritanism, Humanism, and the aristocratic atmosphere in which he lived” (Strauss 2000, 228), he concludes:

The further, most important and most difficult task is then to show how the *project* of a *mechanistic*-deterministic account of nature arises from this *new* moral principle [the fear of violent death]. The essential middle term here is the significance attached on a priori grounds to the *sense of touch*, which now becomes the most important sense. That is simply the as-it-were ‘epistemological’ expression of <the fact> that the fear of (violent) death becomes the moral principle. (That is my London discovery.) (228-9)¹³¹

¹³¹ This letter is also interesting for its somewhat touching, almost poignant account of what occupied—and arguably, what still occupies—young scholars in their daily life, namely a rather uncertain mixture of theoretical ponderings and practical worries concerning the material possibility of practicing “theory”. The letter begins with “personal” remarks by Strauss, who was 35: “Dear Mr. Kochevnikoff [Kojève, who was 32, had not yet Frenchified his last name], /Many thanks for your letter. Please excuse me for not having answered it, and be so kind as to regard this writing as a letter. /I write you in a similar mood as you do to me—namely somber. Some influential English professors do, I believe, take an interest in me—but whether and how that interest will manifest itself in terms of bread, cigarettes, and the like, is another matter entirely. And soon it is summer, that is to say a time when it is impossible to undertake anything. I don’t want to detail

In Strauss' book, two passages will mention this role of touch. The first one reads:

Since [for Hobbes] man is by nature fast in his imaginary world, it is only by unforeseen mischance that he can attain to a knowledge of his own darkness and at the same time a modest and circumspect knowledge of the real world. That is to say: *the world is originally revealed to man not by detachedly and spontaneously seeing its form, but by involuntary experience of its resistance*. The least discriminating and detached sense is the sense of touch. This explains the place of honour which is *tacitly* granted to the sense of touch in Hobbes's physiology and psychology of perception; all sense-perception, particularly that of the most discriminating and detached sense, the sense of sight, is interpreted by experience of the sense of touch (Strauss 1963b [1936], 27; I underline).

This "place of honour" attributed to the sense of touch is evidenced, for example, by Hobbes's claim in *Leviathan's* Part 1 ("Of Man"), Chapter I ("Of sense"), that

The cause of sense, is the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper to each sense, either immediately, as in the taste and touch; or mediately, as in seeing, hearing, and smelling: which pressure, by the mediation of the nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the brain and heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour [*conatus*] of the heart, to deliver itself: which endeavour because *outward*, seemeth to be some matter without. And this *seeming*, or *fancy*, is that which men call *sense*; and consisteth, as to the eye, in a *light*, or *colour figured*; to the ear, in a *sound*; to the nostril, in an *odour*; to the tongue and palate, in a *savour*; and to the rest of the body, in *heat*, *cold*, *hardness*, *softness*, and such other qualities, as we discern by *feeling*. All which qualities called *sensible*, are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely. Neither in us that are pressed, are they any thing

all this for you more fully—after all, you know about it from your own experience. /If I had a modest income, I could be the happiest man in the world" (Strauss 2000, 227). How some young scholars can satirize the politics of their times is expressed by how, on the same page of the expanded edition of *On Tyranny*, one can read the previous letter that survived from the Strauss-Kojève correspondence, written by Kojève on May 1, 1934, which ends thusly: "P.S. Enclosed a picture of Hitler which—in my opinion—explains a great deal: the man is really very congenial and 'cozy'. /Did your wife receive Miss Basio's [Kojève's mistress] letter?" These lines also illustrate striking differences between Strauss' and Kojève's temperament.

else, but divers motions; (for motion produceth nothing but motion.) [...] the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another. So that sense in all cases, is nothing else but original fancy, caused (as I have said) by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of external things upon our eyes, ears, and other organs thereunto ordained (Hobbes 1998a [1651], 9-10).

This phrasing of the experience of feeling or sensing in terms of pressures and motions bears witness to the “*mechanistic*-deterministic account of nature” said to be typical of Hobbes’ thought. As this passage introduces his account “Of Man”, it further asserts that humans are *part* of “nature”. In that sense, there is only “one world” for Hobbes.

Strauss is generally concerned with the relationship between natural science, social science, and philosophy. In this early book, he engages how the “obvious answer” to the question of “the origin not of the method, of the form, but of the material of Hobbes’s political philosophy” (Strauss 1963b [1936], 3), that answer “forced upon us by the structure of Hobbes’s political philosophy itself, is that Hobbes draws the concrete definition of the aim and quality of the individual will from the mechanistic psychology which precedes political philosophy in his system”. The obviousness of this reading is why “almost every one who has written about Hobbes has interpreted his political philosophy as dependent on natural science, for either material or method or for both” (6). Strauss, for his part, argues that “the basis” of Hobbes’ political philosophy is not “scientific” but “moral”, that for Hobbes morality comes before science, “objectively as well as biographically” (170). However, Strauss also rejects the “alternative” answer that situates “the basis” of Hobbes’ politology in “Tradition”: Hobbes’ morality is not quite, or rather not at all that of “the Ancients”. Strauss seeks to approach the grounds for an “exact” interpretation of Hobbes as a *Modern* thinker of political life. With his “London discovery”, he seems to hold that he put his finger on something like a reading key.

Near the end of the book, the second passage on the role of touch reads:

Hobbes's turn to natural science is to be explained by his interest not so much in nature as in man, in self-knowledge of man as he really is, i.e. by the interest which characterized him even in his humanist period. The humanist or moral origin of his scientific question is revealed in his answer to that question. The fundamental concept of his theory of motion, the concept of *conatus*, appears first in his analysis of appetite. Nor is that all. His scientific explanation of sense-perception is characterized by the fact that it interprets perception in the higher senses by the sense of touch; and *the preference for the sense of touch which this presupposes is already implied in Hobbes's original view of the fundamental significance of the antithesis between vanity and fear*. Finally, in his physics Hobbes never attained to an adequate understanding of the principle of inertia. The least one must say is that he treated straight and circular motion as equivalent and that he did not consider it necessary to understand circular motion as a modification of straight motion. In his theory of human nature, on the other hand, he expresses with all definiteness that 'vita motus est perpetuus qui, cum rectâ progredi non potest, convertitur in motum circularem'. If Hobbes's natural science in its questions and answers is thus dependent on his 'humanist', that is moral, interests and convictions, on the other hand a particular conception of nature is the implicit basis of his views in moral and political philosophy. But it is necessary to raise the question whether the conception of nature which is the presupposition of his political philosophy is identical with the conception of nature which he explains in his scientific writings. It is certain that there is a kinship between these two conceptions of nature, *conceptions which in principle are to be kept separate* (Strauss 1963b [1936], 166-7; I underline)¹³².

¹³² To the phrase "the preference for the sense of touch which this presupposes...", Strauss appends this footnote: "See above, p. 27. Among the Hobbes papers at Chatsworth there is an excerpt from Scalinger's *De subtilitate*, in which among other items Exercitatio 286 has been summarized. This treats, in express controversy with Aristotle, of the pre-eminence of the human sense of touch over that of animals" (Strauss 1963b [1936], 166n3). I turn to Aristotle in the fourth, hauntological fold of this chapter, below.

The Latin sentence cited by Strauss in the body of the text is the last sentence of Chapter XI of Hobbes' *De Homine*. The final "Article 15" reads: "Concerning the pleasurable things whereof there be satiation, such as the pleasures of the flesh, I shall say nothing, because they are excessively well known, their pleasure is balanced by loathing, and because some of them are offensive. The greatest good, or as it is called, felicity and the final end, cannot be attained in the present life. For if the end be final, there would be nothing

According to Strauss, “the conception of nature which Hobbes’ political philosophy *presupposes* is dualistic: the idea of civilization presupposes that man, by virtue of his intelligence, can place himself outside nature, can rebel against nature” (168). However,

The antithesis of nature and human will is hidden by the monist (materialist-deterministic) metaphysic, which Hobbes *teaches*, which he found himself forced to adopt simply because he saw no other possibility of escaping the ‘substantialist’ conception of mind, and therefore ‘the kingdom of darkness’. This dilemma, which was not swept aside until Kant and his successors, is the decisive reason for Hobbes’s materialist-deterministic theory, which is not only not needed for his political philosophy, but actually imperils the very root of that philosophy. It is a sign of this: that the moral basis of his political philosophy becomes more and more disguised, the farther the evolution of his natural science progresses. [...] with the progressive elaboration of his natural science, vanity, which must of necessity be treated from the moral standpoint, is more and more replaced by the striving for power, which is neutral and therefore more amenable to scientific interpretation. Hobbes certainly took great care not to follow this path to its logical conclusion. Consistent naturalism would have been the ruin of his political philosophy. That is shown in the case of Spinoza. Spinoza, more consistently naturalistic than Hobbes, relinquishes the distinction between might and right and teaches the natural right of all passions. Hobbes, on the other hand, by virtue of the basis of his political philosophy, a basis which was not naturalistic but moral, asserts the natural right only of the fear of death (168-9).

to long for, nothing to desire; whence it follows not only that nothing would itself be a good from that time on, but also that man would not even feel. For all sense is conjoined with some appetite or aversion; and not to feel is not to live. /For of goods, the greatest is always progressing towards ever further ends with the least hindrance. Even the enjoyment of a desire, when we are enjoying it, is an appetite, namely the motion of the mind to enjoy by parts, the thing that it is enjoying. *For life is perpetual motion that, when it cannot progress in a straight line, is converted into circular motion*” (Hobbes 1998b [1658], 53-4; I underline). In a footnote appended to the Latin citation, Strauss writes: “That the pre-eminence of straight motion over circular can be asserted on non-mechanistic, even anti-mechanistic presuppositions, is shown by the following passage, from Bergson, which should be compared with *De Homine*, cap. 11, art. 15. ‘Life in general is mobility itself; the particular manifestations of life only accept this mobility with regret and constantly lag behind. The former always go forward; the latter would want to keep balancing on the spot. Evolution in general would, as much as possible, occur in a straight line; each special evolution is a circular process’. *L’évolution créatrice*, Paris (Alcan), 1907, p. 139. Hobbes’s theory, no less than that of Bergson, is based primarily on self-knowledge, and not on reflections of a scientific nature” (Strauss 1963b [1936], 167n1; I translate Bergson).

If “The elaboration of this [prior] conception of nature, which is related to naturalism but by no means identical with it, is the most urgent task for an exact analysis of Hobbes’s political philosophy” (170), one is compelled to unfold Strauss’ assertion that “the preference for the sense of touch [...] is already implied in Hobbes’s original view of the fundamental significance of the antithesis between vanity and fear” (166). Is this preference implied in the antithesis itself? Or is it primarily implied in “Hobbes’s original view of [its] fundamental significance”? Is it implied in both, perhaps? In any case, Strauss’ claim insists that, for Hobbes, touch—especially *being touched*, being pressed or pressured—plays a truly crucial role in determining what matters most, politically.

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Vanity and the fear of violent death are the concentrated expressions of what Hobbes called “natural appetite” and “natural reason”, which he held as ““the two most certain postulates of human nature”” (8)¹³³. There is an antithesis between vanity and the fear of

¹³³ According to Strauss, “natural appetite”, for Hobbes, can be phrased as the “irrational striving after power [which] has its basis in the pleasure which man takes in the consideration of his own power, i.e. in vanity” (Strauss 1963b [1936], 11). For Hobbes, “It is not mighty power as such which is the *tertium comparationis* between Leviathan and the State, but the mighty power which subdues the proud. The State is compared to Leviathan, because it and it especially is the ‘King of all the children of pride’. Only the State is capable of keeping pride down in the long run, indeed it has no other *raison d’être* except that man’s natural appetite is pride, ambition, and vanity” (13). For its part, “natural reason” can be “reduced to the principle of self-preservation: since the preservation of life is the condition *sine qua non* for the satisfaction of any appetite, it is ‘the primary good’” (15). However, “It is striking that Hobbes prefers the negative expression ‘avoiding death’ to the positive expression ‘preserving life’. It is not difficult to discover the reason. That preservation of life is the primary good is affirmed by reason and by reason only. On the other hand, that death is the primary evil is affirmed by passion, the passion of the fear of death. And as reason itself is powerless, man would not be minded to think of the preservation of life as the primary and most urgent good, if the passion of fear of death did not compel him to do so. [...] the preservation of life is the *primary* good, an unhindered progress to ever further goals, a ‘continuall prospering’—in a word, happiness is the *greatest* good, but there is no *supreme* good, in the sense of a good in the enjoyment of which the spirit might find repose. On the other hand, death is the *primary* as well as the *greatest* and *supreme* evil. For death is not only the negation of the primary good, but is therewith the negation of all goods, including the greatest good; and at the same time, death—being the *summum malum*, while there is no *summum bonum*—is the only absolute standard by reference to which man may coherently order his life” (15-6). Put more briefly, “Hobbes prefers the negative expression ‘avoiding death’ to the positive expression ‘preserving life’: because we feel death and not life; because we fear death immediately and directly, while we desire life only because rational reflection tells us that it is the condition of our happiness; because we fear death infinitely more than we desire life” (16). What is more, “Not an agonizing death in itself, but a violent death which threatens a man at the hand of other men, is the only one which Hobbes considers worthy of mention. When he says of an agonizing death that it is the

violent death because the latter is a most humbling experience. In Hobbes' foundational story, vanity comes first and is an attribute of every human being as such. But as it escalates, the conflict—the *friction*—of vanities fosters a mutual fear of violent death. The antithetical relation of these two “passions” is held to spark the “rational” passage from the *status naturalis* to the *status civilis*. The latter is their synthesis, as it were:

The artificial State [...] arises when the two opponents are both seized with fear for their lives, overcome their vanity and shame of confessing their fear, and recognize as their real enemy not the rival, but ‘that terrible enemy of nature, death’, who, as their common enemy, forces them to mutual understanding, trust, and union, and thus procures them the possibility of completing the founding of the State for the purpose of providing safeguards for the longest possible term, against the common enemy. And while in the unforeseen life-and-death struggle, in which vanity comes to grief, the futility of vanity is shown, it is revealed in the concord of living, and of living in common, to which their pre-rational fear of death leads them, that the fear of death is appropriate to human conditions, and that it is ‘rational’. It is even shown that it is only on the basis of the fear of death that life comes to concord and that the fear of death is the only ‘postulate of natural reason’ (22).

For Strauss' Hobbes, “the knowledge of mortal danger” (26) is the only way “man [can] be radically liberated from natural vanity, from the natural absorption in the world of his imagination. If this is the case, the fear of death, the fear of violent death, is the necessary condition not only of society but also of science”. “Phantasmata of sight or hearing” constitute prejudices held onto because of vanity. “Unforeseen mortal danger” is thought to liberate the mind's hand; only then can it do science, natural or social.

greatest evil, he thinks exclusively of an agonizing death at the hand of other men. [...] Not the rational and therefore always uncertain knowledge that death is the greatest and supreme evil, but the fear of death, i.e. the emotional and inevitable, and therefore necessary and certain, aversion from death is the origin of law and the State” (17).

1.2 Polytical unguents

The fear of violent death is arguably *the* most gripping and chilling experience. In Hobbes' framework, it determines what matters politically: securing "the Sovereign State" as a "free" and "rational" order. It even seems that every "rational" person who experiences this fear—say by being mugged, by being *pushed* in some way—"as it were once more accomplish[es] in him[- or her]self the founding of the State" (25-6)¹³⁴. The "Hobbesian State" is aptly described as a regime of lubrication—it presents itself as *the* most well-oiled relational system—, and yet—or better, precisely because—it results from the institution of a supposedly most absolute point of friction in the figure of the Sovereign. The story goes that the State's legitimacy as an authoritative institution is a function of its ability to suspend and redirect, to arbitrate and defuse the innumerable irritations that apparently cannot but arise among "vain" individuals and/or groups "within" this or that territory. Its task is to "tame the furies" (Magnusson 2011, 134) that

¹³⁴ I am slightly tweaking the sense of Strauss' words. The complete sentence occurs in the course of a discussion of Hobbes' "identification of conscience with the fear of death", and reads: "In particular it makes possible the distinction between the attitude of the unjust man who obeys the laws of the State for fear of punishment, i.e. without inner conviction, and the attitude of the just man, who for fear of death, and therefore from inner conviction, as it were once more accomplishing in himself the founding of the State, obeys the laws of the State. Fear of death and fear of punishment remain as different as far-sighted consistent fear, which determines life in its depth and its entirety, is from short-sighted momentary fear which sees only the next step" (Strauss 1963b [1936], 25-6). I return to the notion of depth below.

The argument about the allegedly universal significance attributed to "fear of death" always seemed to me questionable, even convoluted, as a rather abstract, detached and pessimistic generalization—until, that is (and here, I am tempted to write: *of course...*), I myself experienced something like it, and then even felt pushed, at that moment—and rather unwillingly—, to "once more accomplish the founding of the state"... At the same time, I felt what I cannot but name the *power* of Hobbes' story—or at least, of the story of the necessity of "the State" characterized by both "the rule of law" and a "monopoly of legitimate violence". The unlimited general strike of Québécois students in 2012 fostered a number of discussions on the abusive use of force by the State, and I did feel threatened on a number of occasions, as I was surrounded by anti-riot police officers. However, the occasion of "once more accomplishing in [my]self the founding of the State" occurred when the very tense political climate brought some "green squares", some partisans of the rise in tuition fees with whom I was acquainted and who happened to have recently served in the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan, not only to express—especially on social networks—a strong desire to "go in" and replace the police, who they deemed "too gentle", but also to roam, in small groups, certain streets of Québec City at night to find and beat up some "red squares". This occurred after a monument honoring the memory of soldiers from the Royal 22nd Regiment was "vandalized" with red square stickers. I then found myself apprehensively arguing for the need to exit cycles of private vengeance and rely on public justice... This story, more than the institution of the State itself, seemed the sole way to defuse tension.

are allegedly uncontrollable without it, that is: *in this State's own staged absence in its now presupposed proper place*, in its imagined past or future failure as an efficient machinery for channeling tensions by, among other practices, the very securing of a “within” in ways that keep the Sovereign sufficiently less irritating, both for the inside and the outside, than the irritations it claims to channel and smooth—lest it becomes rogue, in the contemporary vulgate (see Derrida 2003b). Asking to replace “the State” is to call for comparable modes of lubrication. This demand subtends the question “what alternatives do you propose?” which seems to arise with every presentation of a self-described critical account of politics that insists on not “seeing [or feeling] like a state”.

In matters of frictions, it is helpful to note that “spirituous beverages” are often said to act as a social lubricant, but that it is equally well known that “having too much” risks to have the opposite effects, to increase tension—upsetting one’s insides and/or one’s relations with others (“*let’s take it outside!*”)—, and/or to make all bearings slip away. Politologically, norms, rules and laws are framed as lubricants, as unguents facilitating a decrease in the itchiness of life-in-common, of the relations between (or in) “oneself” and others, between individuals and “the State”, and/or between States and “the System of States”. In cybernetics and systems theory, norms, rules and laws reduce uncertainty with regard to plausible expectations of future behavior on the part of a given entity. But here too, “having too much” is often said to be detrimental.

The cybernetic or systems-theoretic formalism that treats all entities as bodies behaving in traceable ways can be grasped as a recent expression of far-reaching monist tropes. In *The Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, Erin Manning writes:

The state needs the body. Hence my injunction to take sovereignty seriously as well as the politics of security

sovereignty engenders. At the same time, *we would do well to follow the Spinozean route at least as far as to remember that there is no essential dichotomy between states and Nature. Bodies coexist as they correlate. State bodies are not fundamentally different from other kinds of bodies.* The difference is that the body the state historically represents, as Nietzsche points out, is a body that agrees to or is incited to be governed in particular ways. In Hobbes, the sovereign embodies an exchange between freedom and security that combines the individual and sovereign subjects (the state and the citizen) into a single figure. The Hobbesean citizen becomes the rational modern subject who is represented as anything but a sensing body in movement. There is such a stagnancy in the concept of the modern subject as to suggest that the sovereign body is a still-life in the imaginary representation of the territorial nation-state (Manning 2007, 158-9; I underline).

The caricatural aspect of this depiction of “The Hobbesean citizen” and its successor, “the rational modern subject who is represented as anything but a sensing body in movement”, stands out when it is juxtaposed to Strauss’ account of Hobbes, from which one gathers that the Englishman could precisely *not* think any “body” as a stagnant being, given his “conception of nature” and of sense as endless plays of pressures and motions. For international relations scholars who read Hobbes as the theorist of “the anarchy of the System” as a *status naturalis* where States cannot but collide like billiard balls, States are large (artificial) bodies that never truly rest. Moreover, “the System of States” is itself thought as a body that ceaselessly interacts in complex ways with both its “inside” and its “outside”, be it “the World” it never entirely covers (R. Walker 2009), or “rogue elements” that are neither simply “in” nor “out” (Heller-Roazen 2009, 18). Under the names “Subject”, “State”, and “System of States”, there thus swarm a thousand claims to sovereignty. Arguably, this should moderate claims to the effect that any one of these “levels” is “truly sovereign”, if the latter is taken to mean that it definitively settles, fixes

or controls political life. There are frictions between claims to sovereignty precisely as each “sovereign” never totally contains, subjects or subsumes its rivals.

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What moves politologists—and here, I certainly cannot exclude myself—to cut corners, to caricature, to fabricate “straw men” that are often rather thin? It appears that desire configures style. Regarding the two portrayals of Hobbes mentioned above, for instance, it seems Strauss was concerned with a patient “exact interpretation”, while Manning primarily uses Hobbes’ name as a shorthand for the prevalent, allegedly disembodied type of political thought she distrusts and that she seeks to disturb by putting forward an insistent, urgent account of “a politics of touch”¹³⁵. (This is not to say Strauss’ Hobbes is not also made of some straw!) According to Manning, enacting a politics of touch is to “resist the state”. This is important, politically, because it tackles the issue of violences:

¹³⁵ I insist on Manning’s mention of “The Hobbesian citizen” because, according to both the book’s index and my reading, it is the sole passage where Hobbes is mentioned. When one considers Strauss’ explicit claims on the crucial role of the sense of touch in Hobbes’ politology, the absence of a “serious”, “direct” engagement with Hobbes in a book titled *The Politics of Touch*, which pays a fair amount of attention to Spinoza, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Deleuze & Guattari, stands out as a notable feature. Arguably, Manning is trying to work through the “dark lineage” of that “other history of philosophy” which Deleuze, in particular, took part in tracing and popularizing. She is less concerned with “the tradition” that is as it were “traditional”, and which is itself a myth in many important ways. It seems, however, that this “privileging” of one genealogy over the other comes at the cost of a simplification, if not a trivialization of the other, “canonical” genealogy, which is itself accused of being inadequate precisely because it erases, simplifies and trivializes many of the important forces that have long been resisting “it”—if “it” is *one* in any way.

At this point, it may be useful to note that Bloom, in his eulogy for Strauss published in *Political Theory* one year after his mentor’s death, qualifies “the Hobbes book” as symptomatic of “the pre-Strausseau Strauss” (Bloom 1974, 383), precisely because it “follow[s] the canons of modern scholarship and their historical premises. These [early] books put Strauss’ own questions to the authors; he has not yet learned to see their questions as they themselves saw them. He finds these thinkers more caused by than causing their times. He applies a standard of reality to them rather than learning reality from them. He brings influences to them which they did not recognize; and he does not see radical breaks in the tradition which he later came to see because he accepts contemporary periodizations of thought. [...] In short, he does not yet know antiquity. It is no accident that the Hobbes book, the book he liked the least, remains the one most reputed and uncontroversial in the scholarly community”. Still, I believe it should also be remarked that Strauss seems to have authorized a reissue of this early, “least liked” book, in 1963, well after he “became Strauss”, as Bloom puts it. Manning’s silence on Strauss’ Hobbes is perhaps best explained by her silence on Strauss himself, who is most often seen as a conservative representative of precisely that Statist type of political philosophy which appears to legitimize the multiple violences of the State’s institutions, and which should be *silenced*.

The internal vocation of state politics is the unification of aims and the organization of these aspirations into a unique spatiotemporal whole. State politics does not happily suffer tears in its social fabric: politics must be common, and where commonality cannot be located, a line must be drawn to create a fissure between the inside and the outside, between the known and the unknown, the self and the other. This unification of forces for the “common good” condones domination in the name of a re-balancing of social relations. Each body must be put in its place. The placing of the body is necessary in order for the distribution of power to adequately inscribe the social order within its own grids of intelligibility. The body becomes intelligible insofar as it becomes common. Intelligibility as commonality is the primary political articulation within the language of the nation-state. /Yet there always escapes from the body-politic’s grids of intelligibility a disarticulated remains. These remains contest the sovereignty of the nation-state from within, even when resistance is not enacted with this purpose in mind. *A politics of touch is one of the mediums through which the body resists the state. Touch as reaching-toward foregrounds the unknowability at the heart of all bodies of knowledge, reminding us that we cannot know the body as the state claims we do, for no body is ever thoroughly articulated. Every body moves differently, in-difference to the state.* [...] When the state takes over the body, it attempts to create a bond of reciprocity that is solely hierarchical. When the body leaves the (imaginary of the) state, the body begins to create other bodies, other worlds. Violence is operational in both these instances. Yet, when the body departs from a sovereign, territorialized, bounded space to a worlding, a chronotope emerges that cannot be cleanly delineated but through which a juxtaposition and a convergence take place that multiply space-time through textual layerings, creating new bodies-in-movement. Space grows with the body and shrinks with the state (Manning 2007, 62-3; I underline).

Pondering a politics of touch, “It becomes apparent that the body never belonged to the state: the body always exceeds its containers” (64). But is it not the case that “the State” is very much aware of this, that “it” is a singular response precisely to this condition?

I believe the “textual layerings” of my own engagement with the role of touch and friction in Hobbes’ politology suggest coming to grip with the issue of what matters

politically stems less from a willful, more or less well-intended “reaching-toward” than from a *being-seized*. Again, for Strauss’ Hobbes, “Since man is by nature fast in his imaginary world, it is only by unforeseen mischance that he can attain to a knowledge of his own darkness and at the same time a modest and circumspect knowledge of the real world. That is to say: the world is originally revealed to man not by detachedly and spontaneously seeing its form, but by involuntary experience of its resistance” (Strauss 1963b [1936], 27). I cannot help but feel these lines prefigure Manning’s claim that

Our bodies are resistances—to ourselves, to each other, resistances to knowledge, to language, to sensing, as well as to ignorance, to being touched, to being meaningful, to being there. Touching, our bodies gesture toward each other and themselves, each time challenging and perhaps deforming the body-politic, questioning the boundaries of what it means to touch and be touched, to live together, to live apart, to belong, to communicate, to exclude (2007, 9).

Furthermore, as Manning writes “When the body leaves the (imaginary of the) state, the body begins to create other bodies, other worlds” (63), I feel she cannot but agree that “leaving” an imaginary cannot be described as a sovereign deed, that it should instead be phrased as an effect of many pressures and motions, if only of the insistent itch of an ineptitude in or of the imaginary to be left. Here is a tension: I presume Manning is or was shocked by how politologies deal with bodies in ways that do not account for the intricacies of the experience of touching; but I am taken aback by my inability to share this impression, now that the role of the experience of being touched for Hobbes hit me.

The neologism “polytics” may be useful to come to grip with, or at least to texture this knot that has been emerging through this first, politological fold. According to a collaborator of the online Urban Dictionary, polytics is “A word used to describe the complicated and intricate entanglements of being in polyamorous relationships. [It is]

Often associated with [the] frustrating nature of jealousy vs compersion, time management, and trying to remember the seemingly endless web of connectivity between people involved in polyamory” (Phoenix999 2011). Political and politological alliances (and betrayals) can themselves be quite protean... For his part, in the Glossary of his strange “novel” *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, Iranian artist and philosopher Reza Negarestani defines polytics as “Political gradients characterized by their multiplicative pragmatics and multifocal operational cutting edges. Polytics are pragmatic extensions of schizostrategies. Polytics is involved in operationalizing events, turning everything into strategies” (Negarestani 2008a, 242). Schizostrategies are

Strategies for being opened (by), not being open (to). When it comes to affordance, desiring the outside is a repression. However, in terms of schizostrategies, any instrument of repression encompasses a path to the outside, albeit involuntarily or indirectly. Schizostrategies always emerge out of anomalous (in the sense of the positioning and arrangement between two or multiple entities, not their conventionality) participations with the Outside.

Reworking James J. Gibson’s notion of affordance, Negarestani holds “the regulations by which an entity can maintain its dynamic position (in a whole, *i.e.* mereologic address) and survive in its enviroing horizon originate from a deeply meshed economic-based network of interactions, connections and regulative participations, all knitted on mutual affordabilities between the entity and its environment” (Negarestani 2007, 72n11). Thus

Through affordance, openness is represented as the level of *being open* (to) not *being opened* (the place of epidemic and contagion: plagues, contaminations, possession, etc.). “I am open to you.” means, I have the capacity to bear your investment or ‘I afford you’ (this is not an intentional conservative voice but what arises as the fundamental noise produced by the machinery of different levels of organization and boundary, and finally organic survival); if

you exceed this capacity I will be *cracked, lacerated and laid open* (Negarestani 2003).

Can political importance ever “operate” on the latter, the plane of “being opened (by)”?

Or is what is deemed to matter politically necessarily “affordable”, within reach?

2. Contacts, contaminations, compacts & complications: aesthetes’ ethics

A pathway to think distributions of political importance as occurring on the plane of “being opened (by)” seems traced by how, for them to become problematic or to (re)appear as a problem, something like a movement must have occurred. In effect, it seems that the question *what matters politically?* only becomes a live issue, a pressing concern or a weighty interrogation when and where some tremors manifest themselves, shaking, troubling, unsettling, disturbing, destabilizing or encroaching on the routinized, oiled-up, if not automated machinery of a given distribution of importance—when and where “the given”, precisely, vacillates, turns out to be not so given, becomes un-given, as “givenness” slips, as it were, through a crack of sorts. A banal expression of such a movement or variation lies in the call to “revise the list of priorities”, which usually means that something has changed, if only that it is now held that something *should* change. This call assumes importance can be (re)ordered, (re)organized, (re)classified, that mattering can be purposefully tweaked or acted upon. The widespread use of the phrase “agenda setting” in political sociology and in policy and activist circles signals the extent to which to act politically is grasped in terms of interventions—but “the agenda” never keeps still, it keeps being torn open. Etymologically, to intervene is to come-in-between. Interventions are often described as insertions of the proverbial grain of sand in the more or less smooth-running circulatory system of implicit and explicit claims to importance. There is an art of interventions via tactful strategies and tactics, an art of

applying pressure on the right points of articulation. Artists often claim to stage situated interventions in responsive ways—but non-human interventions also occur through art.

2.1 Affording to be touched through hands-on engagements

The various strategies and tactics that artists use—or *that use artists*; this may be the point—to make their works exist as artworks, to make their deeds matter as interventions “in-the-art-world-and-beyond” have been described as “micropolitics” (Prescott 2002, 61)¹³⁶. To get a grip on how these “molecular” processes are articulated, the contemporary sociology of art seems to recommend “empiricism”, that is working through specific sites, particular examples that may be able to make the intricacies of strategies and tactics tangible. Typologies of strategies, tactics and logistics are in principle abstracted from such series of “concrete sites”, although previously abstracted “repertoires of action” (Tilly 2008) seem to participate in framing conceivable avenues.

¹³⁶ I surround this term with scare quotes because this use of the concept of micropolitics differs from the ways in which its creators, Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, used it. It is, however, typical of a certain reception of the concept as problematizing “small” politics, in contradistinction to “macropolitics”, which is held as problematizing “big” politics. This use is prevalent in the milieu of performance art (on this issue, I take the liberty of referring to my MA thesis, which researched the uses of the concepts of micropolitics and performativity in the art milieu of Québec City; see Labrecque 2009). According to this use, the “postmodern condition” would be marked by a passage *from* macropolitics *to* micropolitics, which parallels an asserted passage from totalizing, universalizing “metanarratives” to particularizing, singularizing “small narratives”, from *grands récits* to a multiplicity of *petits récits* (e.g. Ardenne & Martel 2006). The difference between micropolitics and macropolitics is thereby framed as a difference of scale between practices situated on the same continuum. What is more, it is asserted that political practices can *move* from one end of the scale to the other, and that there can be more or less micropolitics. This scalar (and temporally linear) model differs from the “planar” model that Deleuze & Guattari associate with the entwined concepts of micropolitics and macropolitics. In *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze & Guattari write: “In brief, everything is political, but every politics is at the same time *micropolitical* and *macropolitical* (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 260; I translate). These two concepts are tied to the notions of molecular and molar functions, which are expressly said to *not* be (or not *only*) distinguished in terms of “small” and “big”: “the molar and the molecular are not only distinguished by the size, the scale or the dimension, but by the nature of the system of reference that is envisaged” (264). The system of reference of macropolitics or of the molar plane is that of watertight boundaries and of an “either/or” mode of thought, while the system of reference of micropolitics or of the molecular plane is that of lines of flight, deterritorializations, porous borders and of a “both/and” mode of thought. For Deleuze & Guattari, however, deterritorializations are always interwoven with territorializations and reterritorializations; micropolitics are always entangled with macropolitics, as modes of subjectivations are always tied to modes of subjections, whether what is at stake is a nation-state’s “grand” economic policy or the “minute” interrelations woven through the activities of a handful of people gathering as a radical queer collective.

In recent years, I have often pondered the implications of the artworks of a collective named Tissue Culture & Art Project (TC&A). It was initiated in Perth, Australia, by Finnish visual artist and designer Oron Catts and by British art historian and media artist Ionat Zurr, in 1996. Its institutional “home” is the School of Anatomy and Human Biology at the University of Western Australia, where TC&A took part in creating the “artistic laboratory” SymbioticA. This institutional tie is due to the fact that TC&A’s art consists of performative installations that center around what the collective calls “semi-livings”, such as tissue cultures. “Semi-livings” are “living cells and tissues, which are disassociated from the original bodies which once hosted them” (Catts & Zurr 2006, 1). Their current biomass is said to be “in the millions of tons”. These entities are *semi*-living since they are not autonomous: they must be fed and kept in a controlled environment lest they die. TC&A typically stages feeding and killing “rituals”.

TC&A claims it made “three major decisions in regard to its work; the first was not to kill animals or inflict suffering in order to obtain the cells and tissues, the second was not to directly refer to the human body or its parts, and the third was to always construct a fully functioning tissue culture laboratory when [it] present[s its] semi-living creations” (Catts & Zurr 2003, 3). The collective uses biopolymers over which it makes cells grow—say, in the form of an ear, in its project with Stelarc. The results are “sculptures” of various shapes. Feeding these “sculptures” requires introducing nutrients, usually droplets of serum, in (or over) the cultures. TC&A insists to make this “feeding ritual” public as it seeks to facilitate “hands-on engagement” on the part of the audience.

Tissue cultures, like many biological materials, are generally not allowed to cross state borders—or not easily in a legal fashion. When the collective’s shows come to an

end, the cultures must therefore be destroyed, disposed of. TC&A also insists on making this event public, framing it as a constitutive part of its art. It holds that this event is the “most pronounced act of violence” that it enacts (5). Touch is crucial, here, because

The killing is done by taking the semi-living sculptures out of their containment and letting the audience touch (and be touched by) the sculptures. The fungi and bacteria which exist in the air and on our hands are much more potent than the cells. As a result, the cells get contaminated and die (some instantly, some over time). The Killing Ritual also enhances the idea of the temporality of living art and the responsibility which lies on us (humans as creators) to decide upon their fate (Catts & Zurr 2007, 239).

The 2003 *Disembodied Cuisine* project ended in a “feast” (242) during which a cultured “steak” grown from a frog’s skeletal muscle was consumed in the presence of the still-living amphibian. If only for this reason, TC&A plays with the *DO NOT TOUCH!* injunction that has become a key norm of how art is to be encountered in “art spaces”.

TC&A’s *mises en scène* are attempts at modulating what is held to import in the face of new, emerging biotechnologies. The “promissory rhetoric of biotechnology in the public sphere” (Critical Art Ensemble 2002) is illustrated, for instance, by the repeated announcement of a soon-to-come “victimless meat”. This promise increases the acceptance of biotechnologies by environmentalist and animal-protection groups, as shown by the enthusiastic reactions to the first full “lab-grown beefburger” tasted publicly in London in August 2013 (Jha 2013), which bioethician Peter Singer called “the world’s first cruelty-free hamburger” (Singer 2013), and which the president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) called “a dream becoming reality” (in Elliot 2013). Interestingly, some enthusiastic PETA members already contacted TC&A to discuss *Disembodied Cuisine* and the advent of “victimless meat” (Catts & Zurr 2008,

131). The artists claim they had to reply that TC&A's use of the phrase "victimless meat" was an instance of "irony as an artistic and philosophical response to technological determinism". In effect, "Current methods of tissue culture require the use of animal-derived products as a substantial part of the nutrients provided to the cells, as well as an essential part of various tissue culture procedures" (132). More precisely, cells are fed fetal calf serum (FCS), which is made from cells that are extracted from the heart of a calf fetus after the slaughter and bleeding of a pregnant cow. TC&A considers that

This point about tissue culture seemed (until recently) to go unnoticed by the advocates of its use as a replacement for animal experimentation. The abstraction of these animal products in the technology associated with tissue culture served to obscure the very real victims from the eyes of organizations such as PETA and the European Coalition to End Animal Experimentation. For example, a rough estimate (based on [TC&A's] experience with growing in vitro meat), growing around 10 grams of tissue will require serum from a whole calf (500ml.), which is killed solely for the purpose of producing the serum (132-3).

According to the collective, more than half a million liters of FCS are produced worldwide on a yearly basis (141n19). This means that more than one million calf fetuses are "required" annually—and the demand seems bound to increase¹³⁷.

In the perspective of utilitarian, pragmatic bioethics, what imports is the *quantity* of suffering that exists in the world. The minimization of the sum total of pain produced in inter-species relationships is heralded as a crucial ethico-political project. If one considers that suffering is necessarily a temporal experience, and that there exists a maximum "amount" of pain possible at any given moment for any sentient being—

¹³⁷ Assuming that "one day", "sooner or later", the nutrients required for tissue culture and other biotechnological practices will "of course" be produced in a way that does not require animals to be killed for this purpose is to reiterate the powerful "promissory rhetoric of biotechnology", the story of biotechnological research and development as the story of inevitable scientific progress. This is not to say it will not happen; it is to say that the acceptance of novel biotechnologies is "fed", as it were, by this type of confidence.

although pain reputedly slows time down—, it would seem a calf fetus rendered into serum can “objectively” suffer less than a calf rendered as veal, which can suffer less than a cow rendered as beef, given their respective lifespan. Following this logic, however, one must also consider the actual conditions of the life and death of cows “dedicated” to bearing calves for producing FCS to determine if “lab-grown meat” is more or less cruel. Can cells also “suffer”? These considerations weave *an economy of violence*, a system where instances of pain and suffering are framed as commensurable, and as more or less affordable. PETA and TC&A claim to reveal “hidden” instances of suffering. Different scenes of non-human pain presumably touched each collective; some touching scenes seem to inform what matters for them, because they re-present non-humans “being opened (by)” —quite literally “*cracked, lacerated, and laid open*”—, to “raise awareness”. What makes it so that some humans seem to be unable to afford to live in just the same way after having been touched by such scenes while others seem unmarked? How is it that what is most taking for some keeps failing to reach others?

2.2 “The problem inherent in the surface of things is the heart of things”

According to TC&A, its works open—or at least, seek to open—avenues to “get closer” to the “hidden victims” of tissue culture and other biotechnological practices. This process of *hiding* is thought to occur through practices of “abstraction” that weave compact enfoldments. As one encounters a Petri dish, for instance, most of what makes its existence possible is veiled. Some unfolding or unpacking seems necessary to become aware of how the glass or plastic that makes up this or that Petri dish has been made possible—to say nothing of what eventually lives and dies in this receptacle. Among other occurrences, one may thereby encounter petropolitics, which Negarestani defines as

“The cartography of oil as an omnipresent entity narrating the dynamics of Earth[,] the undercurrent of all narrations” (Negarestani 2008a, 242), for oil acts as the “Tellurian Lube” (26). One may further unearth a seemingly infinite series of questions on how oil and silica are made possible, how life on this planet endures, how the Earth spins, how the Sun shines, etc. It seems that, by and through such questions, a descent is enacted, a going-deeper, but also a going-higher as the deepest and the highest become blurrily entangled—*because life only happens on the surface of a sphere, perhaps?* TC&A claims that it can provoke the emergence of a self-questioning of the questioner(s), and even of the system of coordinates and categories enabling a confident differentiation of depth and height. The question “what is ‘surface’ and what is ‘depth’? Are we not to think these descriptive categories as intrinsically reversible?” (Balibar 1988, 202) is made non-trivial by an aesthetic mode of thought that posits that an identity of opposites can be a valid (and even comforting) assumption¹³⁸.

¹³⁸ I borrow the suggestion that the identity of opposites can be comforting to Arthur Kroker’s “Parsons’ Foucault”, where one reads: “Foucault is entangled with the Parsonian discourse. For between Parsons and Foucault, there is not the emptiness of non-identity, but, it might be said, the comforting similitude of the identity of opposites” (in Kroker & Cook 1991, 218). Parsons and Foucault are, as it were, two sides of the same *Kantian* coin. As for Balibar’s question, it comes near the end of “The Vacillation of Ideology”, his contribution to *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Thinking through the interplay of depths and surfaces has been a concern for many Marxists, not least since the relation of “base” and “superstructure” became a central *problématique*. The paragraph from which I extract Balibar’s question offers a point of entry into this issue. Discussing the positivist metaphysics at the heart of Marxism in relation to the notions of “Truth” and “History”, he writes: “What makes a break in knowledge (or some of its conditions) irrupt is the novelty of the conjunction of mass movements and class struggle, the days Lenin spoke of, following Marx, ‘during which the masses learn more than they would in years’ (Days, however, can themselves be years if the problem is not chronological but structural. This would involve questioning the metaphor of a ‘crisis’ subtending this formulation): whether, as Marx brilliantly analyzes for the nineteenth-century revolutions, the structure of class antagonism ends up by polarizing, displacing, and radicalizing the mass movements; or whether, above all, as Lenin, Gramsci, and Mao had a better opportunity to see, the mass movements (religious, nationalistic, ‘cultural’ as in May 1968, or, tomorrow, perhaps pacifistic), constituted on the ‘surface’ of the social formation (But what is ‘surface’ and what is ‘depth’? Are we not to think these descriptive categories as intrinsically reversible?), determine a class struggle that remains hypothetical and provide it with its concrete content. I say ‘above all’ because Marx and Engels probably did not envisage this reciprocity, in spite of their dialectic, and generally applied a reductionist conception to the class struggle, preventing them in the same movement from concretely developing the critical idea of a historical process (*procès*) whose causality would not express the destiny of a predestined subject (proletariat or other) but rather the contradictory articulation of the masses and the classes, never quite the same even ‘in the last instance.’ To parody Kant, it could be said that without the mass movements the class struggle is empty (which is to say, it

These topological considerations on the dimensions of experiences, and especially on the experience of questioning, touch upon distributions of political importance as TC&A claims that what it calls “hands-on” or “wet” engagement with semi-living entities

involving some degree of life manipulation can be seen not only as an ethical conduct but also as a political act. A political act that goes beyond the democratization of the technology, to the act of breaking down dominant discourses, dogmas, and metaphors to reveal new understandings of life and the power structures it operates within. This experiential engagement can sometimes reveal that critique leveled against some biological art is embedded within the dominant dogma (Catts & Zurr 2008, 140).

Underneath, as it were, or behind this problematization of its interventions in terms of logomachies-in-deeds, of a tweaking of rival “discourses, dogmas, and metaphors”—which arguably requires aesthetics of prevalence to *see* some as “dominant”, and aesthetics of emancipation to *phrase* “the act of breaking down” as a transformative deed elevating above the mêlée of sloganeering groupings, which are *heard* as different in

remains full of dominant ideology). However, without the class struggle, the mass movements are blind (which is to say, they give rise to counter-revolution, even fascism, as much as revolution.) But there is no a priori correspondence between these two forms” (Balibar 1988, 201-2). Is it not Kant’s “deepest” teaching that only surfaces are accessible?

That surface and depth are possibly reversible categories is not only a proposition borne by “French postmodern” or leftist scholars. As suggested in the previous section, what I describe as the “Nietzschean” praise of surfaces is quite influential, and it can be said to inform the works of “conservative” exegetes just as well as that of “progressive” creators. In this respect, consider Strauss’ remarks in the Introduction to his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, as he argues for his commitment to begin with an attentive reiteration of “the common view” of Machiavelli as “a teacher of evil”. Strauss writes that “We are in sympathy with the simple opinion about Machiavelli, not only because it is wholesome, but above all because a failure to take that opinion seriously prevents one from doing justice to what is truly admirable in Machiavelli: the intrepidity of his thought, the grandeur of his vision, and the graceful subtlety of his speech. Not the contempt for the simple opinion, nor the disregard of it, but the considerate ascent from it leads to the core of Machiavelli’s thought. There is no surer protection against the understanding of anything than taking for granted or otherwise despising the obvious and the surface. The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things” (Strauss 1969 [1958], 13; for Strauss’ take on Machiavelli’s own concern with how “generally held opinions appear to be a surface phenomenon”, and “how one can proceed in an orderly and convincing manner from the primarily given, from what can be known by everybody in broad daylight, to the hidden center”, see 236-8). In his eulogy for Strauss, Bloom reiterates this teaching, as he ponders the “third” and last “phase” of Strauss’ trajectory, which is precisely initiated by the book on Machiavelli: “Strauss rather enjoyed the reputation for innocence, for it meant that he had in some measure succeeded in recovering the surface of things. He knew that innocence once lost is almost impossible to recover” (Bloom 1974, 385). This last remark evokes the end of Nietzsche’s Preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*.

virtue of their discordant temperaments—, TC&A presents itself as causing irritations in, on and of the allegedly smooth terrain of technophilia without falling into the turbid pond of technophobia. This stance, I contend, requires aesthetics of friction.

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TC&A's explicit hold on its own works—what it claims, in its texts, to be doing in its installations, and perhaps also in its texts—posits that they stage politically significant occasions that work through what I would call a “contagion”-based model of how sense occurs. This “model” assumes the sense(s) made through touching—say, an increased “ethical awareness” of the “experience” of the entities being touched—can be propagated almost like a virus. TC&A's framing of the significance of a seemingly “small” occasion, like an encounter with semi-livings in an art gallery, thus mobilizes a characteristic aspect of the sense of touch, namely that to touch is also to be touched. While psychologists have tried to distinguish an “active” from a “passive touch” (e.g. Gibson 1962), their intertwinement is made tangible by how some manipulations require a protection, a non-porous layer between “surfaces”. Perhaps more so than any other sense of the age-old fivefold, touch involves reciprocity: “I can imagine seeing and remaining invisible, but I cannot imagine touching and remaining intangible. Sight and touch do not have the same properties; they do not have the same ‘reflexivity’ [...]. Touch requires that the touching subject can itself be touched, while sight remains possible when the seeing subject is invisible—admittedly not out of the visible but at least transparent, like glass” (Cassou-Noguès 2010; I translate)¹³⁹. For TC&A, this “reflexivity” of touch is expressed in “the

¹³⁹ Cassou-Noguès uses the contrast between the imaginable character of “the invisible man” (less the version of Plato's Glaucon with the Gyrges ring in *The Republic* than H. G. Well's version) and the unimaginable character of “the intangible man” to argue that “fiction is the mode of donation of the possible”. The impossibility of the latter is said to tell us *all* something about the limits of our own *human* imagination, of

killing [which] is done by taking the semi-living sculptures out of their containment and *letting the audience touch (and be touched by) the sculptures*” (Catts & Zurr 2007, 239; I underline). PETA’s enthusiastic reaction to the notion of “victimless meat”, however, signals there are multiple ways to touch and be touched by the same or by similar entities. It seems undeniable that there is no guarantee that both you and I will touch and be touched in the same way when encountering this or that entity—nor that *it* will touch and be touched in the same way. The conditions for your or my being-touched to be contagious are uncertain, if only because every *point* of contact is, as such, unique—at least according to what Whitehead, in *Science and the Modern World* (1997 [1925], 49-52), called “the fallacy of simple location”.

Perhaps the “misguided” response of PETA members to the artistico-philosophical irony of TC&A’s “victimless meat” stems from the fact that they “merely” *read* about *Disembodied Cuisine*—as I did—, without “participating”? I do not know if this is so, but in the logic of facilitating “hands-on, wet engagements” in order to raise awareness, TC&A would probably suggest it is crucial to take this aspect into account.

The collective also participates in facilitating more extensive encounters with a variety of semi-livings and other beings, like plants and worms, in SymbioticA workshops. Arguably, spending a few minutes or a few hours in an art show is quite

what we can possibly envisage and grasp. If we cannot imagine a story featuring a literally “intangible man”, it is because of the conditions and characteristics of touch as a human sense. Arguably, one of the only ways for a becoming-intangible to be imaginable lies in the neighborhood of H. P. Lovecraft’s strange, unspeakable worlds that posit ungraspable dimensions. This is at least the pathway suggested by the work of scholars like Eugene Thacker or Negarestani, who make an abundant use of Lovecraftian tropes and moods. However, Lovecraft’s unimaginable beings or occurrences are, precisely, only conceivable *as* eerie impossibilities. The idea of “the Hand of God” as being able to touch, as it bestows Grace, while God as such remains untouchable and ungraspable in its totality or infinity, is another (but arguably related) avenue for thinking a touching that does not involve a simultaneous being touched—but precisely, God is *not* human, and this ability to touch without being touchable marks one of the limits, one of the aspects in which the beings created by God in the image of God are not identical with that being or Being of which they are an image.

different than spending a whole week in a “biological art” workshop in Western Australia. Aimed at non-scientists, SymbioticA workshops seek to foster a number of processes, such as: (i) a familiarization with health and safety protocols in a laboratory environment; (ii) a familiarization with microscopes and microorganisms; (iii) learning how to isolate DNA and genetically engineer bacteria with a green fluorescent protein; (iv) engineering animal cell cultures from meat purchased by the participants; (v) cloning plants through tissue cultures; (vi) visiting a life-science research laboratory and discussing with professional scientists; (vii) participating in daily theoretical presentations on biotechnological practices and issues, and to group discussions on the workshop experience itself; and (viii) developing a “hobbyist” or “amateur biologist tool kit” with inexpensive and readily available materials for people’s practices “at home”, after the workshop (Catts & Cass 2008). The goal of these events seems to be to foster the emergence of a shared horizon of concerns and commitments among the handful of participants. In that sense, TC&A and SymbioticA can be said to seek to contaminate¹⁴⁰.

¹⁴⁰ I believe it would be interesting to explore the following interpretive pathway, for which the space is lacking here: what if TC&A’s “contagion”-based model of the possible effects of its practices was less a “viral” model, as it would commonly be suggested, than a “bacterial” one, if one considers recent research on what has been called “quorum sensing” in bacteria? “Quorum sensing is the regulation of gene expression in response to fluctuations in cell-population density. Quorum sensing bacteria produce and release chemical signal molecules called autoinducers that increase in concentration as a function of cell density. The detection of a minimal threshold stimulatory concentration of an autoinducer leads to an alteration in gene expression. [...] Recent advances in the field indicate that cell-cell communication via autoinducers occurs both within and between bacterial species. Furthermore, there is mounting data suggesting that bacterial autoinducers elicit specific responses from host organisms. [In] every case the ability to communicate with one another allows bacteria to coordinate the gene expression, and therefore the behavior, of the entire community” (Miller & Bassler 2001, 165). In other words, before “charging”, as it were, a bacterial population will have reached a certain number. The members of the population can “communicate” and detect whether this number has been reached or not. Whether this “threshold” number has been reached will modulate the behavior of the members of the population, and of the population as a whole.

Arguably, in the discourses of interventionist artists and in those of multiple other political practitioners, it is presupposed that a certain “critical mass” should be sought so that the interventions at stake can have a considerable, even measurable effect. This would appear to be a “bacterial” (rather than a “viral”) model of political apprehension. I believe this is a relevant pathway to explore in relation to TC&A’s work in particular because the collective has sought for a number of years to draw attention to loose uses of biological metaphors in cultural, social, and political thought, and to encourage a more adequate use. To what it calls “the metaphor of the code”, for instance, which posits that life = DNA = information = life, TC&A opposes

3. Digging, leveling, erasing or slicing through the f(r)ogs of war(mth)

If the conception of truth as unveiling, unconcealing or disclosure—as *aletheia*, if you will (see Heidegger 1977)—is to be held onto, it appears that any unveiling is also a re-veiling, a re-concealing or re-closure. This assumption raises the question of what is re-veiled through the “revealing” that TC&A, for instance, asserts to enact through its interventions. I hold that a key yet under-thematized dimension of TC&A’s practice concerns the violences involved in the pedagogical logic of “irony”. In Chapter 2, above, my discussion of Rancière’s ventriloquism of Jacotot’s critique of “the stultifying logic of pedagogy” has tried to refold how framing pedagogical relations as a hierarchical rapport between a knower and an ignoramus positions both on a single plane where the former seeks to pull the latter closer to his or her “spot” while thereby repeatedly reinstating the difference between them as a gap to be bridged. In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2008), Rancière argues that this logic of the pedagogical relation is omnipresent in artistic, philosophical and political circles that assert the “critical” character of their activities, and the “alienated” status of “the masses”. Intently using irony to make a point opens a similar space—or rather, it spaces in similar ways. It can indeed be quite humiliating to learn after the fact that an intended irony was being lost on oneself, that one was misled, or at least mistaken on “what was truly going on”, which is another way to say: what mattered all along for those “in the know”. However, as politics is apprehended as a field

the multiplicity of “levels of engagement with life, such as the cellular, the tissue, or the organ level” (Catts & Zurr 2008, 126). Not all biology has to do with DNA in a significant way. The collective considers that the prevalence of “DNA” or “code” as a level of engagement signals that much “critical” works “are based on what can only be described as sloppy research and misunderstanding of basic biological concepts, such as the difference between genetic engineering and tissue engineering (molecular manipulation and its effects versus cellular intervention). There is need for correct terminology rather than careless use of generic terms in order for a meaningful dialogue to occur” (127). I briefly come back to bacteria in the second subsection of the third fold of this chapter, and in Chapter V, below, on aesthetics of endurance and the politics of smell.

of frictions, as a practice traversed, lacerated with conflicts, struggles, fights and combats, with attempts to force, convert or turn the tide, such humiliations tend to be legitimized by the slogan “the end sanctifies the means”.

3.1 Politics as the continuation of war

In contemporary conjunctures, one of the most circulated foldings of politics as a matter of conflicts, struggles, fights, combats and, ultimately, of politics as *war*, appears to be (at least in “theory” circles) Foucault’s discussion of the inversion of Clausewitz’s claim that “war is the mere continuation of policy [or politics] by other means” (Clausewitz 1918 [1832], 23) into “politics is the continuation of war by other means”. This discussion took place in the winter of 1976, throughout Foucault’s lectures at the Collège de France posthumously published as “*Il faut défendre la société*” (Foucault 1997), and “*Society Must Be Defended*” (Foucault 2003)¹⁴¹. Foucault’s specific argument on Clausewitz’s sentence is that it is in fact this sentence which is the inversion, that the claim “politics is the continuation of war” came first (48). It is arguably this very precedence that made it possible for the Prussian’s sentence to seem strikingly sharp.

Foucault argues that grasping politics as war “implies three things. First, that power relations, as they function in a society like ours, are essentially anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given historical moment that can be historically specified” (15). Second, “Inverting [Clausewitz’s] proposition

¹⁴¹ The scare quotes around the title indicate Foucault is echoing an anonymous order-word. A literal translation of the order-word “*il faut défendre la société*” would be “we must defend society”. “*Il faut*” has connotations of an imperative “gathering-forth” that is best expressed by the English “we must”, although the latter would translate back into French as “*nous devons*”. “Society must be defended”, for its part, would translate back as “*La société doit être défendue*”. This formulation begs the question of just who is to do the defending, while I hold that Foucault’s French title readily implies that it is *we* who must do so. Indeed, his argument centers on the constitution of this “we” as “our nation”, “our race”, or “our class”.

also means [that] within this ‘civil peace’, these political struggles, these clashes over or with power, these modifications of relations of force—the shifting of balance, the reversals—in a political system, all these things must be interpreted as a continuation of war” (16). Third, it implies that “The final decision can come only from war, or in other words a trial by strength in which weapons are the final judges”. What matters politically is held to be determined as such by a burrowed, subterranean war.

In his lectures, Foucault insists on naming this “prior” view “political historicism” (111), not least because it relies on strategically putting forward the wars of the past as what subtend the politics of the present, as what rage beneath the “pacified” political surface. One of the genealogical tasks that Foucault sets himself is “ruling out” what he calls the “false paternities” (270) of this view according to which “war is the motor behind institutions and order” (50). Given how, safe from Clausewitz, Machiavelli and “especially Hobbes” are the names that readily “spring to mind” when a fundamental relationship between politics and war is asserted, Foucault dedicates his fifth lecture to a rereading of Hobbes. By arguing that “a nonwar”—the *fear* of war—is the true basis of Hobbes’ account, he claims that “political historicism” is not at all Hobbes’ progeny, but rather that very “strategy” which Hobbes sought “to eliminate and render impossible” (98) through his interventions¹⁴². This perspective, “falsely” attributed to Hobbes and turned inside out by Clausewitz’s famous sentence, appears to have been

¹⁴² According to Foucault, Hobbes is held as the “father” of the notion that there exists a “permanent warfare” (Foucault 2003, 90) not only “before” the State, in the *status naturalis* described as a state of war of all against all, but “even when the State has been constituted”, *underneath* and *through* it, not least because of three “examples” in *Leviathan*: the claim that people “lock their doors” because “thieves are permanently at war with those they rob”; the claim that “savage people” in the Americas live in a condition of war since they have no State; and the claim that “relations between States” in Europe are strongly characterized by war for there are competing Sovereigns. As this “permanent warfare” is said to be the continuation of the war of all against all, Foucault then examines Hobbes’ account of this “primitive war” (92). He contests Hobbes’ “paternity” of the view that politics is the continuation of war by other means because “the state Hobbes is describing is not

already, if not constituted, at least clearly formulated at the beginning of the great political struggles of seventeenth-century England, at the time of the English bourgeois revolution. We then see it reappear in France at the end of the seventeenth century, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, and in other political struggles—let us say, the rearguard struggle waged by the French aristocracy against the establishment of the great absolute-administrative monarchy. So you see, the discourse was immediately ambiguous. In England it was one of the instruments used in bourgeois, petit bourgeois—and sometimes popular—struggles and polemics against the absolute monarchy, and it was a tool for political organization. It was also an aristocratic discourse directed against that same monarchy. [...] And, finally, you will find it in the racist biologists and eugenicists of the late nineteenth century (49-50).

This view strategically puts forth “a certain historical knowledge pertaining to wars, invasions, pillage, dispossessions, confiscations, robbery, exaction, and the effects of all that, the effects of all these acts of war, all those feats of battle, and the real struggles that go on in the laws and institutions that apparently regulate power” (98), as a way of disclosing the silenced “fact” that “pacified” political life remains, *in truth*, a “permanent warfare”¹⁴³. Foucault holds this “discourse” is *Leviathan's* “strategic opposite number”:

at all a brutish state of nature in which forces clash directly with one another. In Hobbes's state of primitive war, the encounter, the confrontation, the clash, is not one between weapons or fists, or between savage forces that have been unleashed. There are no battles in Hobbes's primitive war, there is no blood and there are no corpses. There are presentations, manifestations, signs, emphatic expressions, wiles, and deceitful expressions; there are traps, intentions disguised as their opposite, and worries disguised as certainties. We are in a theater where presentations are exchanged, in a relationship of fear in which there are no time limits; we are not really involved in a war. Which means, ultimately, that the state of bestial savagery in which living individuals devour one another can in no way be the primary characteristic of Hobbes's state of war. What does characterize the state of war is a sort of unending diplomacy between rivals who are naturally equal. We are not at war; we are in what Hobbes specifically calls a state of war”. It is precisely because “it is not a battle or a direct clash of forces, but a certain state of the interplay of representations” (93) that this state of war “is not a stage that man will abandon forever once the State is born”. This also means, however, that “It is not really war that gives birth to States, and it is not really war that is transcribed in relations of sovereignty or that reproduces within the civil power—and its inequalities—the earlier dissymetries in the relationship of force that were revealed by the very fact of the battle itself” (97).

¹⁴³ Political historicism—or the claim that politics is the continuation of war by other means—is said to be *important* precisely because it implies a new conception of truth: “In a discourse such as this, being on one side and not the other means that you are in a better position to speak the truth. It is the fact of being on one side—the decentered position—that makes it possible to interpret the truth, to denounce the illusions and errors that are being used—by your adversaries—to make you believe we are living in a world in which order

The enemy—or rather the enemy discourse Hobbes is addressing—is the discourse that could be heard in the civil struggles that were tearing the State apart in England at this time. It was a discourse that spoke with two voices. One was saying: “We are the conquerors and you are the vanquished. We may well be foreigners, but you are servants.” To which the other voice replied: “We may well have been conquered, but we will not remain conquered. This is our land, and you will leave it.” It is the discourse of struggle and permanent civil war that Hobbes wards off by making all wars and conquests depend upon a contract, and by thus rescuing the theory of the State. And that is of course why the philosophy of right subsequently rewarded Hobbes with the senatorial title of “the father of political philosophy.” When the State capitol was in danger, a goose woke up the sleeping philosophers. It was Hobbes (99).

Hobbes was saying—or honking—that “war or no war, defeat or no defeat, Conquest or covenant, it all comes down to one thing: ‘It’s what you wanted, it is you, the subjects, who constituted the sovereignty that represents you’” (98). This claim, this *artifice* is often rejected—and it is, as it were, preemptively undermined—by political historicism as engaging in a violent erasure, in a covering-up of the concrete conditions of life-in-common: innumerable violent deaths. Hobbes’ unguent is itself a source of frictions¹⁴⁴.

and peace have been restored. ‘The more I decenter myself, the better I can see the truth; the more I accentuate the relationship of force, and the harder I fight, the more effectively I can deploy the truth ahead of me and use it to fight, survive, and win.’ And conversely, if the relationship of forces sets truth free, the truth in its turn will come into play—and will, ultimately, be sought—only insofar as it can indeed become a weapon within the relationship of force. Either the truth makes you stronger, or the truth shifts the balance, accentuates the dissymmetries, and finally gives the victory to one side rather than the other. Truth is an additional force, and it can be deployed only on the basis of a relationship of force. The fact that the truth is essentially part of a relationship of force, of dissymmetry, decentering, combat, and war, is inscribed in this type of discourse. Ever since Greek philosophy, philosophico-juridical discourse has always worked with the assumption of a pacified universality, but it is now being seriously called into question or, quite simply, cynically ignored” (Foucault 2003, 53). This transformation of “the subject” who speaks the truth from a “peaceful”, “universalist” subject to a subject who “is fighting a war” is the first reason why this discourse is “important”. The second, for Foucault, is that it implies a reversal of assumptions about the intelligibility of history: what is now at stake is an explanation “from below”, which also means an explanation by what is most “obscure” and “irrational”. The third reason for this discourse’s importance is that it is “completely” situated within history—it is one of the first “strictly” historical discourses.

¹⁴⁴ In this passage, Foucault reiterates what appears to be a common interpretation of Hobbes as being most concerned with how to prevent, or even to render impossible, religious civil war, which is interwoven in polemical discourses with the politicized memory of the Norman invasion or Conquest. It is interesting to ponder the strategies at work in Hobbes’ own discourse. For one, it has been argued that Hobbes was not only

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Clausewitz's account of war is not made irrelevant by the inversion of his claim that war is the continuation of politics by other means. For one, an aesthetic mode of thought invites to ponder the possible identity of these opposites. Moreover, if politics is the continuation of war, it becomes all the more important to unfold how war functions. This may be why "Foucauldian" accounts of politics as strategies and tactics resonate with concerns for friction, which is a crucial dimension of war according to Clausewitz.

In effect, beside Chapter I of Book I, in which one finds the claim that war is the continuation of politics, Chapter VII of Book I, "On friction in war", is probably the most famous section of the unfinished treatise *On War*. Clausewitz writes:

Friction is the only conception which in a general way corresponds to that which distinguishes real War from War on paper. The military machine, the Army and all belonging to it, is in fact simple, and appears on this account easy to manage. But let us reflect that no part of it is in one piece, that it is composed entirely of individuals, each of which keeps up its own friction in all directions. Theoretically all sounds very well: the commander of a battalion is responsible for the execution of the order given; and as the battalion by its discipline is glued together into one piece, and the chief must be a man of acknowledged zeal, the beam turns on an iron pin with little friction. But it is not so in reality, and all that is exaggerated and false in such a conception manifests itself at once in War. The battalion always remains composed of a number of men, of whom, if chance so wills, *the most insignificant* is able to

given the title of "father of political philosophy" from his successors, but that he claimed it for himself. This is, for instance, what Strauss writes in *Natural Right and History*: "Thomas Hobbes regarded himself as the founder of political philosophy or political science. He knew, of course, that the great honor which he claimed for himself was awarded, by almost universal consent, to Socrates. Nor was he allowed to forget the notorious fact that the tradition which Socrates had originated was still powerful in his own age. But he was certain that traditional political philosophy 'was rather a dream than science'" (Strauss 1965 [1953], 166). Arguably, Hobbes' "new science" of politics presented itself as neutral. To spontaneously dismiss this claim to neutrality, and *all* claims to neutrality as deceptive is to adopt, if unknowingly, that perspective which Foucault calls political historicism, for it holds that neutrality is in truth impossible. If "permanent warfare" is what truly goes on, claiming to not take side is a way to take a side—and most probably, the side of those who are (momentarily) stronger.

occasion delay and even irregularity. The danger which War brings with it, the bodily exertions which it requires, augment this evil so much that they may be regarded as the greatest causes of it. /This enormous friction, which is not concentrated, as in mechanics, at a few points, is therefore everywhere brought into contact with chance, and thus incidents take place upon which it was impossible to calculate, their chief origin being chance (Clausewitz 1918 [1832], 78-9; I underline).

Friction, in that sense, is closely entangled with the famous “fogs of war”—or more literally, the “clouds of uncertainty”—theorized by Clausewitz. The first paragraph of Chapter VIII, “Concluding remarks on Book I”, reiterates the centrality of friction and hints at a “solution”—a lubricant—, while implying that friction never fully disappears:

Those things which as elements meet together in the atmosphere of War and make it a resistant medium for every activity we have designated under the terms danger, bodily effort (exertion), information, and friction [in chapters IV-VII]. In their impeding effects they may therefore be comprehended again in the collective notion of a general friction. Now is there, then, no kind of oil which is capable of diminishing this friction? Only one, and that one is not always available at the will of the Commander or his Army. It is the habituation of an Army to War (81).

Gaining experience is key to an efficient practice of war—or politics—, but above all, Clausewitz insists that contingent resistance is an ineradicable dimension of action.

Clausewitz’s insistence on contingency has been read as prefiguring what has come to be called the non-linearity of war, its inherent complexity tending toward chaos (Beyerchen 1992/93). There is no doubt that warfare, in its technical means and even in its ends (Schmitt 2011; Gros 2006), has changed in important ways since the Napoleonic Wars, since the era of “the Nation in arms” and the grand campaigns on foot across Europe. Some argue that this makes Clausewitz irrelevant, that reading him today is not only impertinent but also dangerously delusional (Melton 2009). But if *On War*, or Sun

Tzu's *Art of War* or Machiavelli's *Prince* and *Discourses* keep being picked up, opened, read, and written about, it is seemingly because there is a vivid assumption that, beside or underneath the dated "particulars" linked to the situated character of these accounts, something like "universals" of polemology are enfolded or hinted at in these texts. This assumption may be groundless, but still, it is widely held that *principles* of polemical activity can be grasped by cautiously bringing old texts to bear on contemporary conjunctures—cautiously, for Clausewitz put forward his notion of friction precisely to draw attention to the gaps, to the inconsistencies that cannot but exist between "real War" and "War on paper", including (*why would it be otherwise?*) when the paper in question preserves a copy of Clausewitz's *On War*. Remarkably, both contingency and pertinence descend from the Latin *tangere*, to touch. *Contingere* is to befall, to touch "with", and "*Pertinence* is [...] literally, etymologically, the quality of what touches, of what imports, of what counts (*pertinet*). We say a gesture is pertinent when it *touches*, when it strikes *home* [*touche juste*], when it concerns, relates or sticks to what it takes, thereby adjusting itself to the contact" (Derrida 2000, 304; I translate)—without tearing apart.

3.2 Diagrams of incystence

It is only at the very end of his lecture on Hobbes that Foucault names "political historicism" that discourse which holds that politics is the continuation of war by other means (Foucault 2003, 111). He bids farewell to his audience that day by asserting that

Political historicism encountered two obstacles. In the seventeenth century, philosophico-juridical discourse was the obstacle that tried to disqualify it; in the nineteenth century, it was dialectical materialism. Hobbes's operation consisted in exploiting every possibility—even the most extreme philosophico-juridical discourse—to silence the discourse of political historicism. Well, next time I would

like to both trace the history of this discourse of political historicism and praise it.

When Foucault utters those words, on February 4, 1976, I believe he holds that he is taking part—and taking side—in a re-emergence of political historicism, not least in relation to struggles of de-colonization. What he calls political historicism is arguably filled with *ressentiment*—at the very least, it is not a discourse inciting to *turn the other cheek*; at its heart reposes the conviction that there are only so many cheeks to turn before things escalate out of hand and “giving back” violent death becomes a live option. But the power to re-emerge *differently* at different political sites—aristocratic or plebeian, revolutionary or reactionary, colonialist or anti-colonial—is a significant trait of this discourse¹⁴⁵. Political historicism is even that very discourse which invites to frame the contingent possibility of singular re-emergences as what matters, politically. As it “opens up a historico-political field” (169) where force deploys itself, it makes possible a hold on its own encystation, the cyclical yet a-periodic, *each time unique* re(in)surgence of the

¹⁴⁵ It seems to me that the trajectory of Glen Coulthard’s works on contemporary indigenous politics is noteworthy, in this respect. In his much-circulated article “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada”, he writes: “Fanon understood that the individual and collective revaluation of black identity at the heart of projects like the *négritude* movement served as a source of pride and empowerment, and as such helped jolt the colonized into an ‘actional’ existence, as opposed to a ‘reactional’ one characterized by *ressentiment*” (Coulthard 2007, 454). More recently, in the face of critiques to the effect that *ressentiment* is a “sad passion” that should be avoided and that de-colonial struggles are “obviously” based on resentful affects that arguably makes them more “reactional” than “actional”, Coulthard has been engaging this notion more directly in relation to Nietzsche’s theorization of it as a “slavish” affect. In his lecture on “Recognition, Reconciliation and Resentment in Indigenous Politics”, Coulthard argues that “ressentiment is an entirely appropriate and legitimate sentiment to hold in contexts where Indigenous peoples are still subject to the ongoing structural and symbolic violence of dispossession and settler-state governance”, and that “under certain circumstances politically embracing our individual and collective resentment (as opposed to embracing a politics that prematurely stresses the moral superiority of a neo-colonial framework of forgiveness, recognition and reconciliation) can play a cathartic, critically transformative role in the rehabilitation of colonized subjects and in the radical reconstruction of decolonized Indigenous ways of life” (see Coulthard 2011; I take these lines from an abstract, at <http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/events/9499> (Accessed September 9, 2013)). I would argue that this revaluation of *ressentiment* echoes what Foucault calls political historicism by contextualizing and differentiating multiple forms of *ressentiment*, some of which are delegitimized, and some of which are legitimized, all in function of the roles played, the sides taken in violent historical practices of exploitation, domination, and dispossession.

claim that this or that war which politics continues has to be not only rediscovered, but “reactivated” (268). This mode of insistence is what I call incystence.

I articulate this concept of incystence on the ground of Negarestani’s diagrams of the relationships between depths and surfaces, which emerge throughout his theorization of “the Middle East as a living entity”. In the chapter “Machines are digging” in the section of *Cyclonopedia* titled “Bacterial Archeology”, Negarestani writes:

Military and political practitioners have long formulated as an archeological law the asymmetry between ground’s consistency and the consistency of poromechanical entities or porous earth: *For every inconsistency on the surface, there is a subterranean consistency.* The law of subterranean cause in archeology bears a striking resemblance to Freud-Jung’s suggestion that for every psychosomatic breakdown, there is a Complex (an anomalous convolution and knottedness) beneath consciousness. The reason for this similarity lies in the fact that according to both archeology and Freudian psychoanalysis, the line of emergence (the nemat-function) directs itself in accordance with the resistance to emergence, the dynamism of emergence and the degree of porosity. The course of emergence in any medium corresponds to the formation of that medium; the more agitated the line of emergence becomes, the more convoluted and complex the host medium must be. [...] The myths of obtuse flatness (i.e. superficiality) or totalitarianism attributed to Freudian psychoanalysis by postmodernist rivals are in most cases the symptoms of misunderstanding the problem of surfaces and emergence. The *superficial* (as related to visible, circumferential and grounded surfaces) entities of Freudian theories only come into existence as final products of unbound activities involved with emergence, welling up from subterranean complexes of nested holes and surfaces. In other words, the supposedly superficial entities of Freudian psychoanalysis (Oedipus, Rat-man, etc.) in fact delineate the vector of emergence in terms of different surfaces. Among these surfaces, only the most superficial one can loosely attest to its existence, for in terms of emergence the most superficial cannot be registered unless a crypt or a complex of burrows

has already been dug out by the line of emergence from within (Negarestani 2008a, 53-4).

Holding that “depth exists as the ambiguity or the gradient between inner and outer, solid and void, one and zero; or in other words, as a third scale or an intermediary agency which operates against the unitary or binary logics of inner and outer, vigor and silence, inclusion and exclusion” (54) undermines the assumption of a linear, continuous correspondence of war and politics as depth and surface, or surface and depth¹⁴⁶.

Pondering “The militarization of the contemporary world, both in its politics and its concrete approaches”, Negarestani then briefly presents two “cases” that make sensible “the vastness of militarization in respect to the poromechanics of war, and

¹⁴⁶ The “archeological law” formalized by Negarestani recalls the second reason that Foucault gives for the importance of political historicism, namely that it “inverts the values, the equilibrium, and the traditional polarities of intelligibility, and which posits, demands, an explanation from below. But in this explanation, the ‘below’ is not necessarily what is clearest and simplest. Explaining things from below also means explaining them in terms of what is most confused, most obscure, disorderly and most subject to chance, because what is being put forward as a principle for the interpretation of society and its visible order is the confusion of violence, passions, hatreds, rages, resentments, and bitterness; and it is the obscurity of contingencies and all the minor incidents that bring about defeats and ensure victories” (Foucault 2003, 54). Still, what goes on “above” can affect what goes on “below”, as this very rationalization becomes one tool among many in the war that is to be fought.

In *On War*’s Book I, Chapter I, right before his famous sentence, Clausewitz writes a number of lines on how the means of war can act “back” onto and modulate the political ends that these means, in principle, serve: “Now, if we reflect that War has its root in a political object, then naturally this original motive which called it into existence should also continue the first and highest consideration in its conduct. Still, the political object is no despotic lawgiver on that account; it must accommodate itself to the nature of the means, and though *changes in these means may involve modifications in the political objective*, the latter always retain a prior right to consideration. Policy, therefore, is interwoven with the whole action of War, and must exercise a continuous influence upon it, *as far as the nature of the forces liberated by it will permit*” (Clausewitz 1918 [1832], 22-3; I underline). Note how the last phrase can account for the possibilities of an “automation” of war, a detachment of war from “policy”, if “the nature of the forces liberated by it” permits it. In *Mille plateaux*, as Deleuze & Guattari ponder the “capture apparatus” by engaging Clausewitz’s work, they write: “It is only after the Second World War that the autonomization, and then the automation of the war machine, have produced their veritable effect. [The war machine], given the new antagonisms that were traversing it, did not have war as an exclusive object anymore, but took charge and took for object peace, politics, the world order, in sum, the goal. It is there that the inversion of Clausewitz’s formula appears: it is politics which becomes the continuation of war, *it is peace that technically liberates the unlimited material process of total war*. War stops being the materialization of the war machine, *it is the war machine that itself becomes materialized war*. In that sense, there was no more need for fascism. Fascists had only been precursory children, and the absolute peace of survival succeeded where the total war had failed. We were already in the third world war. The war machine was reigning on the whole axiomatic like the power (*puissance*) of the continuous that surrounded the ‘world-economy’” and was putting into contact all the parts of the universe. The world returned to being a smooth space (sea, air, atmosphere) where reigned a single war machine, even when it opposed its own parts” (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 583; I translate).

archeology as the science of military innovation in the twenty-first century” (55). The first case is “countries with detailed homeland security protocols or relatively high levels of alertness, where ground or aerial operations (hostile, subversive or stealth activities) cannot be conducted”. There (*here?*), “the emergence of intricate poromechanical entities escalates, and cannot be avoided. In such countries, the distribution of illegal immigrants or smuggled products such as drugs and weapons around the border regions does not proceed by way of patterns of activities on the surface, but through the formation and the architecture of nested holeyness beneath the ground”. What circulates below can—and is even bound to—re-emerge above at some point, later on and elsewhere, but precisely where and when it may go unnoticed, undetected. If what matters *politically* is what goes on underneath and how what circulates below manages to (re-)emerge, the acknowledgement of porosity would seem to breed paranoia¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁷ The paranoid fear of an “infestation from below” is at work on what could be called the “home front” of “the War on Terror”, although it precisely bears upon how the distinction of home and abroad, inside and outside, domestic and foreign is blurred, troubled, perforated *from within*—it is a schizoid paranoia, if you will, or a paranoia *of* schizophrenia. In his article “The Militarization of Peace: Absence of Terror or Terror of Absence?” in which he unfolds the effects of what he calls “weaponized *Taqiyya*”, Negarestani writes: “When a *Takfiri* [or Jihadist] becomes as one with ordinary civilians – no longer dissimulating but moving and behaving like a true, unfaithful civilian in every respect of his or her public and private life – then the weapon begins autonomously to be activated from the other side; the government (of a foreign non-Islamic country, for example) itself begins to filter, purge and hunt down its own civilians, curtailing their rights, confining them to economic, social and political quarantine to isolate or even purge the disease and its potential hosts at the same time. Each individual is potentially a *Takfiri* cell or niche, a site of infestation, a primary military target (Negarestani 2007, 62). If the tactic is successful, it works like the “dieback disease” that affects trees: “By destroying leaves from top to bottom and by marring branchlets, the tree will eventually be entirely incapacitated and will start to (*over*)react *autophagically* and *allergically* to the artificial dereliction effected by the dieback disease. *Taqiyya* provides *Takfiris* with ample opportunity to use this dieback machinery, starting from the leaves (civilians or what they call ‘expendable entities’) and branchlets (small organizations, etc.), ultimately rendering the tree obsolete without ever having launched any direct attack against its main organs” (65). To refrain from directly targeting the foundations of an attacked entity seems to be a sound polemological principle, insofar as foundations are most solid; one should either target what is above, or seek to undermine foundations from under the ground—but the latter is done most efficiently from inside, which requires an “infection”. Interestingly, Negarestani writes of “*Takfiris* under *Taqiyya*”. For a critical theological engagement with and deconstruction of what I would call inflationist and paranoid uses of this notion of *Taqiyya*, which authorizes the dissimulation of one’s true faith in Islam under very precise circumstances, but which is nowadays heralded by some (notably, right-wing American websites) as the key to read “islamization”, as well as Iran’s foreign policy as fundamentally “deceptive”, see Howarth 2010.

The second case presented by Negarestani is “the Battle of Tora Bora”, which took place in Afghanistan in December 2001. It shows the downside of a paranoid take on how distributions of importance articulate depths and surfaces. By their offensive, American and British forces sought to unearth, to exhume or un-ground Osama bin Laden, to “smoke him out” of the “wormhole” where he was thought to be hiding. The escalation of bombardments was effectively “based on collected information about vast underground facilities and terror networks in the Tora Bora Mountains. [...] The tactics and the entire logic of military progression in Tora Bora were formulated precisely in order to ‘match’ the cavernous mountains of the region, to give an appropriate military response to the holey architecture of terror compounds”. With hindsight, however, it appears that “The Battle of Tora Bora was actualized based on the complexity of Tora Bora sub-surfaces *but in the absence of any actual holes and vermiculate complexities*” (56; I underline). The procedures of decysting were misguided, for no cyst was in sight—or rather, despite all appearances, the “encysted sheikh” was not quite there to be removed¹⁴⁸. It appears

¹⁴⁸ As any battle, “Tora Bora” is recounted in many different ways. To this day, one of the contentious sites within the multiple narratives on the events is the question of the presence of bin Laden in the mountains—of whether he was there at all, and if so, for how long—in late 2001. During the 2004 presidential campaign in the United States, Democrat candidate John Kerry said in a speech that US forces missed the opportunity to capture or kill bin Laden before he escaped, when and where they “had him surrounded”, i.e. in Tora Bora. A few days later, the then recently retired general Tommy Franks, member of “Veterans for Bush” and former “commander of the allied forces in the Middle East, [...] responsible for the operation at Tora Bora”, replied in *The New York Times* that “We don’t know to this day whether Mr. bin Laden was at Tora Bora in December 2001. Some intelligence sources said he was; others indicated he was in Pakistan at the time; still others suggested he was in Kashmir. Tora Bora was teeming with Taliban and Qaeda operatives, many of whom were killed or captured, but Mr. bin Laden was never within our grasp” (Franks 2004; for other narratives, see Burke 2011; Bergen 2009; Weaver 2005; see also the report on Tora Bora by the United States Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations (Kerry 2009)). From an aesthetic angle, it is interesting to note that, in December 2001, newspapers and other visual media published a number of images depicting the complexity of the underground Tora Bora “compounds”, which were even said to have been equipped with air conditioning and other “modern” technologies. What the “caves” looked like at the time of the battle is another disputed aspect of the Tora Bora narratives, not least because the extent of the bombardments since early December 2001 have seemingly transformed the sites. The BBC, for instance, has reported that “one of the Special Forces soldiers who was on the ground [...] speaking on condition of anonymity” explained that “Everybody was trying to get into the fight because... he was there. I can tell you that we dropped so much munitions on this place that we actually changed the landscape. The map is different” (in Corera 2011). Arguably, the constant monitoring of Afghanistan and Pakistan by drones (see Chamayou 2013) is an attempt

that a “Cappadocian Complex”, in both the geological and the psychoanalytical senses of the term, was forcefully driving coalition forces:

Bound to the paranoid logical line in holey complexes (from the ground to the cavity) and unbound by a nonexistent schizoid architecture of nested holes, coalitions forces led by the United States developed the first full-fledged example of a Cappadocian Complex: wherever hostile activities and threat are inconsistent and asymmetrical, there must be an underground cause of nested holeyness; consequently, one must model special military formations to counteract these convoluted and subterranean architectures. Such a logic is the heart of the Cappadocian Complex. —Whereas in Tora Bora there was no sub-surface nexus or complex, in Cappadocia [in Turkey], beneath every surface and in every mountain or hill, there is a multiplex of holes, lairs, and passageways.

One can never be certain in advance (nor even in retrospect) whether one is in Tora Bora, in Cappadocia, and just who else is there—or whether one is standing elsewhere, entangled in another diagram of depth and surface, dealing with a different incystence.

*

What is arguably the most effective way to deal with a cyst, benign or not, is “to have it removed” (self-operation is always strongly discouraged) *when it is not inflamed*. Otherwise, when one is dealing with an inflamed cyst, one is dealing with a leak under the skin, and probably a bacterial infection. This infected leak has to be dealt with first.

Operating an inflamed cyst is dangerous because the infection risks to spread, and the cyst itself risks to become de-structured, ungraspable as a whole. Still, if there is pus, it may be required to excise the “abscess”, to cut, pierce, perforate or lance the cyst in order to drain it. This will help to contain the infection and to appease the pain, to

at turning this landscape into (or at pushing it toward) what Negarestani calls “countries with detailed homeland security protocols or relatively high levels of alertness, where ground or aerial operations (hostile, subversive or stealth activities) cannot be conducted”. The conditions of “success” seem far from being attained, or even attainable—at least as seen from quite a distance, i.e. from North America.

diminish the pressure and the heated irritation. In the draining process, parts of the cyst itself, of the “envelope” that it is (*cystis* in Latin comes from *kustis*, the Greek word for bladder) may detach themselves and be removed. However, a number of complications may occur. New “tunnels”, for instance, fistulas (abnormal passageways) may be burrowed if the hole on the surface becomes clogged—say, if the dressing dries out and prevents leaking. Even if the cyst is eventually removed, such small “tunnels” may then enable “it”, or a “different same cyst”, to reform. Recurrence can occur if parts of the “walls” are left in, but cysts are also known to return at approximately the same site for no precise reason—except that the subcutaneous processes that caused it continue.

Amid this refolding of the politics of touch onto aesthetics of friction as prerequisites to the apprehension of political importance in terms of irritations, these somewhat repugnant bio-medical considerations are interesting because, when it is not inflamed, when it is “operable”, a cyst tends to be non-bothering, even unnoticeable—if its size is modest—, or at least tolerable. It is precisely when it becomes inflamed—often because of irritation: it has been poked at, sunburned, scratched, etc.—that it becomes bothering, highly noticeable, even intolerable, and that it thereby becomes important, that the cyst starts to matter most immediately and even to be the most important occurrence, that which makes it impossible to think of anything else for the time being. But this is indeed precisely when it is *already too late* for therapeutics to work smoothly, when a cystectomy has become both pressing and impracticable, when applying ice and waiting for an appeasement—which might work just as well—seems out of touch with the “urgency”. Once the infection has been dealt with, what remains “inside” runs a further risk (or chance): being forgotten, and thus paving the way for resurgence. Irritation, in

this respect, is a signal that something has changed in what matters, in what must be taken care of, but it is also the cause of this change and what matters most, for a time.

As a diagram of importance, the processual form of the cyst, the entwined logics of encystation, decysting and incystence, do not only concern war—that practice which Godard defined as “*faire entrer un morceau de fer dans un morceau de chair*”: making a piece of iron enter a piece of flesh. Foucault’s insistence on a desirable re-emergence of political historicism, and perhaps the incystence of “Foucault-himself” in contemporary cultural, social, and political thought, suggest that what may be called “ideological warfare”—or what Ayatollah Ali Khamenei calls “soft war” (see Golkar 2010)—, or perhaps politics “proper”, occurs through similar processes of incystence. Whether or not this is because war is a continuation of politics or politics is a continuation of war seems beside the point. Stories of origins, of what came and keeps coming first, are sites of more or less intense struggles. It seems that what imports is determined by irritations, and that friction is a prerequisite *and* an effect of distributions of importance: for acting politically to be grasped as a matter of augmenting or diminishing irritations, *aesthetics* of friction are required, since as one is irritated by encounters with this or that “matter”, one may start to care—but one may also start to build a wall, to retreat.

4. “You’re never actually touching anything”

The logic of incystence appears to be the very logic of hauntology, of what returns without having left or what seems to have gone but remains, of what is neither simply absent nor simply present, what neither “is” nor “is not” in any strict sense, but rather puts stricture itself into play. Both terms seek to express how fuzzy gradients and thresholds, rather than straight lines and clear boundaries, make up “the world” as such.

The apparent immediacy of interiority and exteriority, of being in or out is thereby framed as just that, an appearance, while mediacy or mediation is framed as a concrete *fatum* that can never be truly circumvented. In contemporary political thought, there is a tendency to tie such considerations to what the “natural sciences” teach. This remark by Whitehead, for instance, is evocative of contemporary lines of “critical” thought:

if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends. /Consider one definite molecule. It is part of nature. It has moved about for millions of years. Perhaps it started from a distant nebula. It enters the body; it may be as a factor in some edible vegetable; or it passes into the lungs as part of the air. At what exact point as it enters the mouth, or as it is absorbed through the skin, is it part of the body? At what exact moment, later on, does it cease to be part of the body? Exactness is out of the question. It can only be obtained by some trivial convention (Whitehead 1968b [1938], 21).

Popular accounts of atomic physics and quantum mechanics (e.g. Vsauce 2011) dwell on a similar configuration when they insist that direct contact between two bodies—be they one’s thumb and one’s index finger—is ultimately impossible because the electron clouds surrounding each atom’s nucleus repel one another, so one can only ever feel or touch the repulsive force of electrons, never a “solid” body. The ethical notion of an ultimately untouchable, ungraspable Other, and Derrida’s notion of *différance* evoke homologous concerns for impossibilities of direct contact. Obliqueness appears to reign.

4.1 Horizons of concerns

The prevalence of the hand haunts the politics of touch. It is, as it were, hidden in plain sight: when touch is concerned, “the hand” takes center stage. The development, the emergence of the hand—one may want to write: the human hand, *la main humaine*, but precisely, this is (almost) a pleonasm since the hand is held as the properly human, or at

least the simian “version” of the paw—has been woven by anthropo-philosophers into the *grand récit* of the humanization or hominescence of *homo sapiens*. As Sloterdijk, for instance, presents “the chirotope” as “the first anthropogenous island”, he writes:

Prehension by the paw is not yet world-constitutive. It is only when a hand takes things that it finds handy or that it renders handy, that what finds itself standing or laying down around us commences to transform itself into usable utensils. It is the first act of world production: with it there begins the self-inclusion of islanders into their ecstatic closure, which the philosophy of the 20th century has begun to call being-in-the-world. Who is in the world has the tool at [his or her] disposal; when the tool is near, the world cannot be far (Sloterdijk 2005 [2004], 322; I translate).

Sloterdijk further considers that, among “the populations of utensils in the chirotope, three categories take on particular significance for the detachment of the human island out of the environmental element” (324). The first is “the utensil of throw”. This is so because “As throwers, humans acquire their principal ontological component to this day—the capacity to have an *actio in distans*. By the throw, much more than by the model of the escape, they become the animals that can distance themselves. Due to distance, perspective, which houses our projects, is born”. Touch and sight are closely intertwined in the constitution of a horizon or sphere of concerns and efficient action: the eyes assess the trajectory of a projectile as the more or less successful putting-in-concordance of intentions and results, causes and effects. Causal thinking is thereby attributed to the very capacity to affect what is within reach. The second category is that of “instruments destined to strike” (328), which enable fabrication, the production of what was not there through manipulations of what was around. What is within reach acquires the potential to factor in the creation of novelty by trained hands, while what is

out of reach or what resists become bothering as “unaffordable”¹⁴⁹. The third category is “the discovery of the cutting edges of stone and bones [which] plays a fundamental role for the climate of chirotopic reality. It is with these edges that the cultural history of cutting and, *eo ipso*, of material analysis begins. There where the knife function appears, reason gets moving as a force that divides, creates portions, operates dissections. [...] Knives endow things in the world with the status of divisible elements” (332). In that sense, “In the practice of cutting natural bodies there appears a first manifestation of [...] explicitation—the uncovering of the underlying, the presentation and the disclosure of the absent, the folded, the covered. [...] With their power of denomination, [humans] cut into pieces the world-animal, the savannah and its children—a process that cannot work without the accompaniment of operational violence and of its persistent results”. In this *grand récit*, the importance of the hand for thought cannot be overestimated.

Evoking hauntology and the spectrality of the processual form of the cyst as troubling the interplay of presence and absence, however, summons up the strange phenomenon of “phantom limbs”, of this sensation reported by a number of amputees that a limb is still attached to their body and even keeps moving while it has recently been removed. In the antepenultimate Chapter Twenty-Three of *The Inner Touch: Archeology of a Sensation*, titled “Phantoms. In which Bodies feel Parts they do not

¹⁴⁹ This description offers the occasion to remark how the Heideggerian meditation on the tool or utensil, and especially on things “close at hand” and “ready at hand”, parallels in complicated ways what the field of “ecological psychology” calls, following James J. Gibson, affordance. In 1975, for instance, Gibson writes that “Invariants in a display of optical information specify what I call the *affordances* of things in the world, what they afford us for behaving, acting, living. These are anchored in human beings at one pole and in things at the other. They are values and meanings but they are not subjective, or private, or mental. Consequently, two separate kinds of perception, ordinary perception, on the one hand, and esthetic perception, on the other, do not exist. There is only one kind of perception, the perception of the world with the meanings and values already in it. The formless invariants in the light coming to a point of observation specify ecological objects, not just physical objects; what things are good for, not just their colors and shapes. If this is true, ordinary perception *includes* what we have been calling esthetic perception” (Gibson 1975, 320; for a brief genealogy of the development of the notion of affordance in Gibson’s work, see Jones 2003; for a brief comparison between Gibson’s and Heidegger’s “theories” of perception that centers on vision, see Megill 2003, 20-7).

possess, and alternately fail to feel those Parts that are truly theirs”, Daniel Heller-Roazen (2007, 253-70) refolds the mirror phenomena of phantom limbs and “negation delirium” onto the single, “omnipresent” sensation which he engages throughout the book, namely this “inner touch”, this “general perception” that is the sensation of sensing itself, the very perception of live perceiving. The many “cases” of phantom limbs and negation delirium described in details by 19th century physicians and psychiatrists are said to have

contained at least one veritable “metaphysical discovery,” which concerned the nature of the general perception of organic existence as such. All the men and women who felt themselves to be where they were not, and all those who failed to feel themselves to be where they nevertheless did seem to be, perceived one fundamental fact that few scientists and scholars in their age and after it have registered with equal force: the ultimate delusion may be to believe that sentient beings, in sickness or in health, could perceive their bodies to be wholes composed of anything but ghostly parts (270).

In his archeology, Heller-Roazen repeatedly returns to Aristotle as a “ground”, for the Stagirite, to whom the age-old fivefold of the senses is usually attributed, appears to have been the first to write of a “master sense”. Aristotle thinks this sense of sensing oneself sensing through touch, not least since touch has no proper organ: it is the body itself—not even the skin, for the guts have none—that feels, and that feels itself feeling.

The “cases” of phantom limbs and negation delirium put into play the mereology of Aristotle and of numerous layers or waves of Aristotelian commentators, the “classic” account of the relationships between parts and wholes, and parts and parts. The configuration of this mereology is perhaps most clearly expressed in Book I of Aristotle’s *Politics*, where the Philosopher illustrates the claim that “the city” is prior to “the individual” by an analogy with the relationship that ties the hand to the body. He writes:

We may now proceed to add that the city is prior in the order of nature to the family and the individual. The reason for this is that the whole is necessarily prior to the part. If the whole body is destroyed, there will not be a foot or a hand, except in that ambiguous sense in which one uses the same word to indicate a different thing, as when one speaks of a ‘hand’ made of stone; for a hand, when destroyed [by the destruction of the whole body], will be no better than a stone ‘hand’. All things derive their essential character from their function and their capacity; and it follows that if they are no longer fit to discharge their function, we ought not to say that they are still the same things, but only that, by an ambiguity, they still have the same names (Aristotle 2009 [ca. 330 BCE], 1253a18-24; brackets in the text).

This analogy also signals that a hand destroyed by being severed from the body does not as such prevent the whole to continue to be animated, to remain itself while missing a part¹⁵⁰. Following this line of thought, the fact that a detached hand not only stops to be a

¹⁵⁰ If the body’s function consists in “serving” what many traditions have called “the soul”, this would further mean that the soul is prior to the body. As it is arguably what *animates* the parts of the body and the body as a whole, the soul is as it were the body’s motor, and the body is as it were the soul’s originally inert vehicle. But the soul is also a part of the body, it is arguably lodged somewhere *within* it, and it would seem that the body is a necessary condition for the soul to exercise its own functions, whatever they may be. Serres, for instance, describes an attempt to “touch” the “soul”, and writes: “I touch one of my lips with my middle finger. Consciousness resides in this contact. I begin to examine it. It is often hidden in a fold of tissue, lip against lip, tongue against palate, teeth touching teeth, closed eyelids, contracted sphincters, a hand clenched into a fist, fingers pressed against each other, the back of one thigh crossed over the front of the other, or one foot resting on another. I wager that the small, monstrous homunculus, each part of which is proportional to the magnitude of the sensations it feels, increases in size and swells at these automorphic points, when the skin tissue folds in on itself. Skin on skin becomes conscious, as does skin on mucus membrane and mucus membrane on itself. Without this folding, without the contact of the self on itself, there would truly be no real image of the body; we would live without consciousness; slippery smooth and on the point of fading away. Klein bottles are a model of identity. We are the bearers of skewed, not quite flat, unreplicated surfaces, deserts over which consciousness passes fleetingly, leaving no memory. Consciousness belongs to those singular moments when the body is tangential to itself. /I touch my lips, which are already conscious of themselves, with my finger. I can then kiss my finger and, what amounts to almost the same thing, touch my lips with it. The I vibrates alternately on both sides of the contact, and all of a sudden presents its other face to the world, or, suddenly passing over the immediate vicinity, leaves behind nothing but an object. In the local gesture of calling for silence, the body plays ball with the soul. Those who do not know where their soul is to be found touch their mouths, and they do not find it there. The mouth touching itself creates its soul and contrives to pass it on to the hand which, clenching itself involuntarily, forms its own faint soul and then can pass it on, when it wishes, to the mouth, which already has it. Pure chance, each time” (Serres 2008 [1985], 22-3).

For Christian (*neo-Platonist?*) theologians, the body is also a receptacle for the soul, but rather than enable it *prevents* the fulfillment of the soul’s function, “true contemplation”, the contemplation of God, which can only happen unhindered in “the other world”, where and when bodies are “absent” and time and space are irrelevant notions. As for Aristotle, his reliance on a strange scene of “Etruscan torture” as an analogy of the relationship between the body and the soul troubles the possibility of ever thinking either body or soul without the other. Negarestani dedicates an article to this issue, “The Corpse’s Bride: Thinking with *Nigredo*” (2008b), in which he writes: “In a now lost piece, the young Aristotle makes a reference to the

part of the body but also stops being a hand altogether implies that an individual severed from a city—or from *all* cities—stops being an individual, or a *human* animal.

Caring for the whole is thus noble. However, Aristotelian accounts of the sense of touch trouble their own linear, “functionalist” mereology. For one, if touch is a part (one fifth) of the age-old fivefold, on a par with sight, hearing, taste and smell, it also seems that these senses are parts or instances of touch. Moreover, the acuity of touch is held to express the quality of “the intellect”, or of “the soul”, in privileged and unique ways:

“Touch,” Thomas [Aquinas] writes, recalling the classic Aristotelian doctrine, “is the basis of sensitivity as a whole; for obviously the organ of touch pervades the whole body, so that the organ of each of the other senses is also an organ of touch, and the sense of touch by itself constitutes a being as sensitive.” This fact alone, he observes, suffices to distinguish the primary power from all others. If one grants the fundamental position of the tactile faculty in the order of the animal soul, one must conclude that “the finer one’s sense of touch, the better, strictly speaking, is one’s sensitive nature as a whole, and consequently the higher one’s intellectual capacity. For a fine sensitivity is a disposition to a fine intelligence.” This much cannot be said of any other sense: “exceptionally good hearing or sight,” for instance, “does not imply that the sensitivity as a whole is finer, but only that it is so in one respect.” (Heller-Roazen 2007, 294-5)

The “lowest”, the sense of touch, is thereby closely entangled with what is “classically” termed the “highest”, the intellect—or at the very least, gut feeling is tied to presence of mind, to *phronesis* or *prudentia* perhaps. When Hobbes upholds touch as the most

torture practiced by the Etruscan pirates. In that text, Aristotle draws a comparison between the soul tethered to the body and the living chained to a dead corpse (*nekrous*): ‘Aristotle says, that we are punished much as those were who once upon a time, when they had fallen into the hand of Etruscan robbers, were slain with elaborate cruelty; their bodies, the living (*corpora viva*) with the dead, were bound so exactly as possible one against another: so our souls, tied together with our bodies as the living fixed upon the dead’ [Cicero, quoting Aristotle; Augustine later uses the same passage]” (132). Negarestani comments: “this fragment subtly points to a moment in philosophy when both the philosophy of Ideas and the science of being qua being are fundamentally built upon putrefaction and act in accordance with the chemistry of decay”. I turn to this lexicon in the following chapter, on the politics of smell.

important sense, he is arguably re-actualizing this line of thought, which held sight to be nobler but less important. When Machiavelli writes that “everyone can see, but few can feel”, he also reiterates what may be called an Aristotelian articulation of touch and thought. And when Clausewitz writes “The battalion always remains composed of a number of men, of whom, if chance so wills, the most insignificant is able to occasion delay and even irregularity” (1918 [1832], 78), he reframes how the “lowest” element can refocus a grand horizon of concerns onto itself, reducing its scope to that itchy point that may derail a whole machine. These three writers are said to be “realists”. I contend that this is precisely because it seems they hold that a well-oiled, functioning “order” must be founded upon the attribution of the highest importance to the lowest—to that which will seemingly always generate the most friction. They are charged with deserting the noblest, but analytics of touch and thought persistently blur what could possibly tie the mereology of parts and whole to the scale from high to low.

4.2 Holy motors

In his Epilogue to “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Benjamin writes that “All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war” (Benjamin 2007a [1936], 241), and that “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art” (242). Shortly before the Epilogue, he claims “The mass is a matrix from which all traditional behavior toward works of art issues

today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation” (239). Also,

Architecture has never been idle. Its history is more ancient than that of any other art, and its claim to being a living force has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship of the masses to art. Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropriation, developed with reference to architecture, in certain circumstances acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation. /The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception (240).

Numbness, this inextricably tactile and intellectual condition attributed to “the masses” even in their molecularization, is thus a modality of distributions of political importance.

Drawing on Benjamin, the singularity of the “perceived space” of contemporary conjunctures has recently been described in terms of “tactile appropriation”, of

the passive perception that manifests itself in the kinestheses revealed under the mode of statistic generality in the movement of the anonymous far-Western (*extrême-occidentales*) masses: to move by car on an interurban highway, to operate a pendulum movement between an urban center and its periphery, to get to a hypermarket to buy cleaning products made in Asia, to pay to watch an

American movie, to receive a salary in exchange for a given number of worked hours, to feed oneself by way of drive-through services, to meet a lover on a website, to board a plane to reach a seaside resort on the occasion of family vacations, to speak on the phone (Giroux 2013, 43; I translate).

The strength, the power (*puissance*) of inhabited spatiotemporal configurations can be made explicit by pondering just how they are “experienced on the mode of habituation, of use, of acquired tolerance (*accoutumance*)”. The creation of value, in the capitalistic sense of the term, requires managing the circulation between spaces of production and reproduction. However, “The circulation of bodies is a friction that is costly in energy (for the worker, as well as for the system of production). Now, the social logic that actualizes itself in contemporary space ultimately tends toward the elimination of all friction, notably through the progressive elimination of the geographic distance between the site (*lieu*) of production and the site of reproduction” (46). If one takes Foucault’s project of a “microphysics of power” seriously, it appears that achieving “the elimination of all friction” requires a controlled reduction of temperature. The ideal of capitalistic circulation would then be something like superconductivity, this state of zero electrical resistance reached by certain substances at temperatures close to absolute zero. However, most if not all accounts of life-in-common insist on how *some* irritation or resistance is necessary if moving on, back, or forth—if *any* movement—is to occur.

*

Gestural problematizations of political practices—from Max Weber’s claim that “Politics means slow, strong drilling through hard boards, with a combination of passion and a sense of judgment” (Weber 1994 [1919], 369), to Yves Citton’s notion of a “politics of gestures”, “*une politique des gestes*” that is concerned with both “how we put pressure

unwillingly” and “how to put pressure willingly” (Citton 2013; 2012), for instance—can be apprehended as expressions of a thermodynamic mode of thought. More precisely, and following Serres’ account, in *Hémès IV. La distribution*, these problematizations can be described as working through a “motor” or “motive” mode of thought, one type of motor at stake being the “transformational motor” made intelligible by thermodynamics (Serres 1977, 47-55). The figure of the motor is a response to and a mode of thinking the problem of movement and its production. There is no movement without a difference, and “to each new motor there corresponds the detection of a new difference” (46; I translate). The first generation of motors, according to Serres, was that of the mechanics of the fixed point, of traceable transportations on a single, Euclidian plane where advances and returns are possible. The second generation, following the Industrial Revolution, has as its model the transformation of states of matter through heat—the motor of thermodynamics and fluid mechanics, for which time is a unidirectional flow, a straight line where returns can never be to or of the same. The third generation, that of the “informational motor”, is the most recent, as cybernetics stems from thermodynamics, but also perhaps the most ancient: “The plague and disseminated members, this is the end of motive differences. Here there is a radical multiplicity, far more profound and real than the logics of the comparable and the opposition, in the theater of the represented. It is a matter of the large number and the *clinamen*, that is all” (55). According to Serres, “Every motor functions by difference. It does not feed on it. The condition resides in the reserve (*réservoir*). No motor would produce movement if we did not ascribe it, filled. [...] Difference plus movement, here is the motor. And, preceding it, the reserve” (60-1). The reserve of heat for a car engine, say, is the Earth itself in its relation with the Sun. If

the reserve keeps being filled, it is because some other motor is at stake, which is itself conditional upon another reserve.

Serres offers an axiomatic that applies to science, art, politics, etc. He writes:

From the following table, the reader can, as an exercise, extract axiomatics, from which [s/]he will reproduce some famous works.

1. Where is the reserve?
2. What is inside the reserve?
3. Evaluate the reserve. Is it finite?
4. What is the reserve? Is it given, can it be constructed? Name it.
5. Define the difference.
6. Say on what the difference bears.
7. Draw the circulation, and its scheme.
8. From where does the movement come, where is it going, where does it pass?
9. Define what circulates.
10. Does every circulation returns to the reserve? Is it a cycle, or does it form a pile of waste?

The table may be said to be, in its turn, a reserve. But axiomatics, which were precisely born at this epoch, are reserves too. From the Industrial Revolution onward, every theory responds to this. *Reserve—Difference—Circulation* (62).

It would therefore appear that every “theory” of distributions of political importance, as an account of how variations occur in these distributions, cannot but contain “motor” assumptions—assumptions about what fuels, powers, and drives variations and the very occurrence of distribution, but also a reserve of assumptions that fuel, power, and drive the “theory” itself, as theories are also “things” that matter more or less, politically.

Refolding distributions of importance (IV)

That “war is the motor of institutions” is one theory among others that bear on how variations in distributions of political importance occur. Perhaps more directly than others, however, this perspective which Foucault calls political historicism frames the

problem of what matters politically in a manner that seems to account for so-called commonsensical impressions of what matters. In effect, this account acknowledges that what matters varies, and that making *this* or *that* matter more or less, that modulating political importance, is a contingent enterprise that is never guaranteed to succeed but that is seemingly instantiated in a variety of ways all the time. What seems to return time and again is the question “How to get a hold [*comment faire prise*]? This question”, says Isabelle Stengers, “proclaims that I resist what I call, pejoratively, the theater of concepts. Whether it’s [Alain] Badiou, [Slavoj] Žižek, and so on, we have the impression that the one who discovers the right concept of capitalism or communism will have discovered something extremely important” (in Stengers & Bordeleau 2011, 12; brackets in the text). But what endures is the multiplicity of always-singular attempts to *get a hold*, or to get a grip, which “involves a body-to-body relation to the world, which has a relative truth. [...] The consequences of this hold do not belong to the one who produces the hold, but to the way in which this hold can be taken up, to work as a relay” (13). I hold that these considerations lead to what I call aesthetics of endurance, which may be presupposed by aesthetics of friction since they put into question how some holds hold, while others do not, or hold less well. I argue that these considerations are entangled with what I call the politics of smell—perhaps the most evanescent sense.

Chapter V – Aesthetics of Endurance: the Politics of Smell

*They smell your breath
lest you have said: I love you,
They smell your heart:
These are strange times, my dear....
They chop smiles off lips,
and songs off the mouth...
These are strange times, my dear.*

Ahmad Shamlou (in Bahari 2011, 6)

A whiff of import

The lines cited above were reportedly written in 1979. They serve as the epigraph to Maziar Bahari's *Then They Came for Me. A Family's Story of Love, Captivity, and Survival*, which recounts Bahari's time in Evin Prison, Tehran, following the mass contestations of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's reelection as president of Iran in 2009¹⁵¹. Early in the book, the Canadian-Iranian journalist and artist tells of his weeks in Tehran before the election. He mentions that Shamlou's poem cropped up in a conversation with young people in a bazaar who expressed their rejection of the Islamic Republic:

To me, Farzad, Tina, and their friends were not silent victims of the Islamic government's close-mindedness; they were loud rebels. They risked severe punishment for living the way they wanted to. "You remember Shamlou's poem?" Farzad asked me. He then recited the Iranian poet

¹⁵¹ The title page of *Then They Came for Me* lists the author as "Maziar Bahari, with Aimee Molloy". I refer to the book as Bahari's since in his acknowledgments, he explains thusly the role of Molloy, who is co-author of three other biographical books: "My co-writer, Aimee Molloy, put my scattered thoughts together and helped me get over my fear of writing my first book and the trauma of remembering the ordeal" (Bahari 2011, 276-7). Bahari then lists a dozen other people who made suggestions that "took the book to another level" (277), and read the first draft. This collaborative aspect of the book makes it uncertain that the articulation of the olfactory tropes I am interested in is effectively due to Bahari himself. In what follows I assume a "oneness" of authorship, but this texturing note should be kept in mind.

Ahmad Shamlou's lines about the erratic behavior of the Islamic government in the years following the revolution. [...] Everyone in the group became silent as Farzad repeated the poem's refrain. "Our parents may have allowed the government thugs to smell their breath," Farzad said defiantly. "But our generation fights back." (Bahari 2011, 36)

This passage is not the only one mobilizing the sense of smell. Put under the auspices of Shamlou's words, the book begins with a prologue that recalls Kafka's *Trial* as the reader is told from the outset how a small group of men came to arrest Bahari, waking him up at dawn in the home of his mother, whom he was visiting. The ensuing series of events, the 118 days during which Bahari was held captive, is rather Kafkaesque, and Bahari writes that, as he was being taken into custody, he "thought of Kafka's character Josef K., from *The Trial*, getting arrested by men he thought were pulling a practical joke" (100). Contrary to the case of Josef K., however, the reasons for his detention were soon made clear to him: the journalist was suspected of spying in Iran on behalf of "CIA, MI6, Mossad, and *Newsweek*" (107). The prologue begins thusly:

I could smell him before I saw him. His scent was a mixture of sweat and rosewater, and it reminded me of my youth. /When I was six years old, I would often accompany my aunts to a shrine in the holy city of Qom. It was customary to remove your shoes before entering the shrine, and the caretakers of the shrine would sprinkle rosewater everywhere, to mask the odor of perspiration and leather. /That morning in June 2009, when they came for me, I was in the delicate space between sleep and wakefulness, taking in his scent. I didn't realize that I was a man of forty-two in my bedroom in Tehran; I thought, instead, that I was six years old again, and back in that shrine with my aunts (8).

From the next page onward, Bahari calls this man who was to become his torturer—or, in the euphemistic lingua of Evin's bureaucracy, his personal "specialist"—Rosewater.

Throughout the book, mentions of that peculiar scent often accompany the appearances of this member of the Revolutionary Guards. The first time Bahari was going to be interrogated, he felt a man approaching: “I could tell by his scent and voice as he greeted the guard that it was Rosewater” (107). And then: “Rosewater walked around me. The smell of his sweat overpowered the scent of his perfume.” On the ninth night of his captivity, as he was brought, blindfolded, to meet with a high official, Bahari was “[shown] inside a room where people were speaking in hushed tones. The smell of sweat, feet, and rosewater was strong” (140), which suggests Revolutionary Guards tend to wear that same perfume. On another occasion, Bahari “recognized Rosewater from his slippers and, of course, his smell” (155), and could later tell “[he] moved away from me but remained in the room. I could smell his stench” (156). In the last lines of the book, Bahari, who was released after an international support campaign, writes:

One of these days I’ll send [Rosewater] a package, addressed care of Evin Prison, Tehran, Iran. The package will include a plane ticket to New Jersey [a place the “specialist” thought was “godless [...] With naked women and Michael Jackson music!” (123)], a collection of Chekhov plays [whom Rosewater suspected of being a Jewish accomplice of Bahari], and a Leonard Cohen CD [of songs that Bahari often recalled in prison]. And, before I forget, a new perfume. / [Rosewater] may still hold a personal grudge against me, but I can honestly say that I feel no animosity toward him. In the first few weeks after my release, I was practically allergic to the smell of rosewater—one whiff would make me nauseous—and I dreamt of him almost every night. [...] These days I rarely have nightmares about Rosewater; even the scent doesn’t bother me anymore (273).

Beside this remarkable motif, this lingering spoor of rosewater that punctuates the book, it is notable that many other scents are interwoven with various reminiscences.

In a manner that it is now customary to call Proustian, food smells, in particular, are endowed with the capacity to evoke memories, scenes from the past, as well as dreams or fantasies whose temporality is less linear¹⁵². The most creative use of scents, however, is probably their mobilization as means of “torturing back” the torturer. Rosewater was eager to gather details on Bahari’s travels, and once asked: “Why do you go to Thailand?” (209). Bahari writes: “I was going to explain that Thailand was a transit stop to Cambodia, but I had been through days of beatings, and my body ached. I was also tired of these very personal questions. At that moment, I had an idea: maybe it was time to give him what he wanted, in a tactical move to distract him from my personal life.” (209-10) He decided to tell Rosewater a “shameful secret”, that he liked “sexual massages”, and then crafted a detailed olfactory description:

“When [the masseuse] is totally naked, she rubs her body with herbal oil. It smells so good.” /“Like what?” [Rosewater queried] /“It’s hard to explain. *You’d have to be there in the room to understand it.* The smell I like best reminds me of tropical forests in the morning after a long rainy night. You can just forget all your problems by inhaling the fresh air.” Rosewater was hooked. He wasn’t saying a word. I have to admit, I was enjoying my made-up story as well. “Before she climbs on top of you to begin the

¹⁵² Apart from “pre-Evin” olfactory encounters, such as “the sweet scent of *gaz*, which may be one of the most delicious confections in the world (and one of the main causes of cavities in Iran)” (Bahari 2011, 47-8), and the smell “of sweat and alcohol” on one of his sources after the presidential election (76), the smells of stews seem to have been the most evocative ones for Bahari—for better or for worse. Describing his first night in Evin, he writes: “I had had nothing to eat except for the breakfast at my mother’s house. When I took off the blindfold inside the cell, my lunch and dinner were both there. The lunch was bread and *ghaymeh*, a Persian stew with lamb, split peas, dried lemon, and rice. I’ve always loved the taste of *ghaymeh*, especially the way my mother made it, with eggplant. I missed the bitter, sour taste of dried lemon. I grabbed the plate of *ghaymeh*, eager to devour it, until I saw that it had been there so long, it had almost congealed. Its smell nauseated me” (110). Later, twenty days into his captivity, on the first time he was authorized a pen and some paper in his cell—to write his “confession”—, Bahari started doodling: “I saw my family sitting together. In this mixture of memory and fantasy, it was lunchtime, and my father had taken his usual seat at the table, a glass of illegally produced vodka in one hand. My mother was in the kitchen, and the smell of simmering herbs from the north of Iran filled the large apartment. She was making *ghormeh sabzi*, a lamb stew with kidney beans and vegetables. As I drew my mother in the kitchen, standing by the stove, I could smell the simmering dill, parsley, leeks, and spinach and taste the tender pieces of lamb steeped in the herbs” (168-9). On the spectacle of forced confessions following the 2009 protests in Iran, see Shohadaei 2010.

massage, you can smell the herbs. The smell relaxes you right away.” /Rosewater sighed quietly. I knew that with my story, I was torturing this miserable man, who spent all his time in dark cells beating and torturing innocent people. That gave me such pleasure (210; I underline).

Smells, be they “immediate” or mediated by language as a remote, absent immediacy, can both disgust and seduce. The “same” scent seems capable of both, depending on density and other compositional traits that make “the same” actually quite different. Bahari’s tweakings of the “Proustian” tie between smell and recollection, his tactical uses of this knot both in his relation with Rosewater and in the narration of his story, suggest that if smell is the most intimate of the senses, the one that is most inevitably involved in close, proximate encounters with others, it also has the power to bring what is most remote to the forefront of one’s attention, of one’s horizon of concerns, thereby modulating presences and absences in more or less bearable, endurable ways¹⁵³.

¹⁵³ The passage cited on “herbal oil” arguably has the function of “humanizing” Rosewater by showing a “common humanity” tied to desire that may have a chance to modulate, and even diminish violences. In a recent article in *The New Yorker* portraying Qassem Suleimani, “the head of Iran’s Quds Force, the ‘most powerful operative in the Middle East today’” (Filkins 2013), who is advising Iran’s allies on the ground and has been fighting in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, this man is also “humanized” through an olfactory scene. Journalist Dexter Filkins writes: “At the funeral [of a senior commander of the Revolutionary Guards’ elite branch, the Quds Force’s Hassan Shateri], Suleimani was dressed in a black jacket and a black shirt with no tie, in the Iranian style; his long, angular face and his arched eyebrows were twisted with pain. The Quds Force had never lost such a high-ranking officer abroad. The day before the funeral, Suleimani had traveled to Shateri’s home to offer condolences to his family. He has a fierce attachment to martyred soldiers, and often visits their families; in a recent interview with Iranian media, he said, ‘When I see the children of the martyrs, I want to smell their scent, and I lose myself.’” For a succinct account of the importance of “the myth of martyrdom” in Shia Islam generally, and its intertwinement with messianic tropes in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s defense ideology in particular, see Nasr 2006 (130-6). With regard to Bahari’s use of imaginary scents as a “weapon”, it should be noted that his story did not stop the violences inflicted upon him by Rosewater. Moreover, the acknowledged violence of Bahari’s own storytelling—“I knew that with my story, I was torturing this miserable man”—should be juxtaposed with how, at the end of his book, Bahari presents himself as a partisan of nonviolence, writing: “What seems to be particularly incensing to the Guards is my invitation to nonviolence and peaceful resistance against Khamenei’s regime. In almost all the interviews I’ve done since my release, I’ve emphasized that the most successful achievement of the regime would be transforming the opposition into a mirror image of the regime itself: a vicious, bigoted thug. ‘The Guards understand violence,’ an Iranian diplomat told me. ‘But your insistence on nonviolence is difficult for them to fathom, and because of that they are cursing themselves for letting you go.’” (Bahari 2011, 273) The scene of “olfactory torture” puts into question what counts as nonviolence. Below, I return to the relationship between smell and language, and to the immediate/mediated distinction, which can rapidly become untenable.

Bahari's story puts into play a number of distributions of flair—a word descending from the French *flairer*, to sniff at, to scent—and endurance. Both Bahari and Rosewater seem to believe they “smelled a rat”, that they detected what the other was up to, or at least, that the other was up to *something*. Rosewater may have had good reasons to equate a journalist with a spy since both professions appear to require “sniffing around”, tracking scents to gather information that is not out in the open and may even be willfully concealed. Bahari, for his part, soon gathered his arrest and detention were meant to send off a clear signal to others who could be considering “sticking their nose” in the business of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Basij members in charge of putting the lid on the Green Movement of anti-Ahmadinejad protests (see Golkar 2010; Postel 2010). Both appear to have assumed the other was deeply misguided, corrupt, even rotten perhaps, that great forces he did not comprehend were “leading him by the nose”, as it were, and that time, along with various means of pressure, could foster a transformation.

These considerations further suggest that this distribution of flair and endurance may well act as a metonymy of a broader distribution, one whose subjects may be personified by the names of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, and Barack Obama, the President of the United States of America—or by the names of each side's multiple allies. The Great Politics of mutual deception effectively appear to require having or developing quite a good nose, as appeasement itself can be considered a smokescreen¹⁵⁴. To put it in a pungent register suggested by the imagery of smell, that

¹⁵⁴ Consider, for instance, the claims on the diplomatic relationships between Iran and the United States circulating in the autumn of 2013, a few weeks after the intense summer marked by the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and threats of military air strikes by the United States. Iran's new President, Hassan Rouhani, phoned President Obama on the first day of October, engaging in the “first presidential phone conversation between US and Iran since 1979” (Dehghan 2013). This was read as a “step back” for the “radicals” in Teheran—Rouhani being presented as a “moderate”. A few days later however, Khamenei voiced concerns about appeasement, asserting: “The American government is untrustworthy, disloyal,

no rat is smelled can mean there is no rat to detect, but given how *saturation* is a characteristic trait of olfaction (Laszlo 2003, 9-10), it can also mean one has been in the company of rats for sufficiently long for the nose to stop detecting rat-smell as important, noticeable molecules. In that sense, the entity endowed with the most endurance is not necessarily the better off—depending upon what endurance means.

1. Politics and/as endurance: holding on, holding your nose

In this fifth chapter, I engage the following hypothesis: *aesthetics of endurance act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of capacities*. Formulations of what matters politically in terms of capacities abound. For one, claims that phrase a truth of political importance—*this* truly matters, *that* is in fact negligible—tend to weave stories about a variable ability to bear this truth. A distinction between those who can bear it and those who find it untenable—whether “those” are individuals, groups, institutions, or some other entity—is traced by both those who claim that the truth of political importance is necessarily eternal, and those who claim this truth, if there is one, is utterly variable, unstable, contingent and situated. The reasons put forward to ground the differentiation of those who can handle the truth—be it the truth that there is no Truth—from those who cannot, cover rather vast terrains. A durable trope has it that there is something in or with the truth itself—again, even, or perhaps especially if this truth is that “nothing is true, everything is permitted”—that is or

considers itself superior and breaks its promises” (cited in Rezaian 2013). For his part, hours before that phone call, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird asked in a speech to the United Nation’s General Assembly “not to be taken by Iranian charm offensives”, even “evoking the memory of the failed appeasement of Nazi Germany in the year before the Second World War” (Blanchfield 2013). The interwoven discourses on the desire and the possibility for Iran to develop the capacity to build a nuclear bomb are a remarkable site for studying mutual distrust. Below, in the second and third folds of this chapter, I engage the relationship between the politics of smell, the explication of bio-chemistry, and aesthetics of endurance.

that makes it unbearable for most, if not for all¹⁵⁵. The capacity to bear, to sustain, maintain, or support what matters, to accept, tolerate, or persist *in* it, to endure *through* it, is in that sense a general matter of concerns. Dealing, coming to grips with what matters politically is thereby framed as a matter of capability, of strength, and political life is phrased as a matter of power, of force—or forces, if there are necessarily many. For variations in distributions of political importance to be functions of variable capacities, aesthetics of endurance are required as capacities themselves are only differentiable in ways that are more or less persistent, enduring.

1.1 “The social question is not only an ethical one, but also a nasal question”

I hold that this fifth and last specific hypothesis articulated to the general hypothesis that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of importance is most

¹⁵⁵ In Book V of *The Republic*, for example, Plato’s Socrates describes “the lover of opinion”, as opposed to “the lover of wisdom”, as “that good man who doesn’t believe that there is anything fair in itself and an *idea* of the beautiful itself, which always stays the same in all respects, but does hold that there are many fair things, this lover of sights who can in no way endure it if anyone asserts the fair is one and so on with the rest” (Plato 1991 [ca. 380 BCE], 479a). Such men, according to Plato’s Socrates, “love and look at fair sounds and colors and such things but *can’t even endure the fact that the fair itself is something*” (480a; I underline). As discussed in Chapter III, the incapacity to bear the existence of a truth is held as a “democratic” temperament.

Nietzsche, for his part, attributes the “aristocratic” sentence “nothing is true, everything is permitted” to the order of the Assassins in his discussion of scholars who see themselves as opponents to the ascetic ideals, but who are “by no means *free* spirits: *for they still believe in truth*... When the Christian crusaders in the Orient came across that invincible order of Assassins, that order of free spirits *par excellence* whose lowest degree lived in an obedience the like of which no order of monks has attained, they also received, through some channel or other, a hint about that symbol and tally-word reserved for the uppermost degrees alone, as their *secretum*: ‘nothing is true, everything is permitted’... Now *that was freedom* of the spirit, *with that*, belief in truth itself was *renounced*... Has any European, any Christian free spirit ever lost his way in this proposition and its labyrinthine *consequences*? does he know the Minotaur of this cave *from experience*?... I doubt it, still more, I know otherwise:—nothing is more foreign to these who are unconditional on one point, these *so-called* ‘free spirit,’ than precisely freedom and breaking one’s fetters in this sense, in no respect are they more firmly bound; precisely in their belief in truth they are more firm and unconditional than anyone else. I know all of this from too close a proximity perhaps: that commendable philosophers’ abstinence to which such a belief obligates; that stoicism of the intellect that finally forbids itself a ‘no’ just as strictly as a ‘yes’; that *wanting* to halt before the factual, the *factum brutum*; that fatalism of ‘*petits faits*’ (*ce petit faitalisme*, as I call it), in which French science now seeks a kind of moral superiority over German science, that renunciation of all interpretation (of doing violence, pressing into orderly form, abridging, omitting, padding, fabricating, falsifying and whatever else belongs to the *essence* of all interpreting)—broadly speaking, this expresses asceticism of virtue as forcefully as does any negation of sensuality (it is basically only a *modus* of this negation)” (Nietzsche 1998 [1887], III:24, 109). Nietzsche argues that what is at stake, including in “Platonism”, is a *belief* in truth: “a ‘belief’ must always be there first so that science can derive a direction from it, a meaning, a boundary, a method, a *right* to existence” (110). I return to Nietzsche below.

productively engaged through the politics of smell. To map this hold, to give reasons, if you will, for adopting this stance on a privileged tie between aesthetics of endurance and the politics of smell, I first refold this last phrase and engage what this sense entails.

In the first, political fold of two previous chapters, above, I indicated that a rather common trope has it that, in Western thought, smell is one of the most neglected senses of the age-old fivefold, and perhaps the most neglected sense. In Chapter IV, I cited Serres' claim that "Many philosophies refer to sight; few to hearing; fewer still place their trust in the tactile, or olfactory" (Serres 2008 [1985], 26), and I then engaged aesthetics of friction through the politics of touch. In Chapter I, I began refolding claims on the prevalence of ocularcentrism by citing a review of Serres' *The Fives Senses* in which one reads that, amid "the theoretical turn toward affect and sensibility[,] the tendency is to insist on the prioritisation of one 'repressed' sense (e.g. touch) above another 'dominant' sense (e.g. vision). Thus the agenda is set to turn from visual culture to auditory culture, olfactory culture and so on" (Brown 2011, 162)¹⁵⁶. This trope of neglect is reiterated in recent works that explicitly attempt to draw attention to the political significance of the sense of smell. Qian Hui Tan, for example, in "Smell in the City: Smoking and Olfactory Politics", studies the relationships between smokers and non-smokers in Singapore, writing that in the works of geographers promoting "sensory urbanism" who "identified the overlaps between perceived unhealthiness and exclusion,

¹⁵⁶ To be fair, Brown explicitly argues that Serres escapes this tendency, as he continues: "Serres, by contrast, provides a challenge to the template on which we consider sensation itself and its relationship to philosophies of knowledge. Rather than consider these issues in the abstract or through direct discussion of key philosophical precursors, Serres chooses an empirical path. Every page is alive with rich descriptions of feeling, sensing, apprehending, engaging, living. This is a vibrant text that is at time overwhelming in its channeling of the noise of the world as it erupts through the body" (Brown 2011, 162-3). For a critique of Serres' empiricism as being, in the end, identical with scientific positivism, see Kroker & Cook 1991, 189-214; for Serres' reading of Nietzsche as expressing a certain "postivism"—and how "we have learned to detest this word"—, see Serres 1977 (177). I return to Serres' reading of Nietzsche below.

there has been overwhelming preoccupation with an ocularcentric apprehension and surveillance of public space [...]. This privileging of the visual discounts how other sensory modalities such as olfaction intersect with discourses of pathology and function as factors contributing to one's sensual-spatial disenfranchisement" (Tan 2013, 56-7)¹⁵⁷. Accounts from "specialist[s] of smell, scents, and perfume" are somewhat more nuanced as they tend to assert that "Long considered negligible, smell has become fashionable for some time now. A great number of scientific, professional, journalistic publications echo the vivid interest taken in this fascinating and still mysterious sense" (Le Guérer 1998, 9; I translate). Some scholars even use the phrase "smell studies" to designate a "multidisciplinary" field ranging "from anthropology to zoology, via sciences and history" (Brant 2008, 544)—a small, open field, but a field nonetheless.

These considerations are not only interesting because they exemplify how claims to scholarly—and, in that sense, claims to political—importance tend to posit "a large and troubling hole at the centre of the subject" (Sutherland 1988, 574), in order to subsequently claim to significantly fill this detected hole. They also matter, here, because claims on the extent to which the sense of smell has been and is still neglected tend to

¹⁵⁷ In the introduction to his seminal 1985 article "Smellscape", University of Victoria geographer J. Douglas Porteous writes very similar lines: "Except in the realms of neurophysiology and psychology, little research has been done on smell. Checking through the planning literature on urban aesthetics from the early 1950s to 1984 I find considerable lipservice has been paid to the obvious notion that the urban environment is a multisensory experience. We are enjoined to study smell, sound and taste. But *this, inevitably, is an initial ploy which is followed by discussion of merely visual aesthetics*. The landscape assessment literature is worse, for here the issue is almost always 'visual quality' and practitioners continue to visualize landscapes in neopicturesques terms" (Porteous 1985, 357; I underline). The neglect of smell tends to be attributed to the difficulties involved in studying this sense scientifically. Porteous, for instance, cites psychologist E. G. Boring who "suggested that, in the 1940s, the study of smell was at the same scientific level as that of sight and hearing in 1750! Thanks to recent work in Scandinavia and by the research team led by Engen at Brown University, the gap has now been reduced, although much remains to be learned about odour stimuli, acuity, coding and memory" (358). For an explicit and diverse engagement with the relationships between geography and smells, see *Géographie des odeurs* (Dulau & Pitte 1998), which gathers fifteen essays presented by some twenty scholars on the occasion of a conference held at the Pierrefonds castle in France. The fact that this is a French book offers a first occasion to note the persistence of a "nationalism of smells"—in many ways, it seems "Frenchness still sanction scentedness" (Brant 2008, 556), for example.

weave accounts of the singular properties of this sense in order to give reasons for the kind of attention that it has been and is being paid. On the back cover of *The Smell Culture Reader* (Drobnick 2006), for instance, a book whose very existence bears witness to a contemporary scholarly interest for olfaction, one reads it “provides a much-needed overview of what is arguably our most elusive sense”. In the introduction to *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*, the authors advance that “In spite of its importance to our emotional and sensory lives, smell is probably the most undervalued sense in the modern West” (Classen, Howes & Synnot 2003 [1994], 3). Their account of this undervaluation also hinges on the “elusive” character of this allegedly lower sense:

The reason often given for the low regard in which smell is held is that, in comparison with its importance among animals, the human sense of smell is feeble and atrophied. While it is true that the olfactory powers of humans are nothing like as fine as those possessed by certain animals, they are still remarkably acute. Our noses are able to recognize thousands of smells, and to perceive odours which are present only in infinitesimally small quantities. /Smell, however, is a highly elusive phenomenon. Odours, unlike colours, for instance, cannot be named—at least not in European languages. ‘It smells like...’, we have to say when describing an odour, groping to express our olfactory experience by means of metaphors. Nor can odours be recorded: there is no effective way of either capturing scents or storing them over time. In the realm of olfaction, we must make do with descriptions and recollections¹⁵⁸.

The authors further weave a historical account of the Western-Modern neglect of smell, writing: “The philosophers and scientists [of the 18th and 19th centuries] decided that,

¹⁵⁸ On this last point, it is interesting to note that on April 1, 2013, the Google website presented “Google Nose^{BETA}”, claiming it “leverages new and existing technologies to offer the sharpest olfactory experience available: /Street Sense vehicles have inhaled and indexed millions of atmospheric miles. /Android Ambient Odor Detection collects smells via the world’s most sensible mobile operating system. /SMELLCD™ 1.8+ high-resolution compatible for precise and controlled odors” (see <http://www.google.com/landing/nose/> (Accessed October 5, 2013)). This was an April Fool’s Day joke, but journalists seized the opportunity to underline that some companies are currently working on an “electronic nose that will come pre-programmed with a database of all sorts of smells” (Kliff 2013).

while sight was the preeminent sense of reason and civilization, smell was the sense of madness and savagery. In the course of human evolution, it was argued by Darwin, Freud and others, the sense of smell had been left behind and that of sight had taken priority. [...] Smell has been ‘silenced’ in modernity” (4)¹⁵⁹. This “decision” to devalue smell is

¹⁵⁹ Freud argues that “the sense of smell ha[s] been left behind and that of sight ha[s] taken priority” in two long footnotes to section IV of *Civilization and its Discontents*, as he speculates on “primal man” and “the process of civilization”. The first note is worth citing at length as it offers a seminal account of what will come to be termed abjection, and as it puts into question the claim that the devaluation of smell is the result of a “decision”. Freud writes: “The organic periodicity of the sexual process has persisted, it is true, but its effect on psychical sexual excitation has rather been reversed. This change seems most likely to be connected with the diminution of the olfactory stimuli by means of which the menstrual process produced an effect on the male psyche. Their role was taken over by visual excitations, which, in contrast to the intermittent olfactory stimuli, were able to maintain a permanent effect. The taboo on menstruation is derived from this ‘organic repression’, as a defence against a phase of development that has been surmounted. All other motives are probably of a secondary nature. [...] This process is repeated on another level when the gods of a superseded period of civilization turn into demons. The diminution of the olfactory stimuli seems itself to be a consequence of man’s raising himself from the ground, of his assumption of an upright gait; this made his genitals, which were previously concealed, visible and in need of protection, and so provoked feelings of shame in him. /The fateful process of civilization would thus have set in with man’s adoption of an erect posture. From that point the chain of events would have proceeded through the devaluation of olfactory stimuli and the isolation of the menstrual period to the time when visual stimuli were paramount and the genitals became visible, and thence to the continuity of sexual excitation, the founding of the family and so to the threshold of human civilization. This is only a theoretical speculation, but it is important enough to deserve careful checking with reference to the conditions of life which obtain among animals closely related to man. /A social factor is also unmistakably present in the cultural trend towards cleanliness, which has received *ex post facto* justification in hygienic considerations but which manifested itself before their discovery. The incitement to cleanliness originates in an urge to get rid of the excreta, which have become disagreeable to the sense perceptions. We know that in the nursery things are different. The excreta arouse no disgust in children. They seem valuable to them as being a part of their own body which has come away from it. Here upbringing insists with special energy on hastening the course of development which lies ahead, and which should make the excreta worthless, disgusting, abhorrent and abominable. Such a reversal of values would scarcely be possible if the substances that are expelled from the body were not doomed by their strong smells to share the fate which overtook olfactory stimuli after man adopted the erect posture. Anal erotism, therefore, succumbs in the first instance to the ‘organic repression’ which paved the way to civilization. The existence of the social factor which is responsible for the further transformation of anal erotism is attested by the circumstance that, in spite of all man’s developmental advances, he scarcely finds *his own* excreta repulsive, but only that of other people’s. Thus a person who is not clean—who does not hide his excreta—is offending other people; he is showing no consideration for them. And this is confirmed by our strongest and commonest terms of abuse. It would be incomprehensible, too, that man should use the name of his most faithful friend in the animal world—the dog—as a term of abuse if that creature had not incurred his contempt through two characteristics: that it is an animal whose dominant sense is that of smell and one which has no horror of excrement, and that it is not ashamed of its sexual functions” (Freud 1962 [1931], 46-7n1). Note that the characteristics mentioned are arguably shared by the pig, and that “the term ‘pig’ function[s] as a resonant device for marginalization and a catch-all term for those deserving rejection. [...] Their affective impact – the sense, that is, that reacts to them – is olfaction” (Nugent 2009, 289).

Freud’s second note on smell deals with “sexual difference”, and with how “For psychology the contrast between the sexes fades away into one between activity and passivity, in which we far too readily identify activity with maleness and passivity with femaleness, a view which is by no means universally confirmed in the animal kingdom” (Freud 1962 [1931], 52-3n3). The psychoanalyst insists on a relation between smell and endurance, or tolerance, by arguing that “with the assumption of an erect posture by man and with the depreciation of his sense of smell, it was not only his anal erotism which threatened to fall victim

itself attributed to the singularity of this sense, to how “[it] is felt to threaten the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority, its boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency [while] sight, as the most detached sense (by Western standards), provides *the* model for modern bureaucratic society” (5). Such stories instantiate broader sociological claims on how “Western-Modernity” involves singular “smellscapes” (e.g. Sliwa & Riach 2012; Nugent 2009; Porteous 1985) that result from odorization, deodorization, and reodorization¹⁶⁰.

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In his “Excursus on the Sociology of Sense Impression”, partially discussed in Chapter III to refold the singularities of hearing in contradistinction with those of sight, Simmel claimed “The sociological importance of the lower senses diminishes before that of sight and sound, although that of smell not so much as the particular dullness and lack of potential for the development of its impressions leads one to assume” (Simmel 2009 [1908], 577). The enduring “sociological importance” of this sense is attributed to how

to organic repression, but the whole of his sexuality. [...] The genitals, too, give rise to strong sensations of smell *which many people cannot tolerate* and which spoil sexual intercourse for them. Thus we should find that the deepest root of the sexual repression which advances along with civilization is the organic defense of the new form of life achieved with man’s erect gait against his earlier animal existence. [...] Nevertheless, these things are at present no more than unconfirmed possibilities which have not been substantiated by science. Nor should we forget that, in spite of the undeniable depreciation of olfactory stimuli, there exists even in Europe peoples among whom the strong genital odours which are so repellent to us are highly prized as sexual stimulants and *who refuse to give them up*” (I underline). The verb “to refuse”, here, makes it unclear whether this is a conscious or unconscious valuation.

¹⁶⁰ Porteous is the creator of the concept of “smellscape”, which he articulates onto R. Murray Schafer’s concept of soundscape, writing: “The concept of smellscape suggests that, like visual impression, smells may be spatially ordered or place-related. It is clear, however, that any conceptualization of smellscape must recognize that the perceived smellscape will be non-continuous, fragmentary in space and episodic in time, and limited by the height of our noses from the ground, where smells tend to linger. Smellscapes, moreover, cannot be considered apart from the other senses. [...] A basic spatial vocabulary can be derived from soundscape studies (Schafer, 1977). Soundscapes consist of sound events, some of which are soundmarks (cf. landmarks). Similarly, smellscapes will involve *smell events* and *smellmarks*. Eyewitness is replaced by earwitness and *nosewitness*. Visual evidence becomes hearsay and *nosesay*. The heightening of visual perception becomes earcleaning and *nose-training*” (Porteous 1985, 360).

Smell does not form an object from within itself, as sight or sound, but remains, so to speak, self-conscious within the subject; what is symbolized by it is that there are no independent, objective descriptive expressions for its differences. If we say: it smells sour, that means only that it smells like something that tastes sour. To a completely different degree from the sensations of those senses, those of smell escape descriptions with words; they are not to be projected onto the level of abstraction. Instinctive antipathies and sympathies that are attached to the olfactory sphere surrounding people and those, for example, that become important for the relationship of two races living on the same territory, find all the less resistance of thought and volition.

Simmel then proceeds to give examples of what this last claim implies, writing: “The reception of Africans into the higher levels of society in North America seems impossible from the outset because of their bodily atmosphere, and the aversion of Jews and Germans toward each other is often attributed to this same cause”. He then adds:

The personal contact between cultivated people and workers, so often enthusiastically advocated for the social development of the present, which is also recognized by the cultivated as the ethical ideal of closing the gap between two worlds “of which one does not know how the other lives,” simply fails before *the insurmountable nature of the olfactory sense impressions*. Certainly, many members of the upper strata, if it were necessary in the interest of social morality, would make considerable sacrifices of personal comfort and do without various preferences and enjoyments in favor of the disinherited, and the fact that this has not yet happened to a greater degree is clearly because the forms that are quite suitable for them have not been found yet. But one would have taken on all such sacrifices and dedication a thousand times more readily than the physical contact with the people onto whom “the venerable perspiration of work” clings. The social question is not only an ethical one, but also a nasal question. But admittedly this also works on the positive side: no sight of the plight of the proletariat, even less the most realistic report about it, viewed from the most striking cases of all, will overpower us so sensually and immediately as the

atmosphere, when we step into a basement apartment or a bar (577-8; I underline).

These lines vividly phrase the so-called visceral character of both “race relations” and “class relations” as a function of the discriminatory capacity of the sense of smell.

For Simmel, “Modern people are choked by countless things, unendurably countless things appear to them through the senses, which a more undifferentiated and more robust manner of sensing accepts without any reaction of [suffering and repulsion]” (578). These considerations bear on smell as it seems “from the start a sense positioned more for the proximate, in contrast to sight and sound”. Smell is arguably the most intimate of the senses: “That we smell the atmosphere of somebody” means that

that person penetrates, so to speak, in the form of air, into our most inner senses, and it is obvious that this must lead to *a choosing and a distancing* with a heightened sensitivity toward olfactory impressions altogether, which to some extent forms one of the sensory bases for the social reserve of the modern individual. It is noteworthy that someone of such fanatically exclusive individualism as Nietzsche often said openly of the type of person most hateful to him, “they do not smell good.” If the other senses build a thousand bridges among people, if they can soothe over with attractions the repulsions that they repeatedly cause, if weaving together the positive and negative values of their feelings gives the total concrete relationships among people their coloration, one can note, by way of contrast, that *the sense of smell is the dissociating sense*. Not only because it communicates many more repulsions than attractions, not only because its judgments have something of the radical and unappealing that lets it be overcome only with difficulty by the judgments of the other senses or minds, but also precisely because *the bringing together of the many never grants it any such attractions as that situation can unfold them for the other senses, at least under certain circumstances*: indeed, in general such interferences of the sense of smell will increase in a direct quantitative relation of the mass in whose midst they affect us (578-9; I underline).

This “sensory-irrational immediacy” (583) of smell thus modulates what imports¹⁶¹.

1.2 A politology of enduring fumes

Studies engaging the politics of smell tend to follow Simmel in locating its political quality—or what is politically significant with olfaction—in this sense’s capacity for immediate discrimination. Olfactory discrimination is the power to distinguish “pairs of similar odors: those given off by a chamomile or a linden infusion, by a wisteria or a honeysuckle flower, by a wine from Bordeaux or from Bourgueil” (Laszlo 2003, 7; I translate). At the same time, it is the power to differentiate “the pleasant and the unpleasant, the known and the unknown” (Le Guérer 1998, 36). Interestingly, the distinction between pleasant and unpleasant tends to correspond to that between the known and the unknown, and with that of “good” and “bad” smells. The latter distinction

¹⁶¹ As Annick Le Guérer remarks, Simmel’s apprehension of smell as “the dissociating sense” bears the mark of “Kant’s critique” (Le Guérer 1998, 40). In Book I (“On the cognitive faculty”) of Part I (“Anthropological Didactic”) of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, for example, Kant qualifies “The senses of taste and smell [as] both more subjective than objective” (Kant 2006 [1798], 49). These “two lower” senses are of “chemical influence”, rather than of “mechanical” influence; they are not senses “of perception (of the surface)”, but “senses of pleasure (of the most intimate taking into ourselves). – Thus it happens that *nausea*, an impulse to free oneself of food through the shortest way out of the esophagus (to vomit), has been allotted to the human being as such a strong vital sensation, for this intimate taking can be dangerous to the animal”. Note how this last sentence rationalizes, grounds the “gut-reaction” to repugnant smells in something like an animalistic sense of survival. I return to this trope throughout this chapter.

Kant then writes, in a phrasing that prefigures Simmel’s claims: “*Smell* is taste at a distance, so to speak, and others are forced to share the pleasure of it, whether they want to or not. And thus smell is contrary to freedom and less sociable than taste, where among many dishes or bottles a guest can choose one according to his liking, without others being forced to share the pleasure of it. – Filth seems to arouse nausea not so much through what is repugnant to the eyes and tongue as through the stench that we presume it has. For taking something in through smell (in the lungs) is even more intimate than taking something in through the absorptive vessels of the mouth or throat” (50). To the question “Which organic sense is the most ungrateful and also seems to be the most dispensable?”, Kant answers: “The sense of *smell*. It does not pay to cultivate it or refine it at all; for there are more disgusting objects than pleasant ones (especially in crowded places), and even when we come across something fragrant, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell is always fleeting and transient. – But as a negative condition of well-being, this sense is not unimportant, in order not to breathe in bad air (oven fumes, the stench of swamps and animal carcasses), or also not to need rotten things for nourishment” (50-1). To this last sentence, the editors append a footnote that reads: “*Marginal note in H*: Smell does not allow itself to be described, but only compared through the similarity with another sense (like music with the play of colors), for example, of taste, to compare, e.g., that which smells sour, sweet, rotten – faint odor of slate” (51-n52; note that *H* stands for *Handschrift*, meaning “the complete hand-written manuscript prepared by Kant” (xxxvi); the marginal note cited does not appear in the first and second editions, respectively published in 1798 and 1800. I leave to exegetes the question of whether Simmel had access to it.).

arguably justifies differential treatments of the “sources”—say, people—who are held to be the emitters and bearers of each type of scent: a favorable treatment seems fit for sources of good smells; bad smells incite avoidance, if not attempts at elimination.

A plethora of accounts relate foul smells to disease and to a danger of contamination or contagion¹⁶². Moreover, “olfactory repugnance is often conflated with moral repugnance [and] malodours are typically associated with moral laxity” (Tan 2013, 57). Slaughterhouses, tanneries and other odiferous industries tend to be confined to specific urban (or rather, peri-urban) neighborhoods that often acquire a bad reputation as pestholes, as sites of disease, pollution, poverty, corruption and immorality all at once precisely because they “smell”. The location of such industries is a political matter: “It is not by accident that the west ends of English cities are located upwind of the east ends where live ‘the great unwashed’. [I]n general the working classes had to adapt to noxious fumes while the well-off moved to suburbs or countryside” (Porteous 1985, 364-5). Eliminating, or at least confining “malodors” is a vibrant issue of life-in-common, perhaps especially at the municipal or local, “most proximate” level. There are, however, “global” dimensions to olfactory distributions. Beside long-enduring claims on how “some nations smell more than others – and certainly more than our own” (Nugent 2009, 284), contemporary conjunctures are marked by how “Western” work-spaces tend to adopt scent-free policies (Brant 2008, 556-8) while both the production and the disposal

¹⁶² Below, I return to the endurance of “miasma theory”, namely the belief that “poisonous emanations, from putrefying carcasses, rotting vegetation or molds[,] indivisible dust particles inside dwellings [...] enter the body and cause disease. This belief dates at least from classical Greece in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E., and it persisted, alongside other theories and models for disease causation, until the middle of the nineteenth century. To some extent the belief still persists today. [...] Some malaria control measures based on miasma theory, particularly draining swamps and marches, are part of modern control strategies; though not, of course, because miasmas cause malaria, but because mosquito breeding sites are eliminated” (Last 2002). Miasma continues to act as a strongly negative trope in contemporary conjunctures. Consider, for instance, the use of the phrase “organizational miasma” (Gabriel 2012) in management and organization studies.

of the computers used everyday in those “clean” work-spaces involve the emission of multiple “toxic vapors that attach to the nervous systems of underpaid laborers in China, India, and Ghana” (Parikka 2013), among other places.

An influential naturalizing and evolutionist story holds that smell is “an efficient warning device against contamination” (Porteous 1985, 356), and that its “importance in the matter of food, disease and sex suggests a basic species-survival function” (357). The “alerting, warning, function of smell” (358) seems to explain why foul smells are noticed at all: they signal potentially mortal dangers. In return, this association justifies interventions at “the source” of the bothering scents. Those who do not share one’s reaction of disgust can become suspicious, if only for an instant, for their lack of reaction to foulness suggests they are familiar, proximate with potential catalysts of death that may be clinging on to them, or that may have “contaminated” them already, without them noticing it. Fumes are indeed *the* model of insidiousness, of surreptitiousness...

It is the case that “The perceived intensity of smell declines rapidly after one has been exposed to it for some time. Not that the smell disappears, but the perceiver becomes habituated to it” (358). There is also “a strong tendency to judge unfamiliar smells as unpleasant”, and “little evidence that universally pleasant or unpleasant smells exist, unless the almost universal adult dislike of the faeces odour can be so considered” (359). In return, these remarks jeopardize the immediacy with which doing violence to a source of “bad smells” can be deemed a sound or necessary course of action, especially since numerous cautionary tales warn against the seductive powers of *good* smells—and even, perhaps, of the most pleasant of all smells—being used for “evil ends”¹⁶³.

¹⁶³ In her article “Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Late Medieval and Early Modern England”, Holly Dugan offers a reading, among other performances, of Shakespeare’s *Antony & Cleopatra*, in

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While it appears that different, more or less bearable or tolerable scents elicit different “gut-reactions”, justifying differential “rational” treatments of the scents’ sources, it also seems that past or ongoing differential treatments of “sources” affect one’s very capacity to detect and endure the same scent. In “An ecology of sensibility: The politics of scents and stigma in Japan”, a recent article concerned with the distinction between the “good” smell of leather in the form of a bottled aroma advertised as a purchasable sign of refinement, and the “bad” smell of leather associated with the stigmatized labor of Buraku people living in tanners’ neighborhoods, anthropologist Joseph Doyle Hankins cites an account written in the 1960s by American anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker in which she tells of a journey on a streetcar in her youth, “one hot August afternoon” as “people had to stand close to each other”. She writes: “A white woman standing by me complained of the smell of the Negroes; they did smell. I wondered about the white workers and moved next to them; they smelled, too. The blue cotton uniform which I wore as a playground teacher was wet with perspiration from my strenuous day. I then became aware that I smelled. The streetcar incident stood out as a discovery” (in Hankins 2013, 60). Hankins comments:

which “Cleopatra’s power to alter Roman, martial will is identified as an effect of her strange and invisible perfume” (Dugan 2008, 240). Cleopatra first appears through olfaction: her perfume is smelled long before she is seen. In that sense, what Clare Brant calls “the scent circle, the space an arm’s length around you” (Brant 2008, 547), is vastly extended in the case of this and other seductive figures. Dugan argues “olfaction provided a thematic, metaphoric—and perhaps material—tool to represent women on England’s all-male stages” (Dugan 2008, 239-40). More broadly, “Scents, as stage properties, fulfilled a host of practical purposes, fusing crowd control, religious symbolism, monarchical powers, civic procession, and mercantile interests with thematic content in a wide variety of dramatic performances. When read within the context of late medieval and early modern English stage history, these descriptions reveal that we have dramatically underestimated the ways in which the staging of smell mattered in the past” (233-4). The public use of incenses, in particular, seems to have been capable of evoking the projection of British power onto global trade routes, along with participation in the international political economy of spices and the particular scents associated with various local crafts, such as that of blacksmiths, tanners, and butchers.

Powdermaker's discovery was one of olfactory markedness. The streetcar was awash with bodily smells. However, only 'Negroes' were associated with the odor. The other white woman only marked, and felt comfortable remarking on, the smell of the black passengers. Powdermaker, along with the other white woman, recognized immediately that the black passengers smelled; it took detective work on her part, however – in the form of wonder, olfactory sleuthing, and a reorganization of her sensual awareness – to understand that white people, herself included, smelled as well. It took work for her to shift the types of demands placed on qualities of smell. Before that detective work was done, Powdermaker's selective sensual engagement with the smells of the black passengers felt natural and perhaps innocuous. Her white companion might dodge critiques of racism by asserting that she was simply stating a fact. Smell here functions as a covert interpretive repertoire, comprising affective (a feeling of disgust), energetic (a drawing back from the source of the perceived smell), and representational (a racialized frame through which such a reaction is justified) interpretants, that opens a path for white people in Powdermaker's example to maintain racial boundaries without appearing overtly racist (60-1).

Smell is indeed cultural, but there is a sense in which culture acts as a second nature.

Hankins' *mise en scène* of Powdermaker's story offers a powerful, if unwitting dramatization of William E. Connolly's claim, in his "Critique of pure politics", that

Disgust, in my reading, is reducible neither to the manifestation of a spontaneous accord of the faculties nor to a brute datum of the body. It is a complex corporeo-cultural code of feeling scripted into the cortical organization of the stomach and the brain. Moreover, since disgust, when it becomes strong enough to turn the stomach, can easily foster thoughtlessness, the cultural organization of disgust has profound implications for political and ethical life (Connolly 1997, 19).

In other words, "When thoroughly disgusted you are prone to stop thinking about what it is in your identity that engenders this feeling. You may become thoughtless. And thoughtless people are often unethical. So it may be important to consider how

intersubjective patterns of disgust, thoughtlessness and ethics are interwoven” (2). As Nietzsche puts it, “We think with our stomachs” (13). In that sense, “Sometimes a feeling of disgust becomes ripe material to work on by experimental methods” (19). Connolly insists: “Tactics to modify thought-imbued feelings already there must be experimental because, since you seldom know exactly how the initial feeling became installed and since you lack direct access to triggering scripts in the amygdala, stomach and elsewhere, you do not quite know in advance how the tactics you adopt might act on the existing shape and intensity of your appraisals” (19-20). Powdermaker’s “discovery” during “the streetcar incident” exemplifies such tactical engagements with one’s gut reactions. Still, the conditions that enabled her engagement and the durability of its effects are difficult to assess. Hankins attributes Powdermaker’s self-reflective “detective” practice to the fact that she was encouraged by mentors like Edward Sapir to “study issues in the United States”, an unorthodox suggestion since “The typical object of study for anthropologists at that time was overwhelmingly populations outside of Western modernity, be they native groups of the Americas that scholars like Sapir specialized in, or small-scales societies on islands of Melanesia that scholars such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Powdermaker’s PhD advisor at the London School of Economics, studied” (Hankins 2013, 60). Hankins also mentions Powdermaker’s own reflections on how “growing up in a German Jewish home in Baltimore in the first decades of the century had instilled in her a nascent interest in the subject of race in the United States”. For an “emancipation” from prevailing olfactory prejudices to be thinkable, some endurance was required.

It is noteworthy that institutions can and sometimes do explicitly seek to foster “practices of the self” that involve modifications of one’s patterns of disgust. Hankins

shows this is the case through the example of a bank in Osaka where a man he names Hideki used to work before being hired by the Japan Foundation, the body funding Hankins' research on Buraku smell and that made it possible for him to meet Hideki. "During his training for the bank, [Hideki's] manager had told the incoming staff which neighborhoods close to the branch were Buraku, as a means of preventing discrimination against clients from those areas. The manager explained: if you as an employee know for certain whether someone is from a Buraku or not, you can be sure to steel your face when they come in, to make sure not to show your disgust visibly" (53-4)¹⁶⁴. This restraint of disgust was difficult for Hideki. Given where he was raised, "he grew up hating the smell of leather; it turned his stomach to even think about it. He had trouble touching leather even now; his body flinched at the thought. His shoes were cloth; he avoided leather furniture or clothing" (54). While telling his story, Hideki confessed a feeling of shame: "I know that I shouldn't feel that way about Buraku people. Working here [at the Japan Foundation] I've started to realize that feeling that way is wrong" (brackets in the text). Hankins then offers this remarkable analysis:

At 'places like the Japan Foundation', places that expect and tout a liberal politics of multicultural tolerance, there are certain feelings, like that of disgust in the presence of Buraku smells or people, that people like Hideki should disavow. Liberal multiculturalism presents itself as tolerant to others' affective practices, to their 'smells', even as it presents itself as 'odorless', that is, as abstracted from

¹⁶⁴ In an endnote, Hankins explains "The term 'Buraku' refers to a neighborhood or 'hamlet'. Since the 1920s, though, in central and western Japan, it has become a euphemistic way of referring to neighborhoods that house stigmatized industries – such as leather and meat production – and to people associated with those industries or who reside in these spaces" (Hankins 2013, 63-4n1). In the third part of his article, Hankins discusses how the private detective industry now offers to document whether this or that person "is Buraku". This has become a profitable business since the State has officially forbidden the use of genealogy to discriminate against Buraku. Still, some (most often quite wealthy) families desire to know just who they are hiring or including in their ranks, and they pay private detectives to map the neighborhood in which people grew up. The latter's account then acts as a genealogy, which suggests that "Buraku smell" is not a self-evident "data", a given, but something that has to be unearthed, sought after.

qualitative experience, a rational endeavor that stipulates appropriate forms of moral obligation. Hideki's example, however, demonstrates that although multiculturalism here fronts as representational or rational imperative alone, it operates as well via an incitement to affective and energetic sensibility [...]. Hideki, perhaps as a necessity of his institutional position, aspires to this feeling of tolerance, even as he struggles to feel it adequately. In this tension it becomes patent that liberal multiculturalism, as an abstracted system of thought and representation, has its own qualic sensibility, its own affective registers. In the ecology of sensibility surrounding Buraku stigma, multiculturalism itself 'smells', despite any pretense otherwise (55).

I qualify this analysis as remarkable because it presents the proverbial other side of the coin to the more often underlined narratives of "modernization" as a "civilizing process" that is accompanied by, or that even occurs through, practices of forced deodorization.

In "The Human Snout: Pigs, Priests, and Peasants in the Parlor", for instance, Joseph Nugent studies the transformations of the Irish smellscape at the turn of the 20th century, arguing that "modernization" modulated a decrease of "olfactory tolerance":

The extended historical moment this paper examines is one in which the English middle class – and its Irish equivalent in anxious imitation – had already developed a lowered level of olfactory tolerance that did not yet prevail in rural Ireland. /The untutored Irish peasant was not disgusted by the proximity of the pig and the cesspool because he had not yet learned that he should be. He was, however, about to be taught. And his indoctrination, brought about not at the hands of the distrusted colonizer, but of a rising Irish middle class scrambling to distance itself from the stench of its fellow-Irishman, was one of the more astonishing transformations in the belated embourgeoisement of Catholic Ireland. [...] /That transformation in smell perception occurred in France, as Alain Corbin has detailed, more than a century earlier. Smells were, as never before, observed and noted; the thresholds of olfactory tolerance were abruptly lowered so that odors unremarkable were now suspect. A new awareness of the putrid spread throughout the social body. As the wealthy

de-odorized themselves it was from the poor that stinks were now detected. Smell became a weapon in social contest. The fierce resistance with which the endeavor was met is evidenced by the struggles of municipal officials and sanitary reformers. Theirs was a “battle,” Corbin reports, “against dung, filth, and vitiated air”; their enemy, the peasants’ “loyalty to an *ancien régime* of sensory values” [...] (Nugent 2009, 291-2; see Corbin 2008 [1982]).

There is no necessity to choose between these two accounts of the politics of the “modernization” of smell, between these two trajectories or modalities of sensory history, or of the history of sensibilities (see Denney 2011; Wickberg 2007)—no need to accept as the last word *either* liberal olfactory tolerance *or* modernist olfactory intolerance since both configurations often appear to operate in conjunction.

In effect, those who are held to “smell” are said to do so in contradistinction with “us, deodorized”, and they are “tolerated” precisely *as* “smelly others”—and meanwhile, for some the very tenacious fumes of Western-Modern liberal tolerance itself are sensed as the most noxious ones. It is also telling that in Hideki’s story, “inclusion” or “non-discrimination” is first and foremost a concern for a bank. Money, as the saying goes, has no smell (*pecunia non olet*), and doing business may well justify holding one’s nose for a time that is proportional to the profit at stake... Nugent’s story of Irish people—especially priests, after the mid-19th century “devotional revolution” (Nugent 2009, 292), and members of the rising “Irish co-operative movement” (298n15)—who took on themselves to de-scent and re-scent their fellow citizens is framed as a matter of social ascension, of “the masses” joining the ranks of bourgeois middle-classes. In Japan, today, it seems Buraku people are also encouraged to de- and re-odorize, and multiculturalist bankers arguably seek to make sure they and their staff meet them halfway, as it were, or

where they are at in the long process of de- and re-odorization, in the struggle against the persistent “stench of poverty”, which is reputed to cling on.

The claim that “multiculturalism itself ‘smells’, despite any pretense otherwise” (Hankins 2013, 55) raises the question of the extent to—and the modalities through—which a “subject”, be it a mode of thought, can be aware of its own scent. This issue is homologous to what second-order cybernetics calls “the observation of observations” within systems (Luhmann 2002, 191). For Luhmann, “Observation is the use of a distinction to designate one and not the other side. [...] The distinction that is operatively used in observation but not observable is *the observer’s blind spot*. Formulated in logical terms, the observer is the excluded middle of his observation; he is not the ‘subject’ but rather the ‘parasite’ (Serres) of his observation” (190; I underline). The capacities for self-observation vary, but Luhmann claims that

the difference between systems theory and the Marx/Freud-syndrome (critique of ideology) lies in the fact that [in the former] the concept of observation is used universally and includes itself. Even distinctions such as operation/observation or system/environment function, when used, as the blind spot of the knowledge built upon them; and the question is only which theoretical apparatus can, not eliminate, but endure this insight into its own blindness.

I believe this last sentence gains even more vividness by being translated into an olfactory register: “the question is only which theoretical apparatus can, not eliminate, but endure this insight into its own *anosmia*”, its incapacity to fully smell itself smelling.

2. Atmospheric: conditions of survival & pestering creases

In political matters, it appears that certain words carry with them a peculiar scent, be it an odor of sanctity, of blasphemy, or even the scent of death. The politics of politology are

marked by the evocative capacity of certain terms that can elicit gut-reactions far more readily than nuanced, considerate thought. Terms like cybernetics, for example, or Platonism, and names like those of Kant, Marx or Strauss, for instance, often suffice to invoke vast and singularly creased complexes of affective *pre*-interpretations that, depending on the circle(s) or nebula(s) in which they are used, can be broadly positive or negative, more or less remarkable, acceptable, or bearable. If one seeks to use one of these terms or names in ways that radically differ from the polarized complexes that are hovering around (perhaps precisely because it is reputed to “smell”), the task of “reodorizing” effectively promises to be difficult, if not doomed. What goes for the politics of politology arguably goes for politics “in general”, if only for what is sometimes called “petty politics”. Arguably, the pettiness at issue can be attributed to the impression given off by certain “types” that they only care for trifles, not for “what truly matters”. Common laments over conflicts of “mere semantics”, for instance, evoke an apprehension of such “superficial” determinations of political importance as the sign of a lack of depth on the part of certain “political types” who would fail to recall that *a rose by any other name would smell as sweet*. However, it can also be taken in as signaling a rather profound understanding of how the art of smokescreens is indispensable to cover (up) “what is truly going on”—say, the fouler smells of corruption, or of self-interested attempts at ensuring one’s “political” survival.

2.1 “Breathe, breathe in the air—Don’t be afraid to care”

It is a rather peculiar trait of the relationship between the sense of smell and language that, on the one hand, it appears that specific odors can only be described indirectly, by way of metaphors, and that on the other hand, the lexicon most directly related to smell—

especially negative adjectives like stinky, stuffy, foul, or pungent—offers what are perhaps the most unambiguously evocative qualifications. Indeed, to claim that some entity “smells” easily appears to be an excessive, violent interpellation. It arguably forecloses all responses, save for denial—*but how could replying “this is not so” ever defuse the claim?*—, or for an assuming laughter. Things undoubtedly get more serious—“dead serious”, as serious as they can be perhaps—when the very possibility of smell, breathing, is put into question.

Breathing, grasped as both a condition and a sign of life, which is most often thought in pneumatic terms, is admittedly a condition of possibility of the exercise of every sense of the age-old fivefold. Through the nose, however, breathing seems to have a privileged tie with the sense of smell. To be sure, anosmia, the absence or the dysfunction of smell, is a “medical condition” that can be lived with. Kant may even have been right in advancing that smell is the “organic sense” which is “the most ungrateful and also seems to be the most dispensable [as] it does not pay to cultivate it or refine it at all” (Kant 2006 [1798], 50). Anosmia, in that sense, allows for a greater endurance, for a capacity *not* to be disturbed by unpleasant or by pleasant scents. If one acknowledges the “survival function” of smell, however, it appears to be a most risky condition, a strict limitation of the capacity to detect life-threatening emanations, including one’s own.

Nietzsche, who “often said openly of the type of person most hateful to him, ‘they do not smell good’” (Simmel 2009 [1908], 578), and who claimed to have “a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had” (Nietzsche 2007c [1888], ‘Wise’:1), arguably remains the most artful, the most capable writer when it comes to rendering sensible an impression of choking, a sense of asphyxia in the midst

of what feels like a dangerously stuffy, even rotten cultural atmosphere. This is what is shown in *La distribution. Hermès IV*, for instance, where Serres dedicates a middle section to “*Corruption*” that contains only one chapter, “‘L’Antéchrist’: *une chimie des sensations et des idées*” (Serres 1977, 173-93), “‘*The Anti-Christ*’: a chemistry of sensations and ideas”. Therein, Serres weaves a reading of Nietzsche’s 1888 *The Anti-Christ. A Curse on Christianity* (see Nietzsche 2007b). Serres’ subtitle evokes the title of fragment 1 of the first part, “Of first and last things”, of volume one of Nietzsche’s 1878 *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*: “Chemistry of concepts and sensations” (Nietzsche 2007a, 12)¹⁶⁵. Serres takes Nietzsche’s chemical project seriously, not least since the lexical network of *The Anti-Christ* is “centered on the dynamic of infection or contagion”; the book “is quite simply a medicine manual, signed as such, written as such” (Serres 1977, 173; I translate). “And of a medicine that is dated”, adds Serres. This is the core of his reading: “The text is dated by the Pasteurian age. [...] It is not religion, it is biochemistry. It is not scientific biochemistry, but a reactivation of the old language of

¹⁶⁵ I write “evoke” since the German title is “*Chemie des Begriffe und Empfindungen*” and Serres notably inverts, in his subtitle, “concepts” (or “notions”, in another translation of *Begriffe*) and “sensations” (or “feelings”, “percepts”, “sentiences” or “sentiments”, according to other translations of *Empfindungen*). In the French translations of Nietzsche that I have been able to consult, “concepts” always come before “sensations”, as they do in the original German. If one reads Nietzsche, however, one can understand why Serres would suggest that sensations come first—*is this not precisely what Nietzsche himself is teaching?*

Nietzsche’s fragment starts by the claim that “Almost all the problems of philosophy once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in unlogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, living for others in egoism, truth in error?” (Nietzsche 2007a [1878], 12) Once again, concerns with how “the most A is the most non-A” can be said to express an aesthetic mode of thought. The fragment ends with these lines: according to “Historical philosophy [...] which can no longer be separated from natural science, the youngest of all philosophical methods”, it appears that “All we require, and what can be given us only now the individual sciences have attained their present level, is a *chemistry* of the moral, religious and aesthetic conceptions and sensations, likewise of all the agitations we experience within ourselves in cultural and social intercourse, and indeed even when we are alone: what if this chemistry would end up by revealing that in this domain too the most glorious colours are derived from base, indeed from despised materials? Will there be many who desire to pursue such researches? Mankind likes to put questions of origins and beginnings out of its mind: must one not be almost inhuman to detect in oneself a contrary inclination?—”. Nietzsche’s genealogical project can be read as an attempt to trace the origins of what is thought to be the highest, “Christian morality”, in the midst of what is sensed as the lowest, *ressentiment*.

corruption spurred by new gains. Knowledge, here, spreads through established channels, over a cultural formation that has been in place for centuries” (174). The “infection” Nietzsche detects and targets is Christianity, or nihilism, which he phrases as synonyms.

Serres’ reading is primarily concerned with Nietzsche’s central trope, that is with the articulation of Christianity as a “disease” (Nietzsche 2007b [1888], §19), an “illness” (§§38, 51), as “the one great innermost corruption” (§62) whose “essence” is marked by “sickness” (§52), and that both requires and seeks to escape a therapeutic treatment. In framing Christianity in this way, in arguing that “Nobody is free to become Christian: nobody gets ‘converted’ to Christianity, — you have to be sick enough for it...” (§51), Nietzsche recharges a powerful apprehension of what may be called the history of ideas, of how certain notions and sentiences—especially *harmful* ones—are born and spread to the point of becoming prevalent. Beyond the motif of distinct, more or less base and elevating claims, more or less discordant and emancipatory temperaments, the environment, the *milieu*, the “culture” that feeds them and feeds *on* them becomes a key issue when one is concerned with diagnosis, therapeutics and prognosis.

Serres claims Nietzsche’s account is dated of “Pasteur’s age” since it operates through the notion that “To clean, from now on, is to hunt down possible pollutants, it is to expel corruption by its microscopic causes” (Serres 1977, 173). It is Pasteur who

made obvious everywhere the existence of microscopic organisms. This is science, but what is important, today, is to say what was the impact of these researches on the public [from the 1860s onward]. *The world, all of a sudden, was filled with small noxious animals.* The science of hygiene landed into a puritanical society, and, all of a sudden, exact experimentation was designating the impure. The midges are swarming around the lion. It really was a collective madness. We imagined that the weight of these particles brought them in abundance down into the plains,

where they roamed, dangerously multiplied, and that on the contrary they scarcely inhabited high altitudes. [...] The high was healthy (*sain*), the low was corrupt. The great Nietzschean metaphor of the high and the low is not specific to Zarathustra. The whole scientific world is climbing the mountain, to keep the hands clean and the body pure. Puritanism seized by the experimental madness of the healthy and the sick (178; I underline).

Serres, however, argues that if this is Nietzsche's stance, it is in fact religious in form and largely untrue to Pasteur's work. This last remark may seem irrelevant as Nietzsche is reputed to be the great artisan of a harsh critique of science, of scientists and their will to truth. In *The Anti-Christ*, however, science is precisely counterposed to Christianity¹⁶⁶.

Serres goes on an interesting tangent to explore this issue. For this "science" that makes Pasteur's work on fermentation and microorganisms fit a framework that is not without recalling the age-old "miasma theory" according to which clouds or swarms of tiny pestilential beings spread diseases, "The disease (*le mal*) goes round, dirty and small.

¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche praises science, and especially philology and medicine, because it runs counter to Christianity, to the "priestly" definition of truth: "A religion like Christianity, which is completely out of touch with reality, which immediately falls apart if any concession is made to reality, would of course be morally opposed to the 'wisdom of this world', which is to say *science*, – it will approve of anything that can poison, slander, or *discredit* discipline of spirit, integrity or spiritual rigour of conscience, or noble assurance and freedom of the spirit. The imperative of 'faith' is a *veto* on science, – *in praxi*, the lie at any cost... [...] Paul *wants* to confound all 'wisdom of the world': his enemies are the *good* philologists and doctors from the Alexandrian schools –, he wages war on them. In fact, you cannot be a philologist or doctor without being *anti-Christian* at the same time. This is because philologists look *behind* the 'holy books', and doctors see *behind* the physiological depravity of the typical Christian. The doctor says 'incurable', the philologist says 'fraud'..." (Nietzsche 2007b [1888], §47; see also §§48-49). Toward the very end of the book, Nietzsche deplores how Christianity blocked the path opened by the science of the Greeks and the Romans in Antiquity, which is only being recovered at the time of writing: "All the presuppositions for a scholarly culture, all the scientific *methods* were already there, the great, incomparable art of reading well had already been established – this presupposition of the tradition of culture, for the unity of science; natural science was on the very best path, together with mathematics and mechanics, – the *factual sense*, the last and most valuable of all the senses had schools and traditions that were already centuries old! Do you understand? Everything *essential* had been found so that work could be started: – the methods, it should be said ten times over, *are* the essential thing, as well as the most difficult thing, as well as the thing that can be blocked by habit and laziness for a very long time. What we have won back today with unspeakable self-overcoming (since we all still have bad instincts, Christian instincts in our bodies), a free view of reality, a cautious hand, the patience and the seriousness for the smallest things, all the *integrity* of knowledge – this had already existed!" (§59). With Christianity, "Everything miserable, suffering from itself, plagued by bad feelings, the whole *ghetto world* of the soul [has] risen *to the top* in a single stroke! – – Just read any Christian agitator, Saint Augustine, for example, and you will realize, you will *smell* the sort of unclean people this brought to the top".

Invisible, everywhere” (179). Serres then phrases this remarkable sentence: “Hence the fundamental question: what of cheese? The old medicine associates death with rot, degeneration with decomposition. But cheese tells the opposite, through a strategy that is much finer than the obvious reversals or the puritanical dichotomies. Cheese, true cheese, [...] is the acclimation of rot”. Cheese, in other words, is “milk given over to the hair (*au poil, au cheveu*), to mud, to grime, and thereby transmuted, transvalued into a superior state. A small and vile fungus invades and stains the whiteness of the dairy. A culture, a nutrient broth (*bouillon de culture*), hence the birth of a culture”. By mobilizing Pasteur to support the dichotomy of the pure and the impure, we show that

We understand nothing of Pasteur, of vaccination, [of how] hygiene is dangerous. Pasteur renders Mithridates and acclimated poisons, cheese and its noble corruption scientific. It is the dichotomy of the dirty and the clean (*propre*), assumingly lived in the horror of the pestilential and the cure of air in altitude, the dichotomy of the low and the high, in brief, the partition (*partage*) in general that is the sickness (*maladie*). Hell is the separation of heaven and hell. Scientific wisdom and truth acclimate the venomous, the floppy (*mou*), the rotten, the corrupt, the disease (*mal*), and sickness itself, [they] let it do its thing by itself, in the subterranean of the invisible, in the dark, the viscous, the stinky, [they] have confidence in life, and take from this the feast which we taste. Knowing the healthy (*sain*) beyond the aseptic, the strong beyond the protected, cheese beyond good and evil (180).

This stance is indeed quite Nietzschean, as “Nietzsche was the first to recognize this form, and to apply it to the pseudo-separation of the gods, to despise Socrates and Plato who themselves despised the hair, the mud and the grime, to aggrandize it into the Eternal Return. [But] If *The Anti-Christ* returns to the dichotomy, without reward, it truly marks the collapse (*l’effondrement*)”, that point where Nietzsche lost it, as it were.

For Serres, “Nietzsche blindly understands something in that same region: the Christian is a yeast, a microorganism, a bad virus that decomposes. The true battle is there: fermentation or rot?” (186) It seems “Christianity, to put the reaction into place, must first distillate its poison: *distillate*, among the instincts of a superior type, the disease, or the evil that it *extracts*. Extraction and distillation of contradictory elements with a strong life: guilt, trickery, seduction. As is often the case distillation occurred by *sublimation*. The retained element is *very* small, almost nothing: nihilism. The microbe” (191)¹⁶⁷. As is the case with nihilism, however, it is uncertain whether Nietzsche truly “returns to the dichotomy” of corruption and non-corruption, as Serres claims. In effect, Nietzsche distinguishes *types* of corruption, just as he can be said to have distinguished types of nihilism. Amid the battle of fermentation and rot, not all fermentation is benign, and a dangerous ferment is not necessarily reducible to rot. At the outset of *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche makes explicit how he uses the term corruption:

A painful, terrible spectacle is playing itself out in front of me: I lifted the curtain to reveal the *corruption* of humanity. This word, coming from my mouth, is absolved of one suspicion at least: the suspicion that it implies some

¹⁶⁷ When considering the decline of the Roman Empire, Nietzsche makes what may be the most explicit reference to a notion of fermentation by using the word “saccharine” in the following passage: “[the Empire] was not stable enough to withstand the *most corrupt* type of corruption, to withstand *Christians*... This secretive worm that crept up to every individual under the cover of night, fog, and ambiguity and sucked the seriousness for *true* things, the instinct for *reality* in general right out of every individual, this cowardly, feminine, saccharine group gradually alienated the ‘souls’ from that tremendous structure, – those valuable, those masculine-noble natures that saw Rome’s business as their own business, their own seriousness, their own *pride*” (Nietzsche 2007b [1888], §58). Christians are said to act like yeast perhaps most clearly when Nietzsche writes: “The Christian movement, being a European movement, was from the very start a whole movement of rejected and dejected elements of every type: – they want to gain power through Christianity. They do *not* express the decline of a race, they are an aggregate of decadent forms from everywhere, who look for each other and huddle together” (§51). The interest of Serres’ reading of Nietzsche has to do with his explicit consideration of the possible importance of contemporary developments in biochemistry for Nietzsche’s thought. In this respect, Serres’ reading remains one of the few that does not center on Darwin’s theory of evolution, which tends to be the main site used to think how Nietzsche dealt with biology (e.g. Moore 2003). For an account of Pasteur that implicitly acknowledges Nietzsche’s role for the study of the history of science and that centers, through Whiteheadian tropes, on how “Pasteur happened to yeast” while “yeast happened to Pasteur” in different yet related ways, see Latour 1996.

moral indictment of human beings. It is – I want to keep stressing this – *moraline-free*: and this to the extent that I see the most corrupt precisely where people have made the most concerted effort to achieve ‘virtue’, to attain ‘godliness’. I understand corruption (as I am sure you have guessed by now) in the sense of decadence: my claim is that all the values in which humanity has collected its highest desiderata are *values of decadence*. /I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* things that will harm it. A history of the ‘higher feelings’, the ‘ideals of humanity’ – and I might have to tell this history – would amount to an explanation of *why* human beings are so corrupt. /I consider life itself to be an instinct for growth, for endurance, for the accumulation of force, for *power*: when there is no will to power, there is decline. My claim is that *none* of humanity’s highest values have had this will, – that *nihilistic* values, values of decline, have taken control under the aegis of the holiest names (2007b [1888], §6).

The crucial problem Nietzsche is faced with is the remarkable endurance of Christianity, and thus of “*nihilistic* values”, of the basest instincts like the brooding *ressentiment* that stems from the fear of suffering but that also makes humans *interesting*. Why is the “corruption” of Cesare Borgia *not* the highest corruption? Nietzsche imagines “*Cesare Borgia as Pope*”, and writes: “Luther saw the *corruption* of the papacy when precisely the opposite was palpable: the old corruption, the *peccatum originale*, Christianity, was *not* sitting on the papal seat anymore! But rather, life! Rather, the triumph of life!” (§61) Is not the very endurance of Christianity a sign of its will to power? *Which* corruption truly fosters the persistence of the (super-)human “instincts”? Is this what is at stake?

Nietzsche is certainly grappling with aesthetics of endurance. Crucially, it is he who wrote most clearly, early on, that the value of human life itself pales in comparison with the immensity of nature and its sovereign indifference (Nietzsche 1999 [1873], 4). “Life itself” is irreducible to human life, in that sense. But *this* is the unendurable: “Seen from up close, assumed, it is not supportable. We are touched in our health, our waking

strength and our integrity. We find ourselves rot, before, during, after” (Serres 1977, 182). How can one afford this fragrance and keep one’s nose even remotely clean? The will to power, as a will to will, assumes that creating valuable values requires endurance.

2.2 Becoming capable of creative emanations

In fragment 492 of volume one of *Human, All Too Human*, section 9, “Man alone with himself”, Nietzsche writes: “*The right profession.* – Men can rarely endure a profession of which they do not believe or convince themselves it is at bottom more important than any other. Women adopt a similar attitude towards their lovers” (Nietzsche 2007a, 180). Beside the questionable distinction that it traces between men and women, this fragment is interesting as it weaves together importance and endurance. It first appears to assert that endurance is a modality or a dimension of experience that is informed, determined by “beliefs” or “convictions”: most often, one can only bear a profession (or a love) because one holds it is the most important one. Endurance would thus follow from importance; a belief, a valuation of importance comes first. The fragment, however, enfolds an axis on which it can be tweaked. Apart from the qualifier “rarely”, which already modulates the first sentence, the claim that human beings can endure a daily practice—a profession or a love—insofar as they “believe or convince themselves” it is the most important suggests, with a Nietzschean twist, that we all tend to convince ourselves and come to believe that what is most important is in truth *merely* that which we can endure, that which we can afford to bear. Distributions of endurance precede and inform what is held to matter.

Nietzsche himself became a “private writer” in the years this maxim was written. In *Ecce Homo*, he presents *Human, All Too Human* as an overcoming of self-deception:

What decided me then was not a break with Wagner or anything like that – I felt a complete displacement of my instincts; the occasional mistake, whether it is called ‘Wagner’ or the professorship in Basle, was just a symptom. I was overcome by *impatience* with myself: I saw that it was high time to reconsider *myself*. All at once I realized to my horror how much time had already been wasted, – how useless, how arbitrary my whole existence as a philologist seemed with respect to my task. [...] I was seized with an almost burning thirst: and in fact, from that point on, I pursued nothing more than physiology, medicine, and the natural sciences, – I did not return, even to genuine historical studies, until the *task* forced me to. That is when I first understood the connection between, on the one hand, an activity chosen against your instinct, a so-called ‘calling’ that you are not *remotely* called to – and, on the other hand, the need to *anaesthetize* feelings of hunger and monotony using a narcotic art, – the Wagnerian art, for example. [...] That was the moment my instinct made the inexorable decision to stop giving in, going along, and confusing me with other people. Any type of life, the most unfavorable conditions, illness, poverty – everything seemed preferable to that degrading ‘selflessness’ I had first fallen into out of ignorance, out of *youth*, and later remained in out of inertia, out of a so-called ‘sense of duty’. [...] The illness *slowly pulled me away* [...] I have never felt as happy with myself as I was in the sickest and most painful times of my life (Nietzsche 2007c [1888], ‘Human’: 3-4).

In a passage of the last part of *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am a destiny”, often cited because it explicitly mentions a political project, Nietzsche then writes of his “task(s)” thusly:

I am a *bearer of glad tidings* as no one ever was before; I am acquainted with incredibly elevated tasks, where even the *concept* of these tasks has been lacking so far; all hope had disappeared until I came along. And yet I am necessarily a man of disaster as well. Because when truth comes into conflict with the lies of millennia there will be tremors, a ripple of earthquakes, an upheaval of mountains and valleys such as no one has ever imagined. The concept of politics will have then merged entirely into a war of spirits, all power structures from the old society will have exploded – they are all based on lies: there will be wars

such as the earth has never seen. Starting with me, the earth will know *great politics* – ('Destiny': 1)

A few lines above, he wrote: "*Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for an act of humanity's highest self-examination, an act that has become flesh and genius in me. My lot would have it that I am the first *decent* human being, that I know myself to be opposing the hypocrisy of millennia... I was the first to *discover* the truth because I was the first to see – to *smell* – lies for what they are... My genius is in my nostrils..." Now, it is often said that Nietzsche himself acted as an infection, that self-examination turned into navel-gazing—or navel-*sniffing*—, and that most people care most for their "self".

An argument to this effect is woven through Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, for instance, as Nietzsche's influential role is discussed in terms of his propagating "The revelation that philosophy finds nothingness at the end of its quest [which] informs the new philosopher that mythmaking must be his central concern in order to make a world. /The *transfusion* of this religious mythmaking or value-positing interpretation of social and political experience into *the American bloodstream* was in large measure effected by Max Weber's language" (Bloom 1987, 208; I underline)¹⁶⁸. In this "German invasion" (215), the passage of the language of self, creativity, culture, and values "from the academy to the market-place is the real story" (226). Bloom thereby asserts that

the intellect has an effect on history, that, as Nietzsche said, "the greatest deeds are thoughts," that "the world revolves around the inventors of new values, revolves silently." Nietzsche was such an inventor, and we are still revolving around him, although rather squeakily. This is our scene, and the spectacle consists in how his views have been trivialized by democratic man desirous of tricking himself

¹⁶⁸ The only other instances Bloom uses the term "bloodstream" are when he discusses the importance of the language of rights (Bloom 1987, 166), the influence of Rousseau (183), and the influence of Socrates (275). This indicates that biological metaphors are privileged for thinking the "history of ideas" and transformations in language, in a way that recalls Nietzsche's stance.

out in borrowed finery, in how democracy has been *corrupted* by alien views and alien tastes (148; I underline).

What makes Nietzsche an exceptional thinker, his “merit [is] that he was aware that to philosophize is radically problematic in the cultural, historicist dispensation. He recognized the terrible intellectual and moral risks involved. At the center of his every thought was the question ‘How is it possible to do what I am doing?’ He tried to apply to his own thought the teachings of cultural relativism. This practically nobody does” (203). Bloom diagnoses American society since the 1960s as a place where “Nobody really believes in anything anymore, and everyone spends his life in frenzied work and frenzied play so as not to face the fact, not to look into the abyss” (143), while “In politics, in entertainment, in religion, everywhere, we find the language connected with Nietzsche’s value revolution, a language necessitated by a new perspective on the things of most concern to us” (146). Twenty-five years after the publication of Bloom’s *Closing*, it is most doubtful that it “cleaned the air” or rarefied the language of values in any way. On the contrary, its immense commercial success even seems to have encouraged the proliferation of polarized and polarizing claims over the value of different values¹⁶⁹. In Québec, for instance, where a “debate” framed in terms of “our values” is currently (and I believe, noxiously) monopolizing large sections of the media, Jean-Marc Potte and Jean-Pierre Couture recently showed that “the new faces of conservative nationalism” make explicit references to Bloom’s book in calling for the inclusion of “great literature” in the

¹⁶⁹ I have not been able to find exact sales figures, but an article in *The Weekly Standard* on the occasion of the publication of the 25th anniversary edition of *Closing* gives an order of magnitude. The book’s “first print run, in February 1987, numbered 10,000 copies. /By late spring it was selling 25,000 copies a week. It hit the bestseller list in April, reached number one by summertime, and stayed there for two and a half months. [...] In March of the following year *The Closing of the American Mind* was still a bestseller. By then nearly a million copies had been sold in the United States. Foreign sales were just as prodigious. [...] One observer estimated that more than two hundred reviews of *Closing* were eventually published, and scores of these, in obscure quarterlies and highbrow opinion magazines alike, continued the theme of Bloom as authoritarian menace” (Ferguson 2012).

curriculum to recover “values” that are being “lost” amid the swamp of so-called postmodernism, and in critiquing the deleterious effects of “popular culture” on “youths” (Piotte & Couture 2012, 94; 137). More broadly, it is widely held in academia that Bloom’s (and Strauss’) “influence” fostered the rise in power of neoconservatives¹⁷⁰.

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I was sixteen years old in 2001. On September 11, the word spread during the morning break at school that something important was happening in New York, and I deserted my second class to gather with some students and teachers in front of a television in the auditorium. A few months before, I had smelled tear gas for the first time, during the Third Summit of the Americas, in Québec City. It is difficult for me to assess by myself what characterizes “our times” since this is very much the world I was born into, politically¹⁷¹. If the task of the politologist involves diagnosing states of culture, this is an

¹⁷⁰ The question of the influence of Strauss and “the Straussians” is something of a minefield. In a short critical review of a recent book on this issue, historian of the history of political thought John G. Gunnell writes: “The concept of influence is, however, a slippery one, which sometimes amounts to little more than putting two things side by side and noting a family resemblance. Given the fact that many Straussians are, as was Strauss himself, politically conservative, it should not be surprising that either certain political actors would have been drawn to Straussian ideas or that Straussians would have been attracted to the seat of conservative power. In the United States, however, most instances of either academic intellectuals seeking political influence or politicians attempting to enact philosophical ideas primarily represent stories of unrequited hope. Talk show hosts are probably much more effective than someone such as Strauss or the kinds of intellectuals that Mark Lilla has dubbed *Reckless Minds* (2001). The vast negative influence sometimes attributed to Strauss may, to some degree, be inspired by the same impulse that led Strauss to argue that Machiavelli was the founder of modernity. It may reflect the academic dream that relatively obscure intellectuals can aspire to world-historical significance. /The case of Strauss and Straussianism is, however, in many ways a unique, and certainly interesting, phenomenon in the American academy, and the full story, whether as fact or—in the case of Saul Bellow’s *Ravelstein* (2000)—fiction, has yet to be written” (Gunnell 2010, 944). Gunnell ends his review with a sentence that points to his own “Wittgensteinian” view of the relationship between the “meta-practice” that is the study of politics and the practice of politics itself: “Many political theorists, including both Straussians and anti-Straussians, continue to find it difficult to believe that politics has its own logic”. For an extended account of this last claim, see Gunnell 2011.

¹⁷¹ I decided to write simply “our times” rather than “the Bush era”, here, to designate the post-9/11 world(s) or conjuncture(s) since the latter would surely invite the objection: “well, now this is surely the Obama era...” Perhaps a more adequate designation would be “the Rumsfeld era”, or “a Rumsfeld world” as filmmaker Errol Morris recently put it (Labrecque 2013; see also Morris 2013). This expression has the benefit of arching back to the first passage of the “Rumsfeld-Cheney” duo in the primary circle of the White House in the 1970s, after the demise of Richard Nixon; of pointing to the duo’s second “capture of power” under Georges W. Bush; and of underlining the continuation and even the intensification of many policies adopted by “the Bush White House” under the Obama administration, especially in matters of foreign policy. However, there are of course

issue, but those who came before tend to leave to those who come after many traces, not least in writing, relating what they sensed was changing on this or that occasion. These accounts, often amended, scent the ambiance within which one can try to come to terms with what occurs. Like many of my recent contemporaries, I have heard from an early age that I was born into a time of crisis, in a low period or a cultural desert. *This* desert was given many names: the postmodern condition, the end of ideologies, the end of history, the disappearance of politics, the decline of the Welfare State, the clash of civilizations, neoliberalism, globalization, etc. In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche writes: “against our knowledge and against our wills, our bodies all have values, words, formulas, and morals with *contrary* derivations, – physiologically considered, we are *false*... A *diagnosis of the modern soul* – where would it begin? With a resolute incision into this contradictoriness of instincts, by separating out its opposing values, by performing a vivisection on its most *instructive* case” (Nietzsche 2007d [1888], Epilogue). To me, today, the case of the Critical Art Ensemble is a most instructive one.

3. Withstanding an overblown political climate

It will probably be noticed at this point that the second, artistico-political fold of this chapter did not explicitly engage artworks or artistic deeds—unless one considers Nietzsche as an artist, which is not indefensible. This modulation of the structuring fourfold of this work is due to the fact that the engagement with art is displaced to this third, polemological fold, for reasons that should soon become evident.

many issues with designating a complex conjuncture, or series of contemporary conjunctures, by the name of one man who happens to occupy a high-ranking position in the political apparatus of a single country.

Tracking the spoor insinuating that the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) is a, if not the, most instructive case for thinking how contemporary conjunctures are marked by a certain prevalence of aesthetics of endurance in accounts of political importance compels me to relate how I first noticed CAE's scent. This encounter occurred in early 2006, as I got my hands on the latest issue of *Inter, art actuel*, a performance art journal published in Québec City since 1978. I had discovered *Inter* less than a year before, and I recall waiting impatiently for this issue (no 92) because it was to feature a series of articles on "Art and politics". This "Dossier" was edited by Michaël La Chance, a poet, philosopher and sociologist working at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQÀC). In his introduction, the case of CAE member Steven Kurtz is briefly presented in terms of "terrorist art". In effect, La Chance describes his contribution to the issue—the longest one—as engaging artworks that may not simply "perturb" or "shock" but that would literally terrorize, that "would have attempted to topple a government and to spread a climate of fear in entire populations" (La Chance 2006a, 3; I translate), or rather, that are perceived as such (see also La Chance 2007). La Chance then asserts that a work "seized in the home of Steven KURTZ by the FBI" (La Chance 2006a, 3) was "accused of real terrorism according to the contemporary juridico-policary definition", and that "in the post-9-11 context, the title of explosive artwork takes on a novel connotation". Today, "A reflection on the relations between art and politics cannot forgo studying the procedures of the harassment of artists and the flattening of the artwork, of the leveling of its levels of interpretation, of the practice of systematic misunderstanding that undermines every form of critical resistance". Reading these lines, I got the sense that the stakes were very high around this strange event involving Steven Kurtz and the FBI.

3.1 What doesn't kill you...

La Chance's contribution is titled "Biopolitical Inquisition. Steven Kurtz vs FBI"(2006b; I translate). Kurtz is a founding member of CAE and an art professor at the State University of New York in Buffalo. On May 11, 2004, he woke up to find that his wife, Hope, also a co-founder of CAE, had stopped breathing. He called 911. Things started to unfold in unexpected ways after emergency personnel got into the house and confirmed Hope Kurtz had died from cardiac arrest. A police officer then noticed some Petri dishes, books on germ warfare, and a window that was covered to let no light come through. It was a troublesome assemblage, so the FBI was alerted. CAE made the news that day.

Steven Kurtz was detained for 22 hours, but was not put under arrest. Hope's body was taken for an autopsy. Agents of the Joint Terrorist Task Force in HAZMAT suits searched the house for three days. Computers and documents were seized. Friends and colleagues started being interviewed. The bacteria found in Petri dishes, which Kurtz immediately told the FBI were harmless and cultivated for an upcoming art show in a museum, were sent to a laboratory for analysis. It was soon confirmed that Hope died of natural causes, and it took a week to confirm the bacteria were innocuous. Only then was Kurtz allowed to reenter his house. In the meantime, he had to stay in a hotel under FBI surveillance. Despite the inoffensive character of the bacteria, Kurtz found himself in an intricate legal maze, the end of which he would only see in 2008, when he was cleared of all charges by a federal judge who deemed that the case for a "mail and wire fraud indictment [...] was 'insufficient on its face'" (Associated Press 2008). These charges were leveled against him "After a federal grand jury refused to charge Kurtz with bioterrorism" in July 2004 (CAE Defense Fund 2008). This was not the end of the story,

however, as Kurtz and collaborator Robert Ferrell were then charged with “two counts of mail fraud and two counts of wire fraud concerning the acquisition of harmless bacteria”. Ferrell, a renowned geneticist, “was fined \$500 but avoided prison after pleading guilty to a misdemeanor count of mailing an injurious article [the bacteria in question] to Professor Kurtz” (Associated Press 2008). What has deeply marked commentators like La Chance is not only the smell of censorship that stems from this case, which reads as an attempt to police disciplinary boundaries between art, science and politics, but the persistence of the FBI and of the case attorney, William J. Hochul, Jr.

The tenacious attitude of Hochul, in particular, puzzled many because it was arguably made clear very rapidly to anyone who would *pause* that Kurtz was not a bioterrorist and that CAE was not a “sleeper cell” bent on germ guerilla. This makes it difficult not to read the transformation of the rejected bioterrorism charges into mail and wire fraud charges as anything but a resentful deed on Hochul’s part, given the vocal support expressed for Kurtz in the cultural and scientific milieus (e.g. Annas 2006). La Chance explains Hochul’s tenaciousness in terms of both personal ambition and the bureaucratic logic that forced both the FBI and John Ashcroft’s Justice Department to try to save face. Anti-terrorism forces, as governmental agencies subject to continuous performance evaluations, actively seek to justify their existence, even in the context of the so-called War on Terror. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Hochul played a role in prosecuting a six-men “terrorist cell” in the city of Lackawanna, near Buffalo, in 2002 (La Chance 2006b, 19). According to La Chance, Hochul was seeking to make the Kurtz case into an equally spectacular “success”¹⁷².

¹⁷² I use scare-quotes, here, because the case of the so-called “Lackawanna-six” presents many questionable features that make it problematic to claim it was a success. The story is that of six Yemeni-American men

In this line of thought, I think it is crucial, in addition, to recall that 2004 was a presidential election year, and to insist on the seemingly unnoticed fact that the political climate in May 2004 was not only loosely put under the sign of the War on Terror, interlaced with already familiar claims on the illegitimacy of the whole enterprise and the dubious justifications of the Iraq war. Rather, this paranoid, even hyperventilating political climate was in one of its stormiest episodes to date. In effect, the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, which were seen by the American authorities as humiliating the military as a whole and its war effort in Iraq in particular, first appeared in the American media on April 28, 2004, on CBS's *60 Minutes II*. On Friday, May 7, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee "on the treatment of Iraqi prisoners" (FDCH E-Media 2004). On May 8, *The Economist* featured the most iconic of these photographs on its front page—the man standing on a box with a bag over his head, a blanket on his body and electrical wires in his hand—, with the headline "Resign, Rumsfeld". On May 10, a detailed article appeared in *The New Yorker* with an extended series of the rapidly disseminated photographs (Hersh 2004; see also Gourevitch & Morris 2008). This is the most proximate ambiance in which Kurtz's

who spent some time in an Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan in the spring of 2001. "After the suspects kept up a cover story about their trip for more than a year, Mr. Alwan and five other men from Lackawanna pleaded guilty to training with a terrorist organization. [...] But counterterrorism officials never figured out the mystery that consumed them through the long, tense, terror-obsessed summer of 2002; What, if anything, did Al Qaeda have in mind for its Lackawanna recruits? In fact, the federal prosecutor whose office won the guilty pleas, Michael A. Battle, does not call them a terrorist cell. 'It's a heavy burden to prove,' he said, 'and I wasn't prepared to do that.'" (Purdy & Bergman 2003) It appears that the tension "between evidence and suspicion, broke into the open during a detention hearing last fall for the suspects. /'What is it that these defendants were planning?' asked the magistrate, H. Kenneth Schoeder Jr. /'It's a difficult question,' responded William Hochul, the assistant United States attorney who presented the case, 'because the defendants by themselves have put the court in this box.' After training with Al Qaeda and lying about it, he said, they 'are now throwing themselves on the court, in essence, and saying that you figure out what we're going to do.'" According to "lawyers involved in the case", one reason they pleaded guilty "was that prosecutors were likely to file gun charges for training with weapons, which could have carried prison terms of 30 years", rather than "up to 10 years". The fact that the Defense Department allegedly "pressed to have the Lackawanna suspects declared enemy combatants" since "In a military tribunal, the government would not have to reveal the methods and information from its intelligence investigation", may also have played a role.

home-lab immediately smelled of bioterrorism for security personnel. It was as if the HAZMAT suits that proved useless in Bagdad had finally found their justification back in Buffalo—safe for the fact that there were no weaponized germs to be found there either.

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La Chance coins this neologism, “Hochulism: the intimidation of cultural groups so as to provoke a discreet repression and eventually self-censorship” (La Chance 2006b, 22). It seems, however, that Hochul’s determination in this case met its match in Kurtz’s own persistence, in the activist-artist’s remarkable endurance. For La Chance, this shows

artists have surprising capacities for absorbing in their work the violences and the other forms of harassment of which they are victims. They prove capable of plasticity and resilience on the symbolic plane and know how to use their detractors to specify their message. Attorney HOCHUL is astonished that he has not been capable of breaking KURTZ, astonished that the latter is not being crushed by judicial fees, astonished at his control of the situation. In fact, for KURTZ, HOCHUL belongs to a logic of repression that CAE has been analyzing for years. HOCHUL brings into broad daylight, to the eyes of the whole cultural community, a hardening of disciplinary boundaries that went unnoticed until now. The FBI’s prosecution, precisely because of its gravity, has effectively become a discourse of CAE, [and] the lines you are reading bear witness to this. While, paradoxically, Steven KURTZ cannot speak of the case with journalists, nor expose it further on the occasion of colloquia or other meetings, this prosecution nonetheless feeds (*alimente*) his ceaseless activity since last year: it validates his practice and constitutes the referent of his discourse (18).

Kurtz’s resilience is thought as that of a (creative) “critical researcher”, a committed amateur, while Hochul’s tenaciousness is thought as that of a (creative) “ambitious bureaucrat”, a committed patriot. What Nietzsche called “the contradictoriness of instincts” is at work here, while both characters can be framed as “deeply American”—or

as equally “un-American” from the other’s perspective; this is a site where “the free” and “the brave” are in tension, although just who is who is uncertain.

In his second article on Kurtz’s case, published in *Inter*’s no 94, “Biopolitical Inquisition II. Biological Weapons”, La Chance (2006c; I translate) concentrates on the biological model of culture that he sees at work in how Hochul seemingly understands the political importance of the enduring existence of groups like CAE, and in how CAE itself theorizes the behavior of what they call “authoritarian power vectors” (see Critical Art Ensemble 2006, 55), of which Hochul is only one agent among many. For La Chance, “Microbial proliferation and viral contamination have become the paradigm of terror. [...] We observe this in the Kurtz vs FBI case, when a group of radical-left activists, a CAE cell, is denounced and persecuted as a viral strain: a sleeping strain of a cultural and political ‘Ebola’ threatening to spread across the whole North-American continent” (La Chance 2006c, 31). Building on Foucault’s account of “the political dream of the plague”, presented in *Surveiller et punir*, La Chance argues that

international geopolitics becomes a vast space of surveillance, on the watch for the tiniest signs of viral alerts. It becomes a panoptic totalitarianism where the State laminates (*fait rabattre*) all events onto the stage of a biopolitical theater of contaminations, in which every statement is considered for its quasi-chemical impact of political positioning and dangerousness. It is an area of visibility where everything is laminated and leveled into a univocal language: that of enemy infiltrations and microbial hauntings; the surge of the outside (*dehors*) into the infinitely small. Such is the experience of terror since the Inquisition and 1793: your deepest convictions do not count, your integrity and your values cannot protect you; the smallest detail can betray you, the smallest incident can topple your life over (32).

The ambiance of what La Chance calls terror imposes paranoid self-examination as an imperative for the survival of the agents operating in a singular systemic environment. This imperative, in its effect of self-censorship, is analogous to the task of assessing one's smell and its acceptability to others: it is a deeply uncertain business, not least since concerted efforts at modulating one's (ideological) scent can be turned into signs that there is indeed something rotten to cover up. In a way that recalls the capacity for contamination without contact that Antonin Artaud attributed to both the plague and theater (Artaud 2004 [1935], 510-21), the standing-in-proximity of Petri dishes, bacteria, books on biowarfare, leftist views and an unfortunate death smells of virulent trouble.

3.2 *Marching Plague* in the midst of authoritarian power vectors

This critical analysis is indebted to CAE's own theoretical work, which is gathered in a series of books that the collective has been publishing since the early 1990s. At the time of writing, CAE has published six "theory books" with Autonomedia: *The Electronic Disturbance* (1993), *Electronic Civil Disobedience* (1994), *Flesh Machine* (1998), *Digital Resistance* (2001), *Molecular Invasion* (2002), and *Marching Plague* (2006). They are freely available on CAE's website (www.critical-art.net). The collective also published numerous chapters in edited volumes, as well as articles in academic and cultural journals. In an "introductory statement" for the event and publication *Critical Strategies in Art and Media*, Kurtz positions CAE's books as an integral part of the collective's practice: "If you read our books, they are not the most inspiring writings in terms of optimism – they tend toward a much darker view of the world of global capitalism. But if you look at the kind of projects we do, there is an optimistic streak in

them” (Kurtz 2011). This twofold mode of engagement is explicitly put under the sign of Gramsci’s famous order-word: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”.

CAE’s “tacticalist” approach means other activists often find it “corrupt”. But

If resistant forces can get something out of nothing, why not take advantage of it? That is precisely the situation that tacticalists take advantage of – we make the most of opportunities as they present themselves. And I can speak for Critical Art Ensemble on this problem: we’ve taken money from all kinds of horrible entities. I mean almost every awful technology corporation you can think of. Museum and festival sponsors are the worst of corporations looking for some cheap positive public relations. But this is a necessary negotiation; *there is no pure position. As a tacticalist, I am dependent on what I despise in order to act. So it comes down to tolerances, setting precautions, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, and there are always going to be these huge disagreements among stakeholders about choices that are made by different groups.* I don’t really have a way to iron out this problem. It’s only an observation concerning the question we are discussing: “Why is there a crisis?” It’s partly because we are all in a kind of indefensible position, no matter what. Whether I do nothing or do something, and that something is corrupted, we are always in a negotiation with everything we do, every time we decide we [are] going to produce a project or take action. [...] As anti-authoritarians we are always in the minority position, our politics are never the dominant politics, they are always a form of resistance, and when we are in that minority position *I think it behooves us to be fairly tolerant of people trying various forms of resistance at very different levels of intensity. I don’t think it helps us at all that much to say, “I am drawing the line here, anyone on the other side of that line is part of the problem!” I can’t really live with that.* But this is not to say that serious criticism of locating oneself at a certain point along the continuum of resistance and not another is not valuable (I underline).

What matters politically for CAE, as a self-described anti-authoritarian collective, is thus modulated by the plausible effects of singular engagements on its capacity to persist, to continue resisting what it calls authoritarian power vectors. This pragmatic concern for its

own survival is contemptible from a “heroic” or “purist” perspective, but it makes it able to (try to) endure relationships that others would deem unbearable from the start.

In May 2004, CAE was working on a book that would become *Marching Plague*. Most of the research was among the documents seized in Kurtz’s house. The book was nonetheless published in 2006, after the collective was able to partly reconstitute this research in a rather urgent ambiance. This is a remarkable book because it is what I consider to be CAE’s most rationalist intervention to date. It persuasively argues that

biowarfare ‘preparedness’ is a euphemism for biowartech development and the militarization of the public sphere. Preparedness, as it now stands, is a madness that continues because it gets votes for politicians, audiences for media venues, profits for corporations, and funds for militarized knowledge production. If there is any real threat to our bodies and health, it is not coming from weaponized germs, but from the institutions that benefit from this weaponization (Critical Art Ensemble 2006, 20).

To support its critical stance, CAE presents a brief history of biological weapons, including a detailed account of resistances to the weaponization of germs and other biological agents within the United States’ military apparatus since the 1930s, and a thorough critique of the inefficiency of international treaties against chemical and biological weapons. Put simply, germs are largely ineffective as weapons since their behavior is necessarily dependent on ultimately uncontrollable environmental factors (air or water currents, temperature, etc.) that always threaten to return them back to their sender, actualizing the so-called boomerang effect. This is the reason why, when the weaponization of biological and chemical agents is at stake, offense and defense are inextricably intertwined (68-73). CAE argues that the inclusion, in international treaties against proliferation, of an exception for research on and development of defensive

technologies in fact fosters the proliferation that is supposed to be halted, or slowed. The rationality of this argumentation may be surprising for those who consider that, after Nietzsche, artists are bound to celebrate the irrational forces of their personal self.

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In a number of “practical” interventions, CAE has reproduced experiments carried out by British and American armed forces in the 1950s to test possibilities of weaponizing airborne germs. As the military often did, CAE always used innocuous biological agents to replicate these trials. This practice of public experimentation has made it possible for CAE to support with its own data its hypothesis that the use of biological agents as weapons in open-air environments is ineffective. By not only mimicking or parodying science, but by effectively practicing its own brand of amateur, hands-on research, CAE has been engaging the politico-cultural “fear mongering” that seems to inevitably accompany the mention of germ warfare. CAE has shaped its interventions in a rational, or even rationalist manner, perhaps because the “Kurtz vs. FBI” case has made it clear that playing on symbolic ambiguities in contemporary conjunctures can be turned against you to unambiguously qualify you as a literal threat. Through its theoretical work, CAE has also been trying to explain why the United States of America dedicate considerable funds to “biowartech”, despite all the persuasive reasons suggesting it is misguided to invest extensively in the development of such weapons or of defensive devices to counter them. According to CAE, these investments tap into the frightful character of germ warfare itself, which is “irrational”, or excessive, insofar as its intensity is not proportional to “real risk”.

For CAE, authoritarian power vectors excessively intensify the fear of biological warfare so that a politico-military and techno-mediatic elite can maintain itself, while “unrewarding” biohazards like diarrhoeal disease keep killing millions each year¹⁷³.

The key here is for politicians to look as if they are doing something that responds to the concerns of a given constituency. If the constituents are concerned about bioterrorism and nothing is happening, it is incumbent upon their representatives to make something happen in order to simulate doing something about the crisis that doesn't exist. The spectacle is as significant as the real. Body invasion and nuclear holocaust are the best provocateurs as weapons of mass distraction, and they are being called upon with ritualistic regularity. Luckily for the government, the media has never met a weapon of mass distraction that it did not like (57).

This is perhaps the most classical type of political critique, voiced at what people like Bloom may call the depoliticized spearhead of the artistico-cultural leftist avant-garde: those in positions of institutional authority care most for their own preservation.

Institutional (*political?*) authority is thereby thought to involve the capacity for (re)designing “environments” in a rational manner, that is, to intentionally modulate the conditions of existence of “the many” to the benefit of a few. In the second chapter of *Flesh Machine*, “Nihilism in the Flesh”, CAE engages “biohazards” through a critique of evolutionary tropes in the understanding of culture. The collective claims that,

With economic expansion via territorial occupation in the process of disappearing, the will to purity (fitness) stands on its own as a prime reason for genocide. Currently, genocidal nihilism tends toward elimination of ‘deviant’ subjectivity. This new form of nihilism is much more subtle. The day of the death camp designed for maximum

¹⁷³ According to the World Health Organization, diarrhoeal disease was the fifth leading cause of death in 2011, with approximately 1,9 million victims (World Health Organization 2013a). It is “the second leading cause of death in children under five years old. It is both preventable and treatable” (World Health Organization 2013b).

efficiency is over, and in its place are prisons, ghettos, and spaces of economic neglect. By making it seem that the condition of extreme privation is a part of the natural order, rational authority can eliminate populations without direct militarized action. In some cases, designated excess population will participate in its own destruction as individuals are forced by artificially produced physical need and environmental pressures to do whatever is necessary to acquire withheld resources. In turn, these actions are replayed by the media as representations of the dangerous natural qualities of given races, ethnicities, or classes that must be controlled. Ironically, activities and environments which were intentionally designed become representations of nature, and proof of fitness theory (Critical Art Ensemble 1998, 47).

While “Engineering the death of populations by neglect is not a recent innovation”, CAE claims that “Death by neglect is a haunting reminder that Social Darwinism and the anti-welfare recommendations of Malthus and Spencer in the time of early capital are not only alive and well, but are once again gaining in strength”, enabling “acts of passive genocide to be perceived as legitimate (natural)” (48). For CAE, the field of ideologies and cultural representations is where the struggle over such legitimations of violence can occur. The very proliferation of images and stories of “neglect” saturates perceptual apparatuses, numbing the potential for indignation and revolt through habituation. This configuration brought CAE to disseminate rationalistic yet aestheticized counter-narratives about the irrationality of what are held to be rational political necessities.

4. Explications of political re-implications

Refolding the case of CAE and the opposite forces that characterize its confrontational encounter with the FBI and other agencies of the repressive state apparatus is to unearth a haunting question for the problematization of distributions of political importance through aesthetics of endurance: *what is to endure? who is to endure? what entity, what*

process is it important, politically, to preserve, to maintain in existence, to harden (endure: *in + durus*), or perhaps to soften so that it can last, or perdure (*per + durare*)? For those who supported Kurtz before, during, and after his trial, what is to be preserved is most often incensed as “free thinking”, or what Nietzsche may have called the possibility for “free spirits” to live and affirm life. For those who insisted that, although he was not *actually* a bioterrorist, Kurtz, along with kindred spirits, posed and even continue to pose a noxious threat to “the social order”, what is to be preserved is “the American way of life” as it now exists, which is said to be threatened on all sides by opposing forces¹⁷⁴. Beyond “values”, self-preservation seems to be what is at issue. This may seem like an unambiguous term as it is held to characterize the drive of every entity—except, says Nietzsche, for nihilistic beings willing their own disappearance. However, this is no exception to the extent that nihilism tends to drag on, to linger and defer indefinitely rather than to put an end. Sheer will is insufficient to stop breathing... The question becomes: what sustains or jeopardizes possibilities of endurance, what should not—or should—be “taken in” to modulate *what* existence? Arguing that entities endowed with various capacities hold that different modulations of existence import in virtue of these capacities requires positing many possible experiences of endurance.

4.1 Politicizing the atmotopic situation

In his making-explicit of various “anthropogenous islands”, Sloterdijk may seem to neglect the sense of smell, especially if one considers the attention that he explicitly pays

¹⁷⁴ As suggested above, the nationalistic myth of “America” as “the land of the free and the home of the brave” makes it possible to argue that those who oppose the critical investigations of self-declared anti-authoritarian collectives like CAE are precisely the ones who are a threat to “everything this country stands for”. Conversely, “leftists” in general are continually branded as proto-totalitarians in many influential circles. While there certainly are American singularities in this configuration, its form is arguably omnipresent today.

to the articulation of sight and touch that weave “the chirotope”, and to the relational quality of hearing that makes up “the phonotope”. The very notion of insulation, however, of fragile spheres that constitute distinct yet related *topoi*, is developed through an engagement with what Sloterdijk calls “the atmotopic situation” as the most fundamental condition of a world. A world, in that sense, requires and *is* a “greenhouse effect” (Sloterdijk 2005 [2004], 279; I translate), the constitution of an acclimated, tentatively designed inside against an unwelcoming outside. The existence of a specific atmosphere that can sustain the existence of a specific type of entity for a certain time in a space that is delimited by this atmosphere is a minimal condition of this entity’s persistence. The International Space Station is exemplary in that it requires a minute explicitation of all the minimal conditions of human life, its being situated in a void allowing for no serious mistake to be made (282-94). Explicitation, according to Sloterdijk, is the process through which “What was background and saturated latency has been displaced, with a thematizing energy, on the side of the represented, the objective, the elaborated and the producible” (170). What is most interesting is that Sloterdijk situates the prerequisites of his own account, of “the theory of cultures as units of self-climatizing (and, potentially, self-intoxicating) forms of life” (222-3), in the enduring effects of the practice of gas warfare that emerged during the First World War. This is when “the environment” was truly discovered, that is: made irreversibly explicit.

In his long introduction to the third volume of his *Spheres* trilogy, *Foams: Plural Spherology* (79-230), Sloterdijk provokingly asserts that the forceful explicitation of “the environment” as a fundamental condition of any form of life, including human life, occurred on a specific day in a specific place at a specific time: on April 22, 1915, near

Ypres, France, at 18:00 sharp, when a yellow cloud of chlorine gas some six kilometers wide and 600 to 900 meters deep started moving with the wind at a speed of two to three meters per second from the German side of the no-man's-land toward the Franco-Canadian trenches (80)¹⁷⁵. Ypres, for Sloterdijk, is the “primitive scene” that presents the tightest intertwining of the three “operational criteria of the 20th century: terrorism, the consciousness of design and the environmental approach” (91). The concept of terror supposes “an explicit notion of the environment, because terror constitutes a displacement of destructive action, from ‘the system’ (here, that of physically concrete enemy bodies) toward its ‘environment’ – in the present case, the atmosphere in which the enemy bodies subject to the necessity of breathing move about”. This is to say that,

In gas warfare, the most profound strata of the biological condition of humans are integrated into the attack that is launched against them: the indispensable habit of breathing is thereby turned against those who are breathing, in such a way that the latter, since they prolong their elementary habitus, become involuntary accomplices of their own destruction – supposing that the terrorist gas manages to lock its victims in the toxic milieu for sufficiently long for them to be subjected, through their inevitable inhalations, to the irrespirable environment. Despair is not only, as Jean-Paul Sartre remarked, an attempt (*attentat*) by man against himself; the aerial attempt of the terrorists using gas engenders in the assaulted man the despair due to the fact of not being able to stop breathing and of thereby contributing to the destruction of his own life.

¹⁷⁵ It is worth noting that Sloterdijk's introduction to *Foams* has been published independently in English as *Terror from the Air* (Sloterdijk 2009d), but that this translation is incomplete. In effect, in light of the French version (Sloterdijk 2005, 79-230), it only corresponds to 60% of the introduction (79-174). At the time of writing, the last 55 pages remain to be translated. Regarding the issue of translation, it should also be remarked that I preserve the term *explicitation*, used in the French version in place of the German *Explication*. In doing so I do not follow Sloterdijk's English translators, who write of *explication*. I believe my choice is appropriate because Sloterdijk himself often uses the English expression “making explicit” in the text, which renders the term *explicitation* readily intelligible, and because, as a commentator recently noted, “In his Tate lecture from 10 December 2005, Sloterdijk himself translates the German ‘Explication’ as ‘explicitation’: to unfold in the sense of explicitly making things and rendering things public” (van Tuinen 2011, 60n16). Implication, however, is preferred to “implication” to designate processes of “making implicit”. Again, this is due to Sloterdijk's own usage of the term *implication*.

What La Chance calls the climate of terror explicated by Kurtz's encounter with the FBI operates with a similar apprehension of atmoterrorism, to the extent that the perhaps "indispensible habit" that could be named value-positing is turned against those who are incapable to stop valuating and thereby put themselves at risk.

The phenomenon of gas warfare arguably marks the opening of "a new field of explication of the climatic and atmospheric premises of human existence. There, the immersion of the livings in a breathable milieu is brought to the level of a formal representation" (92). This explication of the human environment enables attempts at willfully *designing* milieus. It supports the plausibility of what may be called intentional environmental politics. In doing so, this process of explication arguably marks the passage from "the vitalistic phase of modernity" to the era of "the atmoterrorist objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*)" (98). "*Making the air conditions explicit*" (150; English in the text) becomes "the subject of the sciences of culture" in contemporary conjunctures. Moreover, "since Pasteur and Koch made the existence of microbes appear" (172), the fact that "everything can, in a latent manner, be contaminated and poisoned, [that] everything is potentially misleading and suspect" (172-3), fosters the thematization of the notion of immune system. As every new concept, "the phenomenon of bio-systemic immunity, once made explicit, projects a large shadow over the past" (204), creating a genealogy of predecessors. For Sloterdijk, the novel notion of immunity imposes a passage "from a fantasmatic ethics of universal pacific coexistence to an ethics of the antagonistic conservation of the interests of finite units" (173). In this respect, it catalyzes "a learning process in which the political system had manifestly taken the lead since

Machiavelli". Once made explicit, however, the relations between environments and immune systems re-modulate apprehensions of politics as a matter of willful design.

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These processes of explicitation may seem to support the dream of a tightly engineered political life, of an increasingly rationalized practice of the cybernetically maximized management of populations according to the right priorities. What may be called the biochemical paradigm, however, insists that this dream is bound to remain a fantasy.

It is not only through their complexity that the emerged immune systems trouble their possessors' exigency of security; they disconcert even more through their immanent paradox: their successes, when they are too radical, overturn themselves to become the causes of a specific type of illnesses: the expanding universe of auto-immune pathologies illustrates the dangerous tendency that the specific has, in the combat against the Other, to achieve a deadly victory over itself (176)¹⁷⁶.

In terms of *cultural* immunity, "extended regions of semantic environments" appear to be "intellectually irrespirable zones" (172), and "The vast amount of knowledge that is acquired on the security architecture of existence – from the medical field to the political field through the juridical – precisely has, on the whole, a destabilizing effect due to its increasingly explicit (and non-repressible) character" (177). Knowledge is not simply power when it weakens and stresses, while ignorance can both strengthen and calm an individual, an institution, or a broad system like a culture (see Mühlmann 2005). This

¹⁷⁶ Sloterdijk then articulates what I would characterize as an aesthetic thought of immunity. In effect, he writes: "It is no chance occurrence that we see emerging, in recent interpretations of the phenomenon of immunity, a trend to attribute to the presence of the stranger at the heart of the specific a role that is much more important than we may have predicted following the traditional identitarian conceptions, those of a Self constituted as an organism and closed in a monolithic way – we could literally speak of a poststructuralist turn in biology. In their light, the patrol of antibodies within an organism appear less like a police force implementing a rigid policy of strangers, than like a theater company that parodies its invaders and presents itself as their transvestites" (Sloterdijk 2005, 176-7; I translate). This thought is not only aesthetic because it mentions theater, but also, and more fundamentally, because of its apprehension of the relationships between "the self" and "the other" in the paradoxical, hyperbological form of "the most A is the most non-A".

implies that “pre-enlightened or pre-explicated situations can, as such, already have an immunologic pertinence – at least in the sense that the sojourn in the non-deployed temporarily enables, under certain aspects, to psychically benefit from certain protective effects of ignorance” (Sloterdijk 2005, 178). These considerations recall the lesson taught by the sense of smell according to Kant, Simmel, and their followers, namely that in certain matters, it does not pay to develop an increased acuity.

A second characteristic of olfactory perception enfolds an equally crucial consideration: saturation, as a form of de-prioritization, of “backgrounding” through habituation, appears to be an effective defense mechanism, a mode of making-implicit-again when confronted with the stressful effects of explicitation. As Sloterdijk puts it,

From now on we also see, since no conscience, given the narrowness of its thematic window, is in a position to treat simultaneously more than one or two motives of alert, [that] it must leave in the background the majority of the other worrying themes actually explicated, as if they did not exist in the real. (In the society of the multi-alarm, many hundreds of alarm clocks ring permanently and simultaneously; nonetheless, we most often succeed in filtering out one main alarm we are able to elaborate.) (179)

In this unintermittable play between “thematization and de-thematization”, there arises

a kind of second naivety, precisely because it is impossible, in a zone prepared by risk analysis, to think simultaneously all that ought to be thought. We give this attitude of secondary naivety the name of ‘re-implication’; it constitutes the stand-by function of explicated but temporarily de-actualized themes. Re-implication is the prosthesis of confidence; its use supposes that everything that can happen effectively happens, but only in an occasional manner and, more often than not, in such a way that the others are the ones who suffer from it.

Sloterdijk attributes to Nietzsche the first explicit conceptualization of “the existence of a system of mental defense” (180), of “something like semantic antibodies or ideo-

suppressors destined to put aside incompatible representations from the space of conscience” (180-1). Thought and discourse hence appear “according to their primary function, as the creation of a protective metaphorical envelope that ought to take away from the subjects of culture their perspective on the horrifying fundamental conditions of existence” (181). Re-implication is another name for such protective (re-)enveloping. What matters most, including when and where politics is concerned, is in that sense determined through ceaseless differentiations between the explicit and the latent that signal that attempts at willfully redesigning distributions of importance are risky trials.

4.2 “The point of everything he does is to last”

The explicitation of processes of re-implication suggests that, while “the environment” has been “discovered” and explicitly thematized as a constitutive yet transformable dimension of life-in-common, of political life, it is never a given that “the environment” as such, as another name for the atmospheric situation or the configuration of sustaining and sustainable climates, can ever be paid the right kind and the right amount of attention, be it by individuals, states, or the system of states, by multitudes, markets or cultures. This explicitation of processes of re-implication suggests that determining what counts as the right kind and the right amount of attention for a form of life is itself an environmental issue that puts into play different capacities, not least the capacities to endure certain articulations of the perceived and conceptualized relations between perceptive and conceptual capacities, this haunting division of *aisthesis*—of experience into an *aisthesis* and a *hexis* of *logos*, to remobilize Rancière’s reading of Aristotle.

One of the issues that insistently haunts very general philosophical and phenomenological accounts like Sloterdijk’s is the extent to and the ways in which they

can be of any use for articulating thoughtful descriptions of how “political politics” functions. By this last pleonasm, political politics, I seek to consider what most people arguably think of when the word politics is used, something like institutional or electoral party politics. It is to this end that I borrow the title of this subsection from a recent exemplar of Canadian historico-political journalism, Paul Wells’ *The Longer I’m Primer Minister: Stephen Harper and Canada, 2006* – (Wells 2013, 292). This book is traversed by reflections on what it means to endure, on the requirements of political survival.

Wells’ main argument is that “Harper has what every successful federal leader has needed to survive over a long stretch of time: a superior understanding of Canada” (9). This understanding is in many ways sociological. It first consists in the acknowledgment that there exists a solid, or rather, a potentially solidifiable Conservative basis that feels, given “Liberal hegemony”, that it has constantly been neglected. Harper’s understanding is also political in the specific sense that it consists in a rather successful apprehension of how parties and institutions function, of what they allow and what they can bear. This understanding explains Harper’s incrementalism, how “He would make his own change, not by revolution or even really evolution, but by erosion” (118) since “The surest rebuttal Harper can offer to a half century of Liberal hegemony is not to race around doing things the next Liberal could undo. The surest rebuttal is to last and not be Liberal” (292), to implement profound change “a degree at a time as if boiling a frog; and to make those changes as hard to reverse as it would be to reconstitute the frog” (10). Wells tends to characterize this political understanding as a matter of practical intuition rather than as a theoretical knowledge. He writes, for instance, of Harper’s “political gut instinct, which in the end is all any politician ever has” (120), and claims that “He survives politically in

large part because he is uninterested in debates that are of concern only to people who live within ten kilometers of Parliament's Peace Tower. He doesn't always guess right about which issues those are, but his instincts have consistently topped his opponents" (262). The same "instincts [...] often get in the way" (344) of attempts to "lay low" and to make "no sudden moves", but thus far, Harper's mode of "muddling through" seems to have been quite effective.

Arguably, the best explanation "for Harper's management style comes not from Canada during his tenure at 24 Sussex Drive, but from the social science literature of a half century ago and a landmark paper written by Charles Edward Lindblom, professor of economics at Yale University. 'The Science of Muddling Through' was published in the journal *Public Administration Review* and quickly became a classic" (297-8). Lindblom distinguishes what he calls the "rational-comprehensive" and the "successive limited comparisons" approaches to policy and decision-making, or the "root-method" and the "branch-method" (see Lindblom 1959, 81). While the first is over-theorized as the only rational path, as a "starting from the ground up" each time through classifying values and objectives and then choosing the appropriate means to achieve them, Lindblom argues the second approach or method is the only possible one, and the one that is actually used. For one, "There is, simply, no practical way to decide first what's important and then to select the method for achieving it" (Wells 2013, 301). In addition to the facts that there are always disagreements on what imports, and that "there often *are* no preferences in the absence of public discussion sufficient to bring an issue to the attention of the electorate" (Lindblom 1959, 81), one question remains haunting when importance is at stake:

How does one state even to himself the relative importance of these partially conflicting values? A simple ranking of

them is not enough; one needs ideally to know how much of one value is worth sacrificing for some of another value. The answer is that typically the administrator chooses—and must choose—directly among policies in which these values are combined in different ways. He cannot first clarify his values and then choose among policies (82).

In this respect, “The value problem is [...] always a problem of adjustments at a margin. [...] Somewhat paradoxically, the only practicable way to disclose one’s relevant marginal values even to oneself is to describe the policy one chooses to achieve them”. According to Lindblom’s account, which is close to cybernetics and market analysis,

Ideally, rational-comprehensive analysis leaves out nothing important. But it is impossible to take everything important into consideration unless “important” is so narrowly defined that analysis is in fact quite limited. Limits on human intellectual capacities and on available information set definite limits to man’s capacity to be comprehensive. In actual fact, therefore, no one can practice the rational-comprehensive method for really complex problems, and every administrator faced with sufficiently complex problems must find ways to drastically simplify (84).

Simplification is “systematically achieved in two ways. First, it is achieved through limitation of policy comparisons to those policies that differ in relatively small degree from policies presently in effect.” The second way resembles what Sloterdijk calls secondary ignorance: it is “the practice of ignoring important possible consequences of possible policies, as well as the values attached to the neglected consequences” (85).

Such re-implications may seem bound to lead to disasters, but Lindblom remarks that

In the root method, the inevitable exclusion of factors is accidental, unsystematic, and not defensible by any argument so far developed, while in the branch method *the exclusions are deliberate, systematic, and defensible*. Ideally, of course, the root method does not exclude; in practice it must. /Nor does the branch method necessarily neglect long-run considerations and objectives. It is clear that important values must be omitted in considering

policy, and sometimes the only way long-run objectives can be given adequate attention is through the neglect of short-run considerations. But the values omitted can be either long-run or short-run (86; I underline).

For Wells, Harper has managed to persuade radical conservatives that “the movement must be content with incremental gains, ‘inevitably’ the only real ones” (Wells 2013, 60), and that “adjusting their message would entail short-term losses as well as gains”. Political survival is thought as the necessary condition for advancing one’s values. Given external and internal threats, it tends to require most of the available attention.

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In the last pages of his book, Wells writes that “Eventually, after enough predictions of a swift demise prove wrong, the very fact of winning, and enduring, is held against winners” (406). There appears to be something like an expiry date on success, although it can hardly be predicted with precision. What comes to matter, at a certain point, is therefore the designing of what will be deemed possible, plausible and interesting *afterward*, beyond a singular finitude. Harper, for example, will prove to have been successful in implementing incremental yet durable, and perhaps even irreversible changes, when it will be clear that he “changed the conversation”. An enduring legacy, a redesigning of the political environment is signaled less by changes in the content of “the conversation” than by changes in its “framework”, in its form. In this precise case, the foreseeable legacy promises to involve a strong polarization over the relationship between “the economy” and “the environment”, among other things. Opponents tend to hold that the prioritization of the former comes at the expense of the latter, that it presupposes that “the economy” and “the environment” can be clearly disentangled, and that this very presupposition signals a first or primary ignorance. Supporters, if they ever

spoke this language, would probably qualify the foregrounding of immediate economic concerns as the sign of a secondary, thoughtful ignorance of far too broad and abstract environmental concerns, as a re-implication necessitated by the primary imperative that is the survival of “the nation” within a risky global marketplace.

Each side seems to feel and to express that the other is incapable to bear the hard truth that what it deems to be the most important, politically, because it is the most immediate condition of survival—of the “bare life” necessary to even consider the possibility of a “good life”, if you will—, is in fact the most trivial (from the other’s perspective), as it is the most remote. Once more, it is claimed that the most A is the most non-A, that the most knowledgeable is the most ignorant. It is doubtful, however, that one can ever be certain of whether one is dealing with a primary or a secondary “ignorance”.

This uncertainty also concerns the very widespread claim that “most people” neglect politics itself out of a primary ignorance of its fundamental importance. Through an account like Sloterdijk’s, however, it becomes plausible that “most people” neglect politics—if they *do* neglect it—because they know better. “No politics at the dinner table”, for instance, is an order-word that has probably helped many families to endure by avoiding internal destabilizations... Wells shows that a similar doubt plagues politicians, as he cites a Liberal aide who described the party’s reaction to attack ads against Liberal leader Stéphane Dion in 2008: they thought “Canadians are going to say ‘You shouldn’t be doing this.’ And that’s exactly wrong. Canadians aren’t going to say that. They’re too busy living their lives. They pay little attention to [politics], and if that little bit of attention is dominated by a particular message, effectively delivered and repeated over and over again, it’s going to sink in. And it did” (251; brackets in the text). This view

made it into one of Michael Ignatieff's statements in 2011, when he was the Liberal leader and sought to reach "ordinary people", in what Wells describes as "fairly advanced mimicry" of Harper's credo: "'Many Canadians enjoy the very special privilege of rich and lucky countries, of not having to think and worry about their democracy,' [Ignatieff] said. 'They do not look up from the more important things they have to do in their lives, such as getting the kids to hockey practice and to school, doing their jobs, being with their neighbours and friends.'" (309) Still, it is tempting to read this as a populist story, one designed to keep "ordinary people" looking down—"not look[ing] up from the more important things they have to do in their lives"—, and thus leaving politics to politicians. Paraphrasing Georges Clémenceau, is it not the case that politics is too important to be left in the hands of politicians?

Refolding distributions of importance (V)

Exploring if and how aesthetics of endurance act as prerequisites to determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of capacities appears to pave the way to *re*-considerations of aesthetics of prevalence, emancipation, temperament and friction, and of formulations of determinations of importance in terms of visibilities and invisibilities, logomachies, resonances and irritations. I have sought to argue that, in a manner that is similar to how something in the sense of smell appears to unearth a general condition of experience, namely breathing, something in the notion of endurance seems to unearth a general prerequisite of persistent problematizations of political life, and thus of what matters politically, namely persistence itself. It might well be the case that the question of political importance is as elusive, as difficult to put into words—or to stare in the face, to get a hold of, to lend an ear to—as it is to explicitate olfactory experience. Or

perhaps it is the case that, in a way that is similar to how it does not necessarily pay off to develop an increased olfactory acuity, spending too much time with the question of political importance is not necessarily advantageous—less, perhaps, because it is messy and somewhat tainting than because, when it is played with too thoroughly, it tends to go stale. If, however, no persistent “backworld” seems sufficiently stable, it is out of the question to define an objective threshold of what counts as “too much time” and what it means for the question of political importance to be played with “too thoroughly”. The immanent threshold that seems to impose itself *no matter what* is the capacity to endure.

In Guise of a Conclusion, or Desistance

In the end, there is no less ignorance, no less uncertainties, but the desires found a form on which they could throw themselves, so as to coagulate and appear in the present tense.

Wajdi Mouawad (2009, 5; I translate)

“My son, my son, what have ye done?”

This dissertation has been concerned with a very general, very broad question: *what matters politically?* I argued that aesthetics of politics act as prerequisites to determinations of political importance. More precisely, I advanced that particular systems of a priori forms determining what gives itself to be sensed act as prerequisites to particular determinations of variations in distributions of political importance. To test this hypothesis, to experiment with its possibility, plausibility and interest, I refolded five specific hypotheses formulated on the ground of this most general phrasing. Considering determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of visibilities and invisibilities, I examined how aesthetics of prevalence may act as prerequisites. Considering determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of logomachies, I examined how aesthetics of emancipation may act as prerequisites. Considering determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of resonances, I examined how aesthetics of temperament may act as prerequisites. Considering determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of irritations, I examined how aesthetics of friction may act as prerequisites. Finally, considering determinations of variations in distributions of political importance in terms of capacities, I examined how aesthetics of endurance may act as prerequisites.

As a conclusion, which is more a letting-go than a wrapping-up, I offer a survey of what I believe has been achieved through this manifold textual argumentation, and I discuss what I hold to be significant limitations of this study of distributions of political importance via aesthetics of politics. After formulating an account of what I think I have done, I will thus formulate an account of what I believe I have not done, what I think I could have done, and what, perhaps, I should have done. In doing so, I will sketch a few avenues pertaining to what will, could, or perhaps should be done in subsequent studies of the interrelationships between politics, aesthetics, and the problem of importance.

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When trusted friends ask me, with variable measures of curiosity and uneasiness, what I have been working on for some years now under the name of “my dissertation”, I tend to respond by this rather simple sentence: *I research how we think of politics aesthetically*. When I am pushed to give an example in order to make this claim more concrete, to unfold “just what I mean”, I tend to raise this question: how do we explain the variable measures of success of this or that familiar politician? I then argue that we tend to assume that the form, the style, the structure and ornamentations of a political claim matter at least as much as its substance and contents, that “politics is all about perception”, and that this claim implies a grasp of what counts as perception. This argument is usually welcomed positively as it accounts for a common view of politics. I hold the task of political thought, political theory, political philosophy and political science—which I gather under the noun politology—is to think how we perceive and understand politics, and how many “we” gather in assessing what matters politically. It is to support adequately intricate accounts that I argue politology should pay attention to aesthetics.

As is often the case in scholarly research, I do not claim no attention whatsoever has been paid to the site that I frame as a significant one; rather, I claim *we can do better*. I have tried to “do better” myself by taking Rancière’s concept of aesthetics of politics seriously in an attempt at “freeing up [its] critical and analytical potential” (Balibar 1995, 145). Rancière’s own work is partly concerned with the critical and analytical potential of this concept of aesthetics of politics for thinking through various formulations of politics as emancipation, as distinct from (yet in relation to) formulations of politics as policing. In this work, I have argued that aesthetics of emancipation act as prerequisites to quite common problematizations of what matters politically that foreground logomachies—conflicting claims and reasons—as essential, and that aesthetics of prevalence work as prerequisites to quite common problematizations of what matters politically that foreground in/visibilizations as central processes. I wove these argumentative lines in an original engagement with the politics of sight, and the politics of speech, and taste.

One of the crucial challenges encountered and dealt with in this work consisted in scrutinizing the possibilities of not remaining content with this twofold account of what matters politically through aesthetics of prevalence and emancipation, through notions of in/visibilities and logomachies, and through the senses of sight and speech, and taste. This knot constituted a challenge since appeals to emancipation, calls to go “beyond” what is deemed to prevail often *end* political or politological claims. The intertwining of aesthetics of prevalence and aesthetics of emancipation often seems to be “the last word”. However, in virtue of the very prevalence of this knot, I was brought to ask what other assumptions, tropes and phrasings, what other aesthetics of politics are at play in this polemical mode of thought that nonetheless comes to sound rather monotonous.

I have woven the second part of the fivefold body of this work around this concern with a perceived inadequacy or insufficiency of aesthetics of prevalence and aesthetics of emancipation in common problematizations of determinations of variations in distributions of political importance. Through a refolding of how the sense of hearing is implicated in accounts of political life phrased in terms of logomachies, I have argued that aesthetics of temperament can often be more decisive than aesthetics of prevalence and emancipation, if only since typological distinctions between *who* is able to prevail and emancipate and *who* is not are constantly (re)made and (re)traced. In that sense, distributions of importance tend to be dealt with as spaces of resonances, and variations in these distributions, various determinations of what matters are themselves described as occurring through more or less harmonious modulations, more or less concordant resonances. Examining the topologies of sonorous resonances has in turn brought me to ponder the important roles that have been, that are, and that can be attributed to the sense of touch in Western politologies and in what tends to be qualified as politics. I argued that the variously marking, variously irritating effects of multiple spaces and instances of resonance are grasped through aesthetics of friction. In that sense, determinations of what matters politically tend to be apprehended as occurring through more or less antagonistic and productive encounters over a peculiar terrain, through peculiar systems and environments whose mapping does not occur independently from mappings of political importance itself, and from intervening gestures of variable depths. Encountering the issue of the variable affordability of different interventions has finally brought me to engage aesthetics of endurance via an examination of the politics of smell. I have argued that concerns for endurance inform how capacities are held to be what import most.

In problematizing these five aesthetics of politics through a rather baroque fourfold (politological, artistico-political, polemological, and hauntological) engagement with each one of the senses of the age-old fivefold, I believe that I have been able to show some of the analytical and critical potential of the concept of aesthetics of politics, beyond or beside the visual-vocal register that seems to me to be the most common one. More precisely, I believe that I have thereby been able to show that aesthetics of politics play important yet often under-thematized roles in how the issue of political importance has been and is dealt with. By arguing that “our” prevalent mode of political thought is an aesthetic mode of thought—albeit this is rarely acknowledged explicitly—, I was brought to make explicit some of “the peculiar characteristics of that sense of importance which is current in the thought of [our] age” (Whitehead 1968b [1938], 15). This is how I would like my intensive use of extensive citations, both ancient and contemporary, to be read.

I hold that this research makes a significant contribution to contemporary politological scholarship by showing that something like aesthetics of politics have been and continue to be recurring matters of concern in accounts of political life. In framing what I consider to be the main contribution of this work in this manner, however, I am making a somewhat unusual gesture. In effect, I am resisting the temptation to primarily inscribe this research in the “novel” configuration of what has been called “the aesthetic turn” (Bleiker 2001) in politological research. Making the reasons for this “resistance” explicit asks, in turn, that I discuss what could and what perhaps should have been done differently. Could a broadly similar conceptual framework have led to different results? Conversely, could a largely different conceptual framework have led to similar results? This twofold discussion offers a way to assess some of the limitations of this dissertation.

And (not quite) all that could have been

Part of what I hope to have achieved through this work is to draw attention to the questionable and intricate implications of gestures as banal as using a phrase like “the aesthetic turn” to make claims on important lines of thought concerning what matters politically. Speaking and writing of turns is indeed a popular, tried way for scholars (among other practitioners) to support their claims to both take part in and even initiate important changes in a field, or a series of fields. It has even been assumed (if not argued) that some fields are best apprehended as and through a series of turns. This is how I read the choice of the editors of the recent *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies* to structure their book in six parts: “Research Design”, “The Ethnographic Turn”, “The Practice Turn”, “The Discursive Turn”, “The Corporeal Turn”, and “The Material Turn” (Salter & Mutlu 2013). Other recent turns—not quite “paradigm shifts”, which are nonetheless said to proliferate in contemporary conjunctures far more than Thomas Kuhn’s concept seems to allow—include, for instance, “the mobility turn” (Faist 2013), “the topological turn” (Lury, Parisi & Terranova 2012), “the speculative turn” (Bryant, Srnicek & Harman 2011), “the performative turn” (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008; Burke 2005), “the affective turn” (Clough & Halley 2007), “the interpretive turn” (Hiley, Bohman & Shusterman 1992), and, perhaps the most famous—*paradigmatic?*—one, “the linguistic turn” (Gattei 2008; Rorty 1992 [1967]). Using such phrases involves a claim to novelty. Assuming that a turn can be detected *as it is occurring* is to make a claim about the perception of a contemporary change, of an ongoing transformation or an experienced redirection of one’s and/or others’ attention. It is to make a claim about a redistribution of importance, and about how this redistribution is and can be sensed and thought as such.

In making such a claim, I believe it is appropriate to go on a search for eventual predecessors. This belief is perhaps a matter of temperament: I myself tend to hold that what Nietzsche called “the eternal return of the same” comes closer to an adequate description of the histories of practices of thought than the notion of a rectilinear progression of cumulative discoveries. Still, my inclination is strengthened by how a persuasive case can often be made to the effect that an allegedly all-new tu(r)ning of attention is built on, enabled by, resembles, and even repeats, *with some differences*, a tu(r)ning that came before—or at least, one that can *now* be said to have come before. The aesthetic and the linguistic turns, for example, have been said to have first been effected by the German Romantics at the turn of the 19th century (see Frank 1999, 273). Once again, turning toward “the Greeks”, which the German Romantics read extensively as “our origins”, and re-reading Plato’s dialogues, for instance, makes it difficult to claim with any credibility that no attention whatsoever was paid to what the adjectives “aesthetic” and “linguistic” seek to qualify before these terms were formulated in specifically German-Romantic ways. Nonetheless, it may be the case that how a past can be read convincingly through concepts that are deemed sound in a present should itself be held as a significant sign that an effective conceptual or notional turn has occurred. In this respect, the framing and the results of this dissertation cannot be severed from a proximate conjuncture in which paying attention to aesthetics in political matters seems a more legitimate deed than it might have been in earlier conjunctures. I believe, however, that if “the aesthetic turn” is to be praised politologically, it should be on the ground of its ability to show how an aesthetic mode of thought has come to be deemed a sound one¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁷ Among the turnings listed above, I would single out “the topological turn” as the most interesting one because it is explicitly concerned with the conditions, prerequisites, and effects of transformations. As John

A seemingly similar framework, that of the aesthetic turn, might not have been able to arrive at the same results than the framework of aesthetics of politics put to work in this dissertation. In effect, I consider that the “aesthetic turn” framework tends to overemphasize certain contrasts and nuances in a manner that jeopardizes its ability to account for its own importance. In contrasting “mimetic approaches” and “aesthetic approaches”, for instance, international relations scholar Roland Bleiker writes: “Mimetic approaches do not pay enough attention to the relationship between the represented and its representation. Indeed, they are not really theories of representation. They are theories against representation. But political reality does not exist in an a priori way. It comes into being only through the process of representation” (Bleiker 2001, 512). He then writes that

Aesthetic approaches, by contrast, embark on a direct political encounter, for they engage the gap that inevitably opens up between a form of representation and the object it seeks to represent. *Rather than constituting this gap as a threat to knowledge and political stability, aesthetic*

WP Phillips puts it, “If a ‘turn’ involves some kind of transformation, then, in the idiom of topology, we would have to acknowledge that the concern would be for the invariant properties that map it on the previous figures, now distorted by twists and turns into seductive new shapes” (Phillips 2013, 124). A few lines below, he writes: “The idea of a topological turn implies either the accession to something like an ontological ground in topology (after Derrida we could refer to the more complex, and less innocent, proposition of a fantasmatic *ontology*) or a historicist account of the emergence of topological structures in mathematics and society. So *either* (this is the most benign but also the most naïve assumption) topology (as we find it) should be regarded as providing the framework within (or window) which all these other kinds of interaction are played out too. *Or* (with a greater epistemological violence) sociology, in historicizing and in this way appropriating topology, comprehends the social as a mutating field of forces that can nonetheless be both set in motion and calculated through an instrumental rationality. This nonetheless calculable field can appear compromised because the quasi-topological treatments often want to celebrate the *incalculable* and (that most suggestive aspect of topological processes) the *transformation*, as if in antagonism towards topology, which commands its privileged role in mathematics because topological invariants are those that remain unaffected by extreme transformation: they are the fixed points in the flux of otherwise unending change. Sometimes, it seems to me, the difference between these two quite distinct kinds of assumption (the ontological and the sociological) is obscured, neglected or dissolved altogether. And it is quite possible for applications to proceed with more or less productive results while oblivious to the stakes implied by this difference. Nevertheless, the situation requires a more sustained analysis, which I will attempt” (125). Commenting on his own method, which is concerned with invariants, Phillips claims that “[his] strategy is anti-historical in this exact sense: it is a matter of attempting each time to identify and to follow the consistency of the logic that organizes the arguments, within a contingent historical milieu, of course and necessarily, but also to the extent that we find underlying these arguments a logical structure that resists – maybe even informs – their historical closure” (128). In these lines, I hear strong echoes of the “heretical” method put to work in my account of *aesthetic* “structures”.

approaches accept its inevitability. Indeed, they recognise that the difference between represented and representation is the very location of politics (I underline).

This view, which Bleiker explicitly ties to a Kantian lineage through Deleuze's reading of Kant, certainly recalls (and is in fact contemporaneous with) Rancière's insistences on dissensus as opposed to consensus, and on how an aesthetic mode of thought frames the various acknowledgements of the inevitable gaps between what is seen and what is said about what is seen by who as the sites of politics-as-emancipation, as opposed to attempts at bridging or filling these gaps, which are privileged sites of politics-as-policing. However, Bleiker's distinction between mimetic and aesthetic approaches is itself subject, in principle, to gaps between "representation" and "what is represented". To claim that "aesthetic approaches accept [the] inevitability" of *the* gap between "a form of representation and the object it seeks to represent" is *not* necessarily incompatible with the gesture that consists in "constituting this gap as a threat to knowledge and political stability". To claim to "engage" this gap (in the singular) is not to say much, for modes of engagement vary. Is it not thinkable—and it is not even often assumed—that knowledge and political stability are inevitably under threat? I fail to see how celebrating, or even "recognising" an inevitability makes what is inevitable any less threatening. Is it not the inevitability of "the aesthetic gap" that makes politics itself an always-unstable practice? Making aesthetics of politics proliferate in a way that shows how many *problematic* aesthetics are always already at work in how political life is perceived and thought, as I sought to do in this research, rather than remaining content with advancing general claims about which "approaches" to adopt or to dismiss, is a gesture that I deem more favorable to the articulation of thoughtful accounts of what is held to matter politically than the gesture consisting in both praising and calling for an "aesthetic turn" as a *solution*.

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Another question faced by this dissertation is the extent to which similar results could have been achieved—*but what does it mean to “achieve” a political “result”?*—by formulating and putting to work a different framework than the manifold aesthetic framework that I folded, unfolded, and refolded throughout this research. Why write of aesthetics of politics and not, say, of epistemologies or ontologies of politics? To me, the most compelling reason for writing of aesthetics rather than epistemologies or ontologies of politics relates to the very issue of putting each of these terms in the plural. In a nutshell, it is much easier to spread the thought that there are multiple aesthetics than it is to persuade that there are many epistemologies and ontologies—and, according to the software which enables my writing these lines, it is more acceptable to claim there are many epistemologies than it is to claim there are many ontologies, as only this last word, in the plural, keeps being underlined by a wavy red trait signalling a mistake. That ontology cannot, or not easily be put in the plural is itself the effect of a monistic *logos* of *ontos*, of being or existence. While in recent years, calls for new—and perhaps especially, for *relational*—ontologies of politics have proliferated, it remains unclear to me just what “adopting a new ontology” might look like, what it might entail and effect. I am equally puzzled by calls to “adopt a new epistemology”. Can we change at will what we think exists and what we think existence is? Can we change at will what we think we know, what we think we can know and what we think knowledge is? If these changes can be envisaged, is this not because the “new” epistemologies and ontologies are not quite new? Is it not because previous epistemologies and ontologies make these “new” ones at least thinkable, conceivable? In this respect, is it not our view of novelty that changes?

Ontologies and epistemologies seem much deeper, much more general notions than aesthetics, but this very claim presupposes some account of surface and depth, and of what it means to sense and to make sense, to value and devalue, to change and to preserve, to perceive and understand, and to fail to do so—it presupposes some account of *aisthesis*, if only in its possible difference with *logos*. If it is the case that political research should seek to account for how we can think and act differently, I believe that formulating political concerns through aesthetic idioms can be a more effective gesture than formulating them through epistemological or ontological idioms, or even through moral or ethical idioms. Aesthetics is often taken as a synonym of style or form, and it is easier to envisage changing a style, grasped as a surface occurrence, even as a seeming, than it is to envisage changing a substance, grasped as a depth. An aesthetic mode of thought, however, also makes it possible to think through how it may be the case that a style or a form is in truth much more difficult to change, much more deeply ingrained, and more invariant than a substance can ever be. Is it not the case that many people change “causes” numerous times while they retain a singular style throughout their “political career”? That this last question phrases a rather banal yet hardly dismissible observation signals a recurrent trait of this dissertation that also stems from the privileging of aesthetics over other terms of engagement, namely the stubborn attempt to account for the persuasive character of what may be called political “commonsense”, or banalities and platitudes. At least one such platitude supported my attempt to pay singular attention to aesthetics: that “politics is all about perception” teaches that if your political project is to transform ontologies, epistemologies, or even axiologies, you will face the problem of making this transformation seductive, palatable, and endurable.

The framework refolded throughout this dissertation assumes that some accounts of perception and understanding, intuition and thought, of the division (or unity) of *aisthesis* are at work in how political life is sensed and thought. I insist on the term “account” rather than “theory” because an aesthetic mode of thought allows for contradictions and paradoxes—*the more it is A, the more it is non-A*—to be conceived as something other than mistakes, while the notion of theory tends to imply a certain faith in the axiom of non-contradiction. Admittedly, these are ontological or epistemological claims, but their form and style, their aesthetics matter. I believe the ways in which politics is thought about with contradictions, and that this is not a defect. In this respect, an aesthetic mode of thought can best account for how politics is felt and thought.

Although I often encounter this recrimination or this lament, I fail to feel that “something is being lost” by concentrating on aesthetic concerns for thinking through the intricacies of political life. I think that this is so because I hold that for thinking through the intricate ways in which what counts and what does not count as “political” and as “politically sound” is determined as such, I know of no better way than to think through aesthetics of politics. This may turn out to be more immediately important than expected in the years to come, if it is true that “A period of political ugliness lays ahead of us because we will be forced to betray our ideals” (Sloterdijk 2012; I translate). Paying attention to what is felt as seductive, palatable, and endurable, and to what is felt as the opposite, is necessarily to put into play one’s own inclinations, one’s tastes and idiosyncrasies. This dissertation is certainly a very “personal” work, as the argumentative routes I assembled and traveled are quite contingent pathways. Undoubtedly, attending to the question of political importance at other times, in other spaces and through other

frameworks would have led to the writing of a different text—but this is an intervention, one intervention among many possible ones, and I fail to see how its singularity can in itself be held as an objection (which is of course not to say that no objections can be made to this work). In any case, I also believe that, given the proliferation of well-ingrained modes of thought in and through which we tend to think, attending to the question of political importance necessarily demands to encounter and to deal with *something like* aesthetics of politics.

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